The Influence of Social, Religious, Institutional, and Cultural Factors on Postsecondary Education Transition of Arab American and Muslim Students in Northern New Jersey

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The Influence of Social, Religious, Institutional, and Cultural Factors on Postsecondary Education Transition of Arab American and Muslim Students in Northern New Jersey

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Leadership, Management, and Policy
Seton Hall University
2015
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Doctoral Candidate, Ismael A. Khalil, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this Summer Semester 2015.

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ABSTRACT

The Influence of Social, Religious, Institutional, and Cultural Factors on Postsecondary Education Transition of Arab American and Muslim Students in Northern New Jersey

Arab American and Muslim students’ population growth on campuses has been very rapid, which in turn has required comprehensive planning to accommodate the needs of this minority. Documented experiences of Arab American and Muslim students are underrepresented in research literature and lag behind every other minority, despite the fact that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States. With all the challenges facing Arab American and Muslim students in our society, it is important to ensure their ability to sustain a positive attitude toward their religion, culture, and college education to prevent imminent problems such as cultural conflict, dropouts, and non-integration into higher education. This study examined the influence of social, religious, institutional, and cultural factors on Arab American and Muslim Students’ transition from high school to postsecondary education in northern New Jersey. Using qualitative methodology, Arab American and Muslim students from two higher education institutions were given the opportunity to describe their perceptions regarding their transition experience from high school to college. The findings of this study were drawn from face-to-face interviews of 24 participants and a demographic questionnaire.

This investigation shed light on some conditions of Arab American and Muslim college students in northern New Jersey, including students’ successes, life styles, financial issues, religious life, diversity, and Islamophobia on college campuses. Although social, cultural, and institutional factors influenced Arab American and Muslim students’ transition, this study revealed that religion plays a central role in their life. Furthermore,
the study suggested that improving postsecondary education to meet the challenges and needs of the growing diverse population is essential to the effectiveness of a postsecondary education system.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I commence my dissertation, In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. I am grateful to Almighty God for giving me the courage and strength to finish my doctorate degree.

With gratitude, I am honored to have exceptional members of my dissertation committee. Each provided me with support and guidance and believed in the quality of my work.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Gerard Babo, my mentor, for his endless support, assistance, and excellent guidance throughout the process of completing this research; you made my dissertation experience rewarding and meaningful.

Dr. James Caulfield, you helped me to join the Seton Hall University Graduate Program and were there for me from the first course until proofreading my dissertation. I will not forget your commitment to supporting the completion of my educational journey, even after leaving your position as a director of the program. Thank you for your dedication and caring.

My deepest thanks and appreciation to Dr. James Pavlin, who willingly volunteered to cross over from the field of Islamic theology and history to the field of education in order to help me. I appreciate your help and suggestions; your reflective comments enriched my work and the final product of my research.

My sincere appreciation is extended to Dr. Caulfield-Sloan for answering the call to help in supporting me while finishing my research and pointing me in the right direction. Thank you for your time and insights.
Special thanks to all professors of the Educational Leadership Program; I am thankful for what you have given me to apply in my practice.

I am thankful to the students who participated in this research willingly and shared their experiences with me and the future readers of this dissertation. This work would not have been possible without your willing contributions of sharing your stories. Beyond the research, it was a pleasure for me to meet and know 24 bright undergraduate students. I hope that your input will help improve the education of your fellow students. Your stories reaffirmed for me the reason why I continue serving young adults of our community and chose the field of education.

Finally, and most importantly, I owe most thanks to my wife, Amal, and my children, Mohammed, Hana, Diaa, and Alaa. Without your encouragement, support, patience, and love, I would not have had a chance for this accomplishment and to be a doctor.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Deah Barakat, his wife, Yusor Mohammad, and her sister, Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha, the three Arab-American Muslim college students who were murdered in the fatal shooting on February 11, 2015, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

To my parents, Badiah and Ahmad, from whom I received the greatest love and sacrifice.

To my wife, Amal, who has been my supporter and critic during my doctorate studies.

To my children, Mohammed, Hana, Diaa, and Alaa, may God guide you to transform my greatest principles, culture, traditions, and religion to following generations to whom I dedicate my life to transmit peace, knowledge, and education.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design and Methodology</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Study</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Islam and Arabs/Muslims</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion of Islam</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab American and Muslim Population</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Perspective of Postsecondary Education</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity in Education</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Preparation</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Structure</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Academics and Preparation</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab American and Muslim Students and Stereotyping</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping of Arab Americans and Muslims</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping in Textbooks</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Stereotyping</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping on Campuses</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Invisible Community</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamophobia</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community under Active Surveillance</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Discrimination and Arab Americans and Muslim Students</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY ........................................................................... 109
Research Design .................................................................................................. 112
Sample Population ............................................................................................... 116
Instrumentation ..................................................................................................... 118
Instrument Questions ........................................................................................... 121
Data Collection ....................................................................................................... 124
Data Analysis ......................................................................................................... 126
Description of the Participants ............................................................................. 129
Validity and Reliability ......................................................................................... 132
Role of the Researcher .......................................................................................... 134
Participants ............................................................................................................ 137
Summary ................................................................................................................ 138

CHAPTER IV: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS .............................................. 140
Research Questions ............................................................................................... 144
Results of the Study ............................................................................................... 144
Demographic Questionnaire ............................................................................... 145
Participants’ Interviews ......................................................................................... 146
Research Question 1 ............................................................................................. 147
  Category 1. Religious Beliefs and Practices ....................................................... 147
  Category 2. Social Factors ............................................................................... 163
  Category 3. Cultural Characteristics ................................................................. 186
Research Question 2 ............................................................................................. 216
  Category 4. Institutional Factors ...................................................................... 216
Research Question 3 ............................................................................................. 233
  Category 5. Support Structures and Barriers Encountered ............................ 234
Summary ................................................................................................................ 245

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ..................................... 248
Discussion .............................................................................................................. 250
Key Findings .......................................................................................................... 251
Research Question 1 ............................................................................................. 253
  Category 1. Religious Beliefs and Practices ....................................................... 254
    Religious Practices .......................................................................................... 254
    Knowledge of the Quran Effect on the Daily Life ........................................... 257
    Religious Beliefs and College Choice .............................................................. 259
  Category 2. Social Factors ............................................................................... 260
    Socioeconomic Status .................................................................................... 260
    Gender .............................................................................................................. 263
    Islamophobia and Images of Arabs and Muslims ......................................... 264
  Category 3. Cultural Characteristics ................................................................. 268
    Family and Cultural Values .......................................................................... 268
    The American Lifestyle ............................................................................... 271
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Profiles of Individual Participants</td>
<td>130, 142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Major Themes Affecting Arab American and Muslim Students’ Transition…</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of postsecondary education are numerous: higher economic or social status, career advancement, and opportunities throughout the individual’s lifetime. Pursuing postsecondary education in general is a goal for Arab American and Muslim students to maintain their cultural integrity while interacting with this diverse population. For both majority and minority group members, the post-secondary degree is one of the social indicators representing the individual’s success, and acquiring a degree is equally challenging for both. The college education defines the access and degree of socioeconomic mobility, social status, financial independence, and political participation in our society (Autor, 2010; Baum, Ma & Payea, 2010; Martinez & Aguirre, 2003). President Obama in his address on February 24, 2009, to a joint session of Congress noted that “In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity—it is a prerequisite. . . . I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training . . . this country needs and values the talents of every American” (President Barack Obama, 2009). Furthermore, business leaders are stressing the need for candidates who have successfully demonstrated knowledge and who are competent to function effectively in a specific career field, an increasingly diverse workplace, and a changing global market (Bikson & Law, 1994).

Over the past decade, a growing number of studies have shown the increased importance of postsecondary education. These studies show that the gap between the
skilled and unskilled has widened in terms of opportunity and income. Autor, Levy, and Murnane (2003) and Levy and Murnane (2004), well-respected economists, discussed how computers and the Internet innovations will enhance productivity and continue to change the occupational distribution of tasks, expert thinking, skill requirements, and hence the employment landscape in the U.S. labor market, creating a challenge for an educational system to prepare the population for unknown future jobs. In their study, they found that technology is changing the workplace by increasing the need for non-routine skills and placing a premium on problem solving and communication skills. Mastering the complex communications skills explains the growing demand and advantage that college graduates and beyond have over high school graduates because college graduates are more likely to have these skills. Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2010) anticipated that 62% of the U.S. job market in 2018 would require postsecondary education compared to 28% in 1973.

The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce report shows that by 2018, the United States work force will need 22 million new college degrees. The country will fall short of that number by at least three million, and this is in addition to at least 4.7 million new workers with postsecondary certificates that will be needed in 2018 (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2010) in jobs such as healthcare, computer, education and business management, which require higher levels of education and training. Furthermore, the job projections indicate that college graduates will drive New Jersey’s economy needs in 2018 more than any other state except for Massachusetts (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010; Matthews, 2012; Spence, 2010; New Jersey Task Force on Higher Education, 2010). The results of the shortage of college-educated employees drove up
premium wages. Workers with bachelor’s degrees earned 40% more than those with high school diplomas in 1980 compared to 74% in 2010. If these trends continue, workers with college degrees will earn twice the wages of high school graduates by 2025 (Carnevale & Rose, 2011). In summary, Autor (2010) stated that for the past three decades the labor market growth is “polarizing” into steadily high-skill, high-wage employment and low-skill, low-wage employment; and the wage gap between the two categories is growing.

The growth of the minority population in the United States is projected to increase dramatically. The U.S. Census Bureau report (2012) defines a minority as “anyone who is not single-race White and not Hispanic,” such as Hispanics, African-Americans, and Asians. The U.S. Census report shows that the demographics are shifting across the United States; as of July 1, 2011, about 50.4% of our nation’s children who are younger than the age of one were minorities. This is up from 49.5% in April 2010. An extension of this growth is that colleges and universities can anticipate higher percentages of students pursuing higher education from multiracial, multi-religious, and multicultural populations seeking admission to their institutions. Therefore, the representation of the Arab American and Muslim students’ population in postsecondary education is also expected to increase.

As a result, integration of the Arab and Muslim community is desirable in our nation because it can affect the climate of diversity on college campuses and increase its representation as a minority group. It is imperative to study this minority group to understand its needs and try to assist it in its integration, education, and increase its representation in our society. Therefore, its various personal, social, and academic needs should be addressed, just as are those of other minority groups (Banks, 2001; Banks,
2008; Niemann & Maruyama, 2005). This norm should serve as a wake-up call to postsecondary institutions. Traditional student service styles must be changed to accommodate the needs of the new student population, especially concerning the most overlooked issue, student’s religious practices (Mays, 2003).

Consequently, colleges and universities should think about establishing programs and policies relevant to the needs of its twenty-first century diverse population in which the Arab American and Muslim students are a part. As a result, the education system in the United States will encounter challenges to meet the needs of various minority groups, which require it to adjust to accommodate and face these challenges (Eisenlohr, 1996; Balfanz, Bridgeland, Bruce, & Fox 2013; Teranishi, Allen, & Solorzano, 2004). During this adjustment process, minority individuals need to address and counter the fear, stereotypes, and beliefs held by the larger society (Allport, 1954). Studies show that students who face multiple challenges navigate and implement strategies in order to stay on an academic pathway and are more likely to reach their aspirations (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006).

The U.S. Census Bureau classifies Arab Americans as “White or Caucasian.” As a result, a major challenge in describing the Arab American and Muslim population is estimating its size because of the absence of official data. Furthermore, most Muslims are not Arabs; Arabs constitute only about 20% of the world’s Muslim population (Pew Research Center, October 2009). A study in California estimates the growth of the Muslim population in the state to double every six years; another study in Illinois found that the growth rate in the state doubled every 17 years (Pew Center, 2007). Therefore, it may be difficult to get a reliable estimate of the number of Arab Americans or Muslim
students enrolled in colleges and universities. The Pew Center report (2007) found that 22% of the Muslim population in the United States is enrolled in colleges or universities. Since the Pew Center report’s estimate of the Muslim adult population was at least 1.4 million, 22% of that number would equal 308,000; therefore, this is at least the number of Muslim students enrolled in colleges or universities. However, the available evidence suggests that it may be more than 308,000 Muslims who are currently enrolled in U.S. universities and colleges, and their number is increasing.

The enrollment of Muslim students at Catholic colleges and universities has reportedly doubled over the past decade, and women account for much of that growth reports The Washington Post (Wan, 2010), The Washington Times (Kellner, 2012) and The New York Times (Pérez-Peña, 2012). The Higher Education Research Institute reported that the percentage of Muslim students at Catholic colleges and universities is higher than at the average four-year secular institutions in the United States (Shapiro, 2012). Furthermore, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2007) reported that, compared to the national average of 21% who are between the ages of 18 and 29, the average age of Muslims living in the United States is 29% of the age range in which many individuals attend college. In view of the growing number of Arab American and Muslim students in the United States and the essential need to understand this minority group, it is important to investigate the social, cultural, religious and institutional factors that influence the postsecondary transition of Arab American and Muslim students.

Despite this growth, there is still a shortage in literature on the experiences of Arab American and Muslim students in education, cultural integration, barriers preventing them from seeking college enrollment, and dropping out from higher
education. A sparse amount of data in research and literature is available on their higher education experience. There is certainly a dearth of literature when it comes to Arab American and Muslim undergraduate students, especially the experiences of female Arab American and Muslim students (Leonard, 2003; Maira, 2004; Mays, 2003; Mir, 2007; Shammas, 2009; Tamer, 2010). As a result, it is important to study this minority to recognize its needs and be able to assist it in its education and inclusion in society and to improve their representation in our nation. Because of this shortage of representation in the literature and the stressful, unique educational experiences of the Arab American and Muslim students, this study heeded the call of Ayish (2003), Mays (2003) and Mir (2006) for intentional and focused research on Arab American and Muslim students in higher education. This exploratory qualitative study sought to understand some experiences of Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary transition between high school and college.

**Background of the Study**

There is a growing number of students from different minorities enrolling in postsecondary education. Arab American and Muslim students are one of these minorities. It is important for society to be familiar with the needs of postsecondary education and the experiences of Arab American and Muslim students. During a ceremony celebrating Ramadan, President Bill Clinton said, “Muslim Americans are a cornerstone of our American community. They enrich our political and cultural life; they provide leadership in every field of human endeavor, from business to medicine, to scholarship” (Gudel, 2001). Banks (2008) pointed out that, minority groups work for their group rights, thereby bringing greater equality and social justice for all Americans.
Despite that, in our society, little effort has been made towards providing evidence about Arab American and Muslim contributions to our civilization, which minimizes the financial and social impact of Arabs and Muslims in the United States. In their study about discrimination against Arabs and Muslims, Moradi and Hasan (2004) pointed out that because of the shortage of official government data on Arab American experiences, their study contributed to the literature on a population likely to experience discrimination and prejudice. Much of the scholarly literature has ignored these points thus far.

The revival of Islam during the seventh century was the reason for the spread of the Arabic language and culture throughout the world. There are more than 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide. Based on the current growth rate, it is estimated that the Muslim population will reach about 1.9 billion by 2025. Islam is considered a common thread that connects diverse people and cultures (Haddad, 2002; Shaheen, 2001). Arabs share the same language and common historical experience, including decades of colonialism and Western hegemony (Barakat, 1993; Haddad, 1991, 2002), such as when the British, French, and Italians occupied a large portion of the Arab world. The Pew Center (2007) survey and Gallup's project (2011) found that the Muslims in the United States are ethnically and racially diverse, representing about 77 countries. This community is seen as a microcosm of the Muslim world. In no other place in the world will one find such a unique and a diverse group of Muslims.

According to the U.S. Census and on most affirmative action forms, Arabs and people of the Middle East are classified racially as Caucasian. The term Arab does not exist on the census form as other Asian ethnicities do. According to Directive 15: Race
and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting in May 1977, U.S. Census racial categories were defined as American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and White. Clearly, Arab as a racial category does not appear on the U.S. Census form. Although Arabs and Middle Eastern people are racially classified as White, the U.S. government has unofficially considered them as a distinct racial group by linking Arabs to terrorism and threats to national security (Hassan, 2002). Racial ethnic profiling of Middle Eastern men on grounds of terrorism and illegal immigration was commonplace before September 11, 2001 (Ahmed, 2004). Tristam (2009) said, “I’ve seen in [the] U.S. the exclusion of North Africans from being qualified as ‘African-American’ on the census and on scholarship applications (again, they’re supposed to check the “white” box) means they’re doubly discriminated against: Not really white, but not non-white enough to benefit from certain programs” (p. 3). Furthermore, Samhan (2009) pointed out that the cultural intolerance, discrimination, and racial profiling that some Arabs and Muslims have felt, especially since 9/11, has only added to the sentiment of being distinct from the White majority. Checking the box labeled Caucasian will prevent any documentation showing that Arab Americans and Muslims are being profiled. Arab Americans, comparing them to other ethnic minorities, are considered "outsiders" to the description of the United States citizen (Tamer, 2004). All people from Arab countries are racially defined as White by the U.S. Census. However, Samhan (1999) argues that the Arab American population may be considered an “invisible minority” in America. This is because some Arab Americans look ethnically White and are counted as White by the U.S. Census Bureau, yet they are “not quite White.”
To be an Arab does not mean to come from a particular race or religion. Similar to American, it is a cultural trait rather than a racial one. Any person who adopts the Arabic language and culture is typically considered an Arab. The Arab world is comprised of a majority of Muslims, some Christians, and a small Jewish population. Arab Americans and Muslims make up a significant ethnic and religious group, whose population in the United States currently exceeds ten million. They are well-educated, well-organized, quite active in U.S. political life, and are now directly related to the United States’ most volatile area of foreign policy. Therefore, it is essential to learn more about this ethnic group in order to serve it better. It is the right time for colleges, universities, education institutions, and ethnic studies centers to look seriously into the educational gap in their curriculums to cover the needs of all minorities, including Arab American and Muslim students. Our students in the educational institutions deserve the right to learn about the broad fabric of U.S. ethnic diversity, mainly in the context of current global landscapes.

**Statement of the Problem**

The high school diploma currently does not serve as the basic credential for successful employment; higher education is a vehicle for growth and improved socioeconomic status. Postsecondary education contributes to the formation of the student’s identity process at a critical development stage. Arab Americans and Muslim parents’ attitudes towards identity maintenance are generally positive. As a commitment to their religious identity and cultural traditions, about 2% of Arab American and Muslim parents send their children to Islamic schools to receive an education consistent with the family’s religious beliefs. However, most opt for public schools (Zehr, 1999).
Furthermore, many families who send their children to public schools seek the help of Islamic weekend schools, summer camps, mosques’ youth programs and activities, and local or national conferences to maintain their cultural and religious values.

Because Arab American and Muslim populations are increasing rapidly, states are focusing on this group and their activities at different levels, from school to post-college, specifically after September 11, 2001. Unfortunately, a review of related literature shows that little was known about the Arab and Muslim community prior to the September 11 attacks. Leonard (2003) pointed out that, despite the visible presence of Muslim students on the campuses of colleges and universities around the country, literature about them is still limited. Furthermore, there is an absence of studies investigating the postsecondary education experiences of Arab American and Muslim students. Moreover, basic demographic information concerning Arab American and Muslim students in higher education in the United States does not exist. In fact, it is a major challenge to find any official documents supplying any type of statistical information regarding Arab American and Muslim students in postsecondary education in the United States. Therefore, my research used some data gathered by nonprofit Arab American and Muslim community organizations that documented the experiences of their communities, such as the Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), and the Arab American Institute (AAI).

Despite the growth of the number of Arab American students in public schools, many schools have not yet counteracted Arab stereotyping or recognized Arab culture and history (Suleiman, 1996). Many researchers are requesting public education to provide students, including Arab Americans, with the multicultural perspectives and the
needed values to spread equality and social justice around the world. In her study about Arab American high school students, Abu El-Haj (2007) affirmed it clearly in her conclusion that “this is a critical time to reinvigorate public school commitment to citizenship education in ways that engage with diversity, conflict, and structural inequalities that know no national borders” (p. 312). Similar to that, Banks (2008) posited that citizenship education should include cultural rights for citizens from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, and language groups.

The dearth of literature and knowledge of the postsecondary education experiences of Arab American and Muslim students raises important questions about the reasons behind the situation, which necessitates studying. To examine this phenomenon, this qualitative study was conducted using open-ended interviews to collect data from a selected sample of Arab American and Muslim postsecondary education students that reside in northern New Jersey.

The estimated 3.67 million Arab Americans (AAI, 2012) and the 7 to 10 million Muslims living in the United States are considered a significant part of American society. Thus it is imperative that researchers and society in general enhance their knowledge about this diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural group (Haddad, 2002; Hassan, 2002; Jackson, 1997; Moradi & Hasan, 2004; Naber, 2000; Suleiman, 2001). Furthermore, the growth of the Arab American and Muslim student population is projected to increase dramatically in higher education in the next ten years, yet we know little about them and their culture. This lack of knowledge can potentially lead to a myriad of problems concerning their integration into higher education, such as a lack of English proficiency, cultural conflict, and dropouts. The Washington Post (Wan, 2010), The Washington
The New York Times (Pérez-Peña, 2012), and the Center for American Progress (Shapiro, 2012) reported that the number of Muslim students enrolled at Catholic universities has doubled over the past ten years. The Pew Center (2007) estimates the population of Muslim students enrolled in colleges and universities to be more than 308,000, and their number is increasing.

In light of this growth, it is necessary to understand and investigate the educational needs and cultural experiences of this minority group to provide it with the proper assistance at schools or college campuses. Furthermore, the integration of Arab Americans and Muslims is required in our society because it may affect the climate of diversity in our society, including college campuses. In our diverse and multicultural nation, cultural conflict may occur when minority students are placed in campus environments in which values and customs are different from those at home, causing self-image problems for them (Eisenlohr, 1996). Therefore, something needs to be done to avoid this cultural conflict.

Furthermore, it is essential to study the challenges faced by Arab and Muslim immigrants, which represent about one fifth of this minority. It is crucial to explore the impact of immigration on them to understand their social and cultural identity in order to better support them in their integration and cultural adjustment into our society and education system. Bradford (2009) pointed out that successful integration of this ethnic group will not only benefit Arab Americans and Muslims, but it will also benefit America’s image in the Muslim world.

Moreover, the rate of graduation from high school for students with limited English proficiency (immigrants) remains very low. The national average freshman
graduation rate in 2010 was 83.2%, but it was below 66% for limited English proficiency students. This indicates that the dropout rate is high among the limited English proficiency (immigrant) students and reflects a large gap in graduation rates between the two groups (Balfanz et al., 2013). In addition, “too many of those who do graduate lack the skills for success in postsecondary education and the 21st century workforce” (Balfanz et al., 2013, p. 2). Year after year, “America is still needlessly losing too much of the talent and potential of our young people to the high school dropout epidemic” (Balfanz et al., 2013, p. 2). As a result, the African American, Hispanic, and Limited English Proficiency subgroup data “reveal significant challenges and indicate that unless we make substantial and accelerating improvements with these populations, the nation will not achieve a 90% graduation rate” in 2020 (Balfanz et al., 2013, p. 27).

More than 85% of Arab Americans over the age of 25 years have obtained at least a high school diploma, which is higher than the average U.S. population compared to 33% of Whites, (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). More than 45% of Arab Americans have a bachelor’s degree compared to the U.S. national average of about 29% (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). About 18% have a post-graduate degree compared to about 9% of Whites, (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Arab American Institute, 2011; Arab American National Museum (AANM, n.d.).

Arab Americans are motivated to succeed because of the persistence to gain knowledge and due to the history of discrimination and stereotyping against them in the United States. This is in addition to the problem of military occupation, lack of employment opportunities in their original countries, government oppression, and religious, social, and cultural pressures.
These are the reasons that the Arab American graduation rates are about double the national average, and these rates are inspiring. However, the challenges facing this community to attain higher education degrees are believed to be more of a concern for them than any other minority. Only 45% are aspiring to attain a bachelor’s degree out of about 85% who obtained their high school diplomas. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the discrepancy between the two rates. It is necessary to understand the reason for the dropout rate, which is one of the important challenges facing Arab American and Muslim postsecondary students. The National Center for Education Statistics (2006) study showed that many students who entered the school system dropped out before reaching their senior year, and 8% of high school sophomores in spring 2002 left school by spring 2004 without a diploma. In addition, with the above-mentioned statistics, it is essential to study the reasons behind the enrollment rates or acceptance rates of Arab Americans applying to colleges to be able to do something to improve these rates. Harvard Graduate School of Education’s study, the Pathways to Prosperity Project (2011), showed that only 56% of college students finish four-year degrees within six years and only 29% finish the two-year programs in three years.

After September 11, 2001, there was an increased interest from the government at all levels to understand the culture, history, religion, and language of this ethnic group, which is affecting its present and future. Some schools and colleges established programs and offered courses on Islamic history and Arabic language and culture. Federal and state governments provided grants to schools and colleges to support such programs. However, little is known about and understood concerning integration of Arab Americans and Muslims in this society, how postsecondary transition factors are affecting their future in
the United States, and how to help them reside in this country and maintain their cultural and religious identities.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the influence of social, cultural, institutional, and religious factors on the postsecondary education transition experience of Arab Americans and Muslim students in northern New Jersey. This qualitative study addressed a gap found in the literature about the experiences as told by Arab American and Muslim college students. This study explored the experiences for the first time as told by the Arab American and Muslim students during their transition from high school to postsecondary education in northern New Jersey.

Examining the social, cultural, religious, and institutional factors can help us understand the impact they make on this ethnic group in our country. It is anticipated that the insight attained from the thick and rich descriptions provided by the Arab American and Muslim students will provide valuable information regarding their postsecondary education transition experiences. In addition, the study can shed light on the factors that affected their decision to continue their postsecondary education, their views of their respected higher education institutions, challenges they encountered during their transition, how they coped with them, support services that facilitated their college enrollments, and how they utilized them. Given the lack of inclusion of Arab Americans in previous research, this dissertation focused on the factors influencing the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary transition in northern New Jersey. As
Bushman (2004) proclaimed, “There is a dearth of research examining Arabs who live in the United States, such research is desperately needed” (p. 754).

This study was an attempt to develop a deeper understanding of Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary transition experiences by assessing what factors at the secondary school level might influence this transition as perceived by those experiencing it. Understanding the postsecondary degree transition experience of Arab American and Muslim students and the contribution of the social, cultural, religious, and institutional factors affecting that transition was the focus of the present study.

It is my hope that this study will shed some light, foster a better understanding, and continue to build on the limited amount of work that has been done focusing on postsecondary education and Arab American and Muslim students in America. In addition, my aim was to add new understanding about the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary transition experience, challenges, difficulties encountered, and factors that potentially contribute to their postsecondary transition experience, so that it may help the policy makers, families, K-12 educators, and postsecondary higher educational personnel in their future planning. Furthermore, it is my hope to provide awareness to student affairs officials on the transition experience of Arab American and Muslim students so that they may better serve this population by modifying or offering new services to meet their expectations and needs, such as dietary food and schedule and calendar accommodations (Ali & Bagheri, 2009).

Finally, I hope that this study will aid in lessening the negative attitudes toward Arab Americans and Muslims and assist in combating Islamophobia and the stereotyping of this minority group, which is overtly present in American society, the media, and on
college campuses alike. Smith (2010) described Islamophobia as a misguided and irrational fear that many Americans have about Muslims, reporting the poll results in which a good number of Americans reported feeling “uncomfortable with the presence of Muslims in America” (p. 188). In its new analysis, findings based on the attitudes toward Muslims and Islam, the Gallup Center for Muslim studies (2010) found that religious prejudice is stronger against Muslims. The study reported that 43% of Americans admit having at least "a little" prejudice toward Muslims, which is more than double the number who say the same about Christians and Jews. Smith (2010) mentioned that Islamophobia may manifest in multiple fashions and will contribute to negative attitudes toward Muslim students on campuses because the current political climate toward Muslims in the United States is hostile and unjust.

**Research Questions**

The aim of this study was to gain understanding about how the cultural, social, religious, and institutional factors influence the postsecondary education experiences of Arab Americans and Muslim students in northern New Jersey. It explored the relationship between these factors and the Arab and Muslim postsecondary education transition. Therefore, this research provided insight into this particular community and helped increase the understanding of the Arab American and Muslim population. To address this research, the following questions guided this study:

1. How do religious beliefs and practices, social factors, and cultural characteristics influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition?
2. What are the institutional factors that influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition?

3. What types of support structures and barriers at institutions influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition and how are they utilized or coped with?

Seeking answers to these questions was done by interviewing members of the Arab American and Muslim community to relive the experiences they have had and share their stories that may explain the lived experience of their postsecondary education. Consequently, direct description of this group of participants will hopefully foster a better understanding of the Arab American and Muslim students in our society.

**Theoretical Framework**

Social and cultural factors represent potential barriers for Arab American and Muslim students when entering postsecondary education. The impact of racism toward minorities, including Arab Americans and Muslims, plays an essential role in institutionalizing the alienation of the “other,” which directly affects the postsecondary enrollment of this minority. To understand the roots of institutionalized racism in America, which is beyond the scope of this research, a person needs to study the history of the relations between Whites “the dominant” and other races or minorities in the United States.

In recent years, some scholars developed the Critical Race Theory (CRT) out of the legal scholarship studies that were taken from the examination of the civil rights movements to address the racial inequities in society; and since its inception, it was adopted by other disciplines (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005, 2012).
This theory is an analytical framework that was developed to understand both the social problems and racial inequalities in higher education and other fields of society (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). The CRT recognized that racism is rooted and permanent in the American social system and fabric. According to Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), the theory tries to acknowledge the “centrality of race and racism and intersectionality” in the institutional structure of life (p. 312).

The influence of prejudice and racial discrimination toward minorities, including Arab and Muslim students, plays an important role in initiating the marginalization of the Arab minority. Many Arabs have experienced discrimination and racism (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Cainkar, 2009; Crosby, Bromley, & Saxe, 1980; Maira, 2004; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Perry, 2003; Speck, 1997), especially after the attacks on September 11, 2001 (Bushman, 2004). This racism affects the enrollment rates in postsecondary education between immigrants and Whites. The graduation rates of the African American and Latino students and students with limited English proficiency (immigrants) are still low compared to the graduation rates of Whites; significant graduation gaps persist despite the progress made in past years. One of the highest average freshman graduation overall rates, New Jersey in 2011, was near 90% for White students; however, it was 69% for African American, 73% for Hispanic, and 68% for limited English proficiency students (U. S. Department of Education, 2012). This is a large gap in graduation rates between Whites and the other three groups of students, which is worth studying.

Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) pointed out five elements that form the basic perspective, research methods, and pedagogy of CRT framework in education: (a) the centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination,
which is to understand race and racism, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, which means to find out how power is rooted in institutional structures, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, which indicates the importance of personal knowledge and experience of unprivileged groups, and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective, which means to investigate race and racism in education in light of their historical and contemporary context (pp. 315-321). As Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995) posit, “The ‘voice’ component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice” (p. 58).

In this research, it was hypothesized that socioeconomic conditions, family, and cultural characteristics have an impact on the enrollment of Arab American and Muslim students in college. Therefore, the focus of this study was to analyze challenges facing the Arab American and Muslim students entering postsecondary education linking them to discriminatory practices that have existed toward the Arab American and Muslim community. Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995) in their attempt to create a connection between CRT and education contended that “the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system” (p. 58). Similarly, the voice of Arab American and Muslim students as a marginalized group in this society in general and at postsecondary institutions in specific is required, like the voice of people of color, for a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of the educational system. One of the tragedies that are enacted daily around the country in the field of education is “the silenced dialogue” when Black and Native American educators are speaking but seldom are aware that the dialogue has been silenced. When you are “talking to White people they still
want it to be their way, they think they know what’s best for everybody, for everybody’s children” (Delpit, 1998, p. 280). This is similar to Saeed’s (2002) description of the Muslim community when they are denied the right to speak for themselves and that right is given to someone else. Banks (2001) and Delpit (1998) argued that without the real voice of the people of color, it is doubtful that we will be able to know or improve the performance of the students of minority communities and live up to our nation’s democratic ideals when they are violated.

As long as Arab Americans are classified as “White,” they will remain relatively invisible without a voice and a paucity found in the literature about them will be of concern. This gap relates to the concern that Arab Americans are classified as “White.” Therefore, many researchers argue that Arabs are distinct enough in their culture, religion, and experiences from Whites to warrant recognition as a distinct ethnic group (Ayish, 2003; Shaheen, 2001; Suleiman, 1996; Zogby, 1990). The government's lack of identifying Arab Americans as an ethnic group and distinguishing them from Whites compelled many writers and thinkers to describe them as the invisible ethnic minority group (Naber, 2000; Saliba, 1999; Shaheen, 2001; Suleiman, 1996; Zogby, 1990).

Saliba (1999) argues that the legal classification of Arabs as White placed a cover over discriminatory and racist practices against them and disempowered them as an ethnic group in society; and as a result, they have been ignored and excluded from being active because of this classification. In the echo of the previous argument, Tamer (2010) stated, “American's legal classification as White essentially ignores the present extreme discrimination and racist attitudes toward Arab Americans” (p. 108). As a result, the
researcher and activist Kadi (1994) described them by saying “As Arabs, like other people of color in this racist society, our race is simultaneously emphasized and ignored” (p. xix). She continued to say, “It’s tough to name a group when most people aren’t aware the group exists . . . that’s why . . . I coined this phrase for our community: The Most Invisible of the Invisibles” (p. xix). Such a strong statement situates the Arab Americans among other ethnic groups and shows the level of frustration some activists of this ethnic group have reached.

The argument is that the U.S. Census is one of the main ways that protections and entitlements are distributed, and it is an essential means of conferring identity. Therefore, it is especially important that Arab Americans secure recognition. U.S. Census categorization would allocate funds and legal protections to Arab Americans against an increase in discrimination and violence. Mezey (2003) stated, “In the language of social constructivism, the census helps to construct recognizable identities at a number of different levels: national identity, group identity and individual identity. These identities can be at once mythic and deeply meaningful” (p. 1702). In the echo of Mezey’s point of view, Tamer (2010) pointed out that there are various benefits that occur due to U.S. Census official recognition, including recognition by colleges and universities that the Arab American students’ growing presence in postsecondary education would contribute to the diversity for affirmative action. Samhan (2009) also mentioned that the U.S. Census recognition would affect rational fund allocations for schools, hospitals, and other assets serving the entire community in cities with sizable Arab American populations such as Dearborn, Michigan, or Paterson, New Jersey.
Therefore, the first step in combating unreasonable fears, protecting Arab Americans, and educating American citizens about Arab Americans is to recognize Arab Americans as a minority group, rather than allow them to disappear into an over-inclusive definition of White. The literature review of the study offers a framework to understand the challenges and concerns facing the Arab Americans and Muslims that may make this study an essential contribution to understand the Arab American and Muslim students in the postsecondary educational institutions.

**Research Design and Methodology**

Studying the research questions provided me with the opportunity to explore and gain a deeper understanding of how social, religious, institutional, and cultural factors influence Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition experience and how they frame it. To obtain answers to the research questions, the phenomenological qualitative inquiry was used to study the postsecondary transition experience of the Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey. Merriam (2009) pointed out that researchers in qualitative research seek to understand the meanings people have constructed about their world and experiences. Therefore, a qualitative approach was chosen for this study to assist in exploring the meanings Arab American and Muslim students attach to their postsecondary educational experiences. Furthermore, the qualitative interactive design provided the flexibility for the researcher and the participants to explore concepts that may vary among participants (Maxwell, 2005).

Few researchers have focused on Arab Americans and Muslims in North America (Altareb, 1997; Bushman 2004); even fewer qualitative studies have focused on them in
the United States (Buda & Elkhoul, 1998; David & Ayoubi, 2002). Additionally, few qualitative studies have been conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of the Arab American ethnic group and how they are affected by their integration experiences into the new Western culture (Ansari, 1992; Kim, Atkinson, Wolfe, & Hong, 2001). The qualitative analyses in this research considered the factors contributing to the postsecondary education transition experiences of Arab American and Muslim students. Participants talking about their life experiences are a common source for collecting data. Therefore, it is essential to build rapport with the participants through an interactive one-on-one interview approach (Maxwell, 2005). Participants of the study included students in postsecondary education who are members of the Arab Americans and Muslim community in northern New Jersey.

A phenomenological qualitative methodology was used to examine and draw conclusions from the participants’ responses. The dearth in the number of studies that explored and focused on Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary transition experience guided the selection of this research methodology because this approach provided the Arab American and Muslim students with the opportunity to represent themselves and speak on their own behalf through the one-on-one focus interviews. In addition, the research topic, the purpose of the study, and the research questions strengthened the selection of the phenomenological qualitative methodology as the best and suitable for the study. Marshall and Rossman (2006) described the phenomenological approach as “the study of lived experiences and how we understand those experiences to develop a worldview” (p. 104). It depends on the assumption that there are an essence and structure to share experiences that can be reported (p. 104). For Giorgi (1997), in
phenomenological research, the operative word is “describe,” and phenomenology refers to the totality of lived experiences of an individual person, and the aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon.

The phenomenological approach strives to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of the lived experiences. This approach involves numerous in-depth interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest. Marshall and Rossman (2006) characterized the phenomenological qualitative study as using in-depth interviewing “to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share” (p. 104). Creswell (2007) pointed out, “Phenomenology is not only description, but it is also seen as an interpretive process in which the researcher makes interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences” (p. 59).

Maxwell (2005) stated, “The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers” (p. 22). A qualitative research approach was appropriate for this study because I was interested in conducting the research in an in-depth, comprehensive way to uncover and understand the perceptions and experiences as described by the participating students.

This methodology explored the influence of social, cultural, religious, and institutional factors on the Arab American and Muslim postsecondary education experiences in northern New Jersey. Two postsecondary education institutions from North Jersey were purposefully selected. Both institutions have an increasing number of Arab American and Muslim student enrollment; and at the same time, they are among the largest ones. A purposeful sample of 24 volunteer Arab American and Muslim students
of both genders from both postsecondary institutions was recruited to participate in this study. The sample of participants experienced the same phenomena and fell within the same age bracket, ages 18-24. The techniques used in collecting the data included unstructured interviews, recording the participant interviews, and a demographic questionnaire to gather the subjects’ information and obtain the demographic data. In this phenomenological qualitative study, data collection methods of in-depth interviewing, recording the participant interviews, and a demographic questionnaire to gather the subjects’ information were used to address this influence by capturing the experiences of Arab American and Muslim students. Additionally, specific questions were utilized to collect the data during the in-depth, face-to-face interviews with the participants in addition to the literature reviews and analysis. Data analysis started with the transcribing of the initial interview and continued throughout the entire study. After conducting the interviews, a list of significant statements was recorded; these statements were grouped into larger units or themes. These themes were then integrated into narrative description (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) to develop an understanding of the social, cultural, religious, and institutional factors influencing Arab American and Muslim postsecondary education experiences in northern New Jersey.

Furthermore, the data were validated by providing each participant with copies of his or her interview transcripts to identify areas of concern and clarify any misconceptions that may have developed during transcription of the interviews. The focus in-depth interview data collection approach helped me advance my understanding of how the social, cultural, religious, and institutional factors influence the Arab American and Muslim postsecondary education transition experiences. It provided
valuable insight that can be used to help accommodate the needs of the students at the postsecondary education level. In addition, the results from this study might provide insightful information to colleges, universities, and policy makers to make college campuses equitable places for Arab American and Muslim students and redesign or modify programs to accommodate this growing constituency and meet its needs.

**Significance of the Study**

Postsecondary education advances individuals’ opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills. Successful transition to postsecondary education is the key to predict students’ persistence in college and degree attainment. This study focused on the social, cultural, religious, and institutional factors that are contributing to the postsecondary transition of Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey. The significance of this phenomenological qualitative study was to describe the unfolding experiences of the Arab American and Muslim students’ experiences in postsecondary education in northern New Jersey. This study is unique because this research discussed the factors contributing to Arab American students’ postsecondary education experiences and attainment, which has been ignored in previous studies.

The current study examined literature available that provided an outline to understand the Arab American and Muslim students’ concerns. This may allow this study to offer the means for understanding some of these educational issues that Arab American and Muslim students face on campuses. The utilization of the wide lenses provided by the CRT framework in this study may make the present study an important contribution to the understanding of the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education experiences and needs. Furthermore, researchers have been
requested to pay attention to the growing ethnic groups and find the balance between studying the mainstream and the minorities, which tends to ignore the fact that ethnic religious groups are not part of the dominant culture (Beaman, 2003). The appeals made by activists have placed a burden on the researchers in adequately meeting the needs of this ethnic group. The Higher Education Research Institution (HERI) (2005) in its preliminary results from the major spirituality study of 112,232 freshmen students attending 236 diverse colleges and universities across the country began to differentiate between religiously identified groups.

Despite the necessity of studying minorities, few studies discuss the issues of Arab Americans and Muslims. However, these researches have illustrated the necessity and the desires to have more studies to discuss the Arab American and Muslim community concerns, especially education. Indeed, the significant increase in recent years in researching the educational and social concerns of other diverse ethnic and religious groups has provided a great understanding of the needs of these marginalized ethnic and minority groups (Banks, 2001; Banks 2008; Kaplan & Maehr, 1997). Arab immigration, long a neglected dimension in U.S. ethnic history (Pulcini, 1993), has recently garnered more research interest. Moreover, scholarly analysis of Arab Americans remains limited in scope, with limited studies based on nationally representative data (Kulczycki & Lobo, 2008).

Even though Arabs and Muslims are the least-studied ethnic group in the United States (Ahmed, 2004; Bradford, 2009; Pulcini, 1993; Suleiman, 1996, 2001), they get a considerable amount of publicity associated with political and economic events, especially after the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, and
Pennsylvania. Bradford (2009), in his study of Arabs and Muslims, pointed out that despite their growing in size and importance, this population remains poorly understood and deserves more academic attention. The need for better understanding of this growing community has become more urgent in recent years, especially after the events of September 11, 2001. This study can potentially contribute to the postsecondary education of Arab American and Muslim students because it will gather the students’ insights, perceptions, concerns, and interests, which may be essential to promote Arab Americans’ and Muslims’ successful integration into American society.

Part of the challenge in studying Arab Americans and Muslim issues in the United States is the deficiency of research and accurate information and resources about this ethnic group. Consequently, their educational needs and cultural experiences are less understood. Therefore, there is precedence for conducting such research and seeking information about the perceptions and experiences of Arab American and Muslim students who pursue postsecondary education in New Jersey to understand their culture and religion, to better serve their needs, and to comprehend and improve communication with this minority group. This study, if placed in its proper context, may make an important contribution to the knowledge and understanding of Arab American and Muslim students in colleges and universities in addition to recognizing their educational needs and make the institutional modification to accommodate them. This study may help the college faculty achieve a better understanding of transition barriers confronted by Arab American and Muslim students and their educational needs.

A recommendation was made by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (2003) demanding that writers give special attention to the way in which the Arab
and Muslim history is written and taught, to intercultural education, and to the ethics of communication and information. This study is essential because it may help meet some of the needs of the Arab American and Muslim students’ population and prepare them to be successful and to be contributing members in society by gaining insight into their ethnicity and culture. It is anticipated that this study will help educators make decisions on how to design curricula to meet the needs of this diverse society to determine the success of the Arab American and Muslim students and other ethnic students.

This study was conducted in New Jersey, a state which historically since 1870 has a large population of Arab Americans and Muslims and remains a favored destination for new immigrants from the Arab world because of its location. In addition, the Arab American population in New Jersey ranks fifth among Arab concentrations and is considered one of the fastest growing Arab populations in the country; their underreported estimation in 2008 is close to 240,000. This ethnic population in 2000 went up about 38% since 1990 and doubled in number from 1980 (AAI, 2011).

This qualitative study utilized data collected from the lived experiences of a group of Arab American and Muslim students through one-on-one semi-structured in-depth interviews in order to understand social, religious, cultural, and institutional factors affecting their postsecondary transition experiences and make some informed statements and recommendation concerning that transition experience. It is my hope that this study will be useful to college staff and students and serve as a model for future researchers who wish to understand the Arab American and Muslim students’ culture, religion, and college transition experience.
Additionally, the anticipated dramatic growth of the Arab American and Muslim student population, the current study is important because simple tolerance, respect, and celebration of religious and cultural differences are not sufficient on today's college campuses (American College Personnel Association, 2006). Therefore, the data of this study may be useful to colleges and universities that need to create a culture on the campuses not just of tolerance but of acceptance of the Arab American and Muslim students. This study may be helpful to educators to talk knowledgeably, openly, and frankly about religious, spiritual, and cultural differences on college campuses, and find ways to involve all students, including Arab American and Muslim students and staff in civil dialogue with the willingness to listen, learn, and amend previous religious prejudices and blind spots.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the fact that as an Arab American Muslim educator, I have strong feelings and beliefs about Arabs, Muslims, and the experience of the growing Arab Muslim community attending postsecondary education. The population of this study may not provide a comprehensive picture of the magnitude of the obstacles that Arab American and Muslim students come across while trying to enroll or attend college. In addition, the study was limited by the size of the sample and the limited time. The sample was selected solely because of the purpose of studying the Arab American and Muslim student population. The data were collected from the participants through face-to-face interviews. This study focused only on the postsecondary education experiences of the Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey. Furthermore, it depended on volunteers from that community.
This study was limited by the phenomenological approach that presents descriptions of reactions and perceptions of the participants. This approach does not involve any statistical calculated measurements. Although the generalizability of the results and findings of this study is to be determined by other researchers to study the experiences of other ethnic groups throughout the nation, the methodology processes, and challenges presented in this study can be used for further research in similar settings and as a model for studying other ethnic groups.

**Definition of Terms**

The following list defines terms used in this study:

*Acculturation:* The modification of the culture of a group of individuals as a result of contact with a different culture (Dictionary online, n.d.)

*Arab:* An ethnic group whose members are defined by sharing the same heritage and speaking the Arabic language and share a common historic experience.

*Arab American:* A person whose ancestry and cultural background are from a country or countries in the Arab world.

*Culture:* The integrated arrangement of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations; the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, n.d.). It is a set of attitudes, values, concepts, beliefs, and practices that are shared by members of the group (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009).
Ethnic Identity: “one’s sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one’s thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behavior that is due to group membership” (Rotheram & Phinney, 1987, p. 13).

Faith: A belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion. Faith is belief and complete trust in and loyalty to God (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, n.d.).

First-generation Immigrant: Refers to a foreign-born citizen who has been naturalized and lives in a new country.

Focus Interview: A purposeful oral interaction technique in which an individual collects information from another person in a quiet and private place (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Gay et al., 2009).

Islam: Islam is the last monotheistic religion articulated by the Quran and taught by the normative examples of Muhammad, the seal of the prophets according to Islam. The Arabic word Islam means submission or surrender to the will of a unique God, Allah.

Islamic Law: A code of ethics as it is law, derived from the Quran and the teaching and examples of the Prophet Mohammed. Its concern is what a Muslim should and should not do because it is only applicable to Muslims. According to Islamic Law acts are categorized obligatory, recommended, permissible, reprehensible, but not forbidden, and forbidden (Esposito, 1988; The Free Dictionary online, n.d.).

Islamophobia: Term used to describe a growing unexamined social anxiety and hostility against Islam and Muslims in the United States (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008, p. 5).

Minority Group: Part of a population whose members have significantly experienced a narrowing of opportunities, less control or power, and are often subjected to differential
treatment from the dominant or majority group in a country (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, n.d.); Shaefer, 2010).

*Muslim:* One who submits to God; any person who accepts the faith and the teachings of Islam.

*Postsecondary Education:* Any opportunities for students to attend formal training programs after they have completed high school or the equivalent, which mandates the fulfillment of specific degree requirements, including coursework or practical training at colleges, universities, and vocational technical institutes.

*Prejudice:* An irrational or hostile attitude directed towards an individual, a group, a race or their supposed characteristics.

*Race:* Individuals of the same family, tribe, and nation unified by shared interests, habits, or characteristics.

*Religion:* The service and worship of God or the supernatural; commitment or devotion to a religious faith or observance; a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, n.d.).

*Second-generation Immigrants:* U.S. citizens by birth with one foreign born parent or both parents.

*Stereotype:* “A representation of a culture, which teaches that the people of that culture are by nature inferior” (Alatom, 1999, p. 73).

*Social:* of or relating to human society; the interaction of the individual and the group, or the welfare of human beings as members of society (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, n.d.)
Transition: Change from one stage or place to another. In this study, transition refers to
(1) the movement from high school to postsecondary education or vocational training and
(2) the transition through to completion of postsecondary education.

White: Refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the
Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicate their race(s) as White or
report entries such as Irish, German, Polish, Italian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Egyptian,
Algerian, Moroccan, or Caucasian (U.S. Census, 2010).

Summary

This chapter began with an exploration of current changes in U.S. demographics
and their impact on today's society. Many studies have been conducted on several ethnic
immigrant communities; Maira (2004) states since 2001 there has been a growing
identification with the label of “Muslim” over any other single ethnicity. This
demographic growth is influenced by waves of immigrants, which are directly affecting
the education system. While seeking their education, Arab American and Muslim
students are subjected to experiences of hostility and adversity within a culture that has
traditionally discriminated against other minorities.

This study follows the qualitative approach to explore and understand the
influence of social, religious, institutional, and cultural factors on the postsecondary
education transition of Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey.
Speck (1997) reported that Muslim students are asking society to understand Islam and
Muslims, “We are asking for full, equal opportunity of knowledge. That’s all what we
ask for... Just learn about us” (p. 45). Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) pointed out that they
wrote an article in Change to share their own experiences of being Muslim in academic
spaces and of feeling the need to actively negotiate others' perceptions of us (Muslims) on campuses despite lack of support and understanding of our identities.

It is essential to increase our knowledge regarding Arab Americans and Muslims and broaden our understanding of their social, cultural, and religious practices. Currently, a large gap exists in the literature on the Arab American and Muslim students' postsecondary education due to the lack of research or because researchers have ignored it. Therefore, studying the Arab American now is more important than in previous years.

There are a variety of factors that influence postsecondary transition and choices; demographic, social, economic, institutional, personal and academic are among them (Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Perna & Thomas, 2006). Furthermore, other studies have shed light on factors associated with low academic performance by minority groups: socioeconomic status, cultural differences, and race relations (Ogbu, 1990, 1992). Moreover, successful survival for students facing transition challenges depends on their ability to manage social, academic, and cultural environments. Key factors to support this transition are accessing on-campus and off-campus resources, including student campus activities and support services (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007).

**Organization of the Study**

This qualitative research is organized into five chapters.

Chapter I provides an Introduction, Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Research Questions, Research Design and Methodology, Significance of the Study, Limitation of the Study, Definition of Terms, Summary, and Organization of the Study.
Chapter II offers a review of conducted research and related literature. It presents Arab American and Muslim students through a few studies discussing their problems. It highlights relevant key issues that relate to the study, such as historical perspective of postsecondary education, diversity in education, academic preparation, stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims, and educational discrimination. The necessity to develop this idea of exploring and understanding this student population is highlighted in light of the essential changes needed in the educational system.

Chapter III describes the methodology and the rationale for its selection, the research questions, population of the study, sample specification, instrumentation used, the data collection procedures and methods of data analysis. Chapter IV offers the analysis of the data and interpretation of the finding and results. Chapter V includes the summary, conclusions, results of the study, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Postsecondary education is essential to a successful economy and maintaining a civil and inclusive society. It is a significant factor in achieving individual dreams and promoting prosperity and security in society as well as strengthening democratic values. In addition to highly skilled employees to meet the challenges of the 21st century, New Jersey needs educated people to be active members to contribute to society for a lifetime. “College graduates are more likely to vote, participate in community groups, and sustain the environment than residents without a college degree. New Jersey’s future depends on expanding educational opportunity” (New Jersey Task Force, 2010, p. 13).

The benefits of college education are clear on the personal and public levels. It is not only to obtain higher annual earning but also to upload society’s needs. It is widely understood “We need citizens who think clearly, who are curious and creative, and who thoughtfully hold our public officials accountable. Scientists and business managers are key, but so too are poets, historians and nurses. Education opens minds, and thereby expands the spirit and strengthens the fabric of our state” (New Jersey Task Force, 2010, p. 20). In the echo of that, Matthews (2012) stated, “As a nation, we desperately need more citizens with postsecondary degrees. We need them to bolster our economy, to strengthen our democracy, to lead our communities, and more” (p. 5).

Several studies and researches were conducted on student transition from high school to postsecondary education. Yet the Arab American and Muslim ethnic group remains underresearched. This group has received less attention than other ethnic groups.
Currently, a deficiency exists in the literature on Arab American students and their culture, which has almost entirely been ignored by researchers and research participants. In this chapter, the literature review examines available related research in order to clarify cultural, religious, social, and institutional factors that are affecting the postsecondary transition of Arab American and Muslim students in New Jersey.

Siu (1996) and Yeh (2002), while studying the Asian American minority, identified four categories of educational factors related to college students: individual factors (language, education, immigration status), family factors (socioeconomic status, parents’ education, family support and guidance), institutional factors (inadequate academic preparation, institutional climate, inadequate institutional support programs), and community and societal factors (model minority stereotype and intragroup socioeconomic status). In their study of 160 Asian American students’ comfort in the university environment, Gloria and Ho (2003) found that social support (family and friends) was the strongest predictor for academic persistence. Furthermore, one of the more important findings in Cooper, Chavira, and Mena’s (2005) study is that income, geography, and families—probably the most important one—are keys for the development and sustenance of students’ educational and career aspirations and school achievement, not only amongst educated families but also among low-income minority and immigrant families.

In studying the relationship of three factors—(a) university comfort, (b) social support, and (c) self-beliefs—and how these factors predicted academic non-persistence decisions for 99 Latino/a undergraduates of Mexican heritage; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez and Rosales (2005a) concluded that all three factors were significantly related and
predicted academic non-persistence decisions. The results show that social support was the strongest predictor followed by university comfort. Social support from family, friends, and faculty or staff mentors outside and inside the university proved to be an important factor that supported student academic pathways. In addition, the positive perception of the university environment was strongly related to perceived mentorship.

To understand the postsecondary transition of Arab American students, the following related literature review addresses the following topics: overview of Islam and Muslims, historical perspective, diversity in education, academic preparation, stereotyping, and education discrimination. These sections helped develop the current study.

**Overview of Islam and Arabs/Muslims**

More and more Americans are becoming aware of Islam and its practices in the United States, most rapidly since September 11, 2001. Islam is considered the fastest growing religion in the United States. (Dumbrell, 2004; Gudel, 2001; Kellner, 2012; Leonard, 2003; Speck, 1997) with an estimation of 7 to 10 million members. It is considered to be the second largest religion in the world (Gudel, 2001; Mead, Hill & Atwood, 2001) and the second most commonly practiced in the United States (Nydell, 2006). It is hard to determine exactly the accurate beginning of Islam in the United States, but documented information about Islam has been present since the 17\textsuperscript{th} century (AANM; Dumbrell, 2004; Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.; Tweed, 2004). Demographically, Islam was insignificant, and its presence was marginal or quite invisible until 1965 (Robert, 2002). The rapid establishment of different organizations, institutions, and mosques around the United States exemplifies the growth of the Arab American and Muslim population. Data released in May 2012 from the 2010 U.S. Census
reports that Islam was the fastest growing religion in America in the last 10 years, and their number today has more than doubled from 2000, which was the largest gain reported by any religious group (see also NY Daily News, May, 2012; The Washington Times, May, 2012). Stein (2000), while discussing the diversity of religions in United States, predicted this growth; he illustrated that there is an accelerating growth of religious diversity and its scope in contemporary America is greater than ever before. In addition, at that time he pointed out that Islam with 3,332,000 members in 1998 is experiencing dramatic increases in numbers in America; and there is every reason to expect the number of Muslims will become the second largest religious group in a very short time.

Because of the lack of reliable official information such as the U.S. Census, it is difficult to have an accurate estimation of the total number of Arabs and Muslims residing in United States. Mead et al. (2001) in The Handbook of Denominations in the U.S. estimated the number of Muslims around to be four to six million. The growing presence of Arabs and Muslims in New Jersey, which is the home of an estimated 400,000 Muslims (Gudel, 2001), makes it one of the seven states that gained an increase in its Muslim population, showing the significance of such a study. Furthermore, these figures emphasize the urgency placed before educators to take notice of the needs and concerns of Muslim students’ postsecondary education; however, the higher education literature has very few studies highlighting the experience of Muslim students.

**Religion of Islam**

Faith touches the inner feelings of the human heart, and it is part of the culture and civilization. Al-Faruqi, a widely recognized philosopher in comparative religion
(1984) said, “We may readily agree with those who say that the study of religion is the study of mankind” (p. vii). He indicated that the importance of religion is easily comprehended by simply attending to the various definitions of religion as it ranges from being “an expression of collective identity” to “projective feelings of dependency” (p. vii). As a result, religion influences behavior in all possible communications; and it is a necessary constituent when exploring human phenomena.

Islam is a monotheistic Abrahamic religion. Historically, it is the last monotheistic religion, the tenets of which are taught by the Quran. The Arabic word *Islam* means submission or surrender to the will of God, Allah. Muslim means the one who submits to the will of Allâh. Muslims believe that God exists in solitude, not as a Godhead of two or three. They do not believe in the Holy Trinity, but they believe in the Christian and Jewish prophets of God. However, they consider Muhammad as the seal of the prophetic cycle.

Muslims believe that “God is the creator of all things, and He only is the Controller of all things” (Quran 39:62). In addition, they believe that daily actions and duties depend on intentionality; without the proper intention, the duty to God is invalidated. As the Prophet Muhammad said, “Actions are determined by intentions and a man will attain what he intended” (Al-Nawawi, 1983).

Islam is based on five pillars that shape the Muslim beliefs and deeds, which is centered on these five obligatory actions. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said, “Islam is founded on five [pillars]: (1) Shahada (declaration of faith), bearing witness that there is no God except Allâh, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allâh, (2) establishing regular Salat (prayer), (3) giving the Zakat (alms), (4) Hajj
(pilgrimage) to the House of Allah in Makkah once in the lifetime, and (5) Sawm (fasting) the month of Ramadan” (Al-Nawawi, 1983, #1075).

In Islam, the individual is taught that God has commanded people to seek knowledge and education from the cradle to the grave. The Prophet Muhammad says, “Seeking knowledge is obligatory on each Muslim” (Ibn Majah). This is a clear message that learning is an obligation on every Muslim, male or female. The purpose of education in Islam is derived from the Quran, 28:77 and 21:25, to fulfill the objectives of education that direct and influence the relationship between the human, his surroundings, and God. “But seek, through that which Allah (God) has given you, the home of the Hereafter, and [yet], do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters”(Quran 28:77). This verse reveals that Islam supports learning and education for all people.

It states in the Quran 21:25 “And We sent not before you any messenger except that We revealed to him that, There is no deity except Me, so worship Me.” Therefore, the ultimate purpose behind seeking education is pleasing God, being a good human being, and preparing for the Hereafter. Emphasizing the importance of education, the Quran states, “Proclaim (or read) in the name of the Lord and the Cherisher, who created man, out of a clot of thickened blood. Read and your Lord is Most-Bountiful, He, who taught the use of the pen, taught man that which he did not know” (Quran 96:1-5).

The aim of education is character building. For Muslims, education aims to develop the personalities of children to the end that they will be conscious of their responsibility to God (the Creator) and to fellow humans. Additionally, in the Quran it is stated, “... Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?” (39:9). The
Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) also said, “Superiority in education is better than superiority in divine service” (Al-Bihqi). These texts reveal that Islam supports learning and education for all people of both genders, males and females. As a result, Muslims believe that investing in education is the best investment an individual can make because it eventually leads to intellectual prosperity.

**Migration**

The Muslim population in the United States was somewhat insignificant until the twentieth century. The earliest Muslims to reach the American shores were African slaves before the Civil War (1861-1865). The Arabs migrated to the United States like many other ethnic groups. Researchers describe three waves of immigration to the United States starting from the late nineteenth century (Arab American National Museum (AANM, n.d.); Griggs, 2002; Nydell, 2006; Zogby, 1988, 1990). The first wave of immigrants has been described as relatively small in number (Cainkar, 2009; Griggs, 2002; Leonard, 2003) and included mostly uneducated and poor Christians who came to the United States between 1890 and 1939 largely for economic reasons (Bradford, 2009; Griggs, 2002; Cainkar, 2009). When European countries with power colonized much of the Middle East after World War I, the second wave of immigrants arrived in the United States, though its estimates are unknown. The second-wave of immigrants was typically highly educated and mostly Muslim. This wave made significant contributions to the development of Islamic institutions, including the building of mosques and community centers (AANM, n.d.; Jackson, 1997; Suleiman, 1999a). The third wave of immigration of Arab individuals was the largest due to the 1965 Immigration Act. It began in 1967 and it continues to date, but most of these recent immigrants are Muslim professional and
technical workers. The third immigration wave has been responsible for the establishment of most Islamic organizations and institutions (AANM, Bradford, 2009). These waves shared characteristics such as homeland cultures, the experience of immigration, ethnic traditions and values, the central role of family, prioritizing family ties over personal success, respect for and duty to elders, and the importance of religious faith (Jackson, 1997; Nydell, 2006). Moreover, the immigrants from these waves differed in the challenges they faced in the social, political arena and on issues of identity, acculturation, and adjustment. (Aswad & Bilge, 1996; Suleiman, 1999b).

Acculturation illustrates a shift from country of origin to a new host country in terms of values, beliefs, and attitudes. Acculturation strategies may be linked to immigration waves, and they are among the most significant issues for immigrants. It indicates an association with the new culture while integrating the past into a new value structure (Abudabbeh, 1996). A few studies examining acculturation within the Arab American community identified a number of striking variables for Arab Americans including discrimination, country of origin, religion, reason for immigration, gender, language, and racial-religious ethnic identification (Jackson & Nassar-McMillan, 2006; Nassar-McMillan, Lambert, & Hakim-Larson, 2011).

The Arab-Americans trace their ancestral roots to 22 Arab countries. Arab Americans have been identified as those who emigrated or descended from one of the 22 Arabic-speaking countries stretching from Morocco to the Persian Gulf and including such countries as Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (Suleiman, 1999b; Aswad & Bilge, 1996). El-Badry's (1994)
report on the demographics of Arab Americans notes that they are much like other
Americans, despite the variation in tradition and culture in these nations; the common
ground is an Arabic heritage and the Arabic language (p. 22).

The vast majority of Arab Americans are native born, and nearly 82% of Arabs in
America are U.S. citizens. The majority of Arab Americans trace their ethnic roots to five
groups, including Lebanese, 47%; Syrians, 15%; Palestinians, 6%; Egyptians, 9%, and
Iraqis, 3% (Samhan, 2001). The established Arab American population can be found in
every state, but about two-thirds of them live in ten cities. Los Angeles, Detroit, and New
York are the home of one-third of the Arab community. Since the late 19th century, New
York has been the entry state for Arabic-speaking immigrants, and it remains the
community’s cultural and commercial capital. New York and neighboring New Jersey
(particularly northern Jersey) remain the focus for new arrivals.

**Arab American and Muslim Population**

The 2000 census indicates that Arab immigrants represent a tiny fraction of
overall migration to the United States, consisting of less than 3% of the total. In 1994, El-
Badry pointed out that more than 27,000 people from Arab countries migrated to the
United States in 1992, 68% more than those who had arrived ten years earlier. The 2000
census reported 1.2 million people have an Arab ancestor (data from the 2010 census is
not yet available), but experts believe that the official Arab American population could
swell to more than 4 million people (Ashmawey, 2010b). According to the U.S. Census
Bureau, the Arab population in 2000 went up about 38% since 1990 and doubled the
number from 1980. The overall U.S. population grew 13% in 1990. In addition, Arabs
can be found in large concentration in eleven states, New Jersey being one of them (AAI, 2011).

All people from Arab countries are racially defined as White by the U.S. Census and on most affirmative action forms. Therefore, the Arab as a racial category does not appear on the U.S. Census form. Prior to 9/11, Arab Americans had consistently advocated for a separate checkbox for Arab Americans on the U.S. Census. After the tragedy of September 11, some researchers argued that Arabs are not seeking official U.S. Census recognition, especially because they believe it will operate as a repressive disciplinary power that reinstates racial subordination (Allied Media Corp., 2012; U.S. Census, 2009). El-Badry mentioned that it would be very dangerous for Arab Americans to check and mark in “Arab Americans” on the census form. She states, “I fear that these kinds of data are going to be misused” (Analysis: Arab-Americans, 2004, para.7). Furthermore, El Guindi (2003) clearly expressed her fear by saying, “In this atmosphere some Arab Americans are quite comfortable with checking the box for White, fearing that a separate classification of Arab or Muslim could be a governmental attempt to identify them for profiling purposes” (p. 632). Samhan (Allied Media Corp., 2012), the former executive director of the Arab American Institute Foundation, argues, “Among the major oppositions to data classification is the potential for abuse by government or law enforcement agencies, especially in times of crisis” (para. 6).

Other Arab American scholars expressed reservations on the official U.S. Census recognition, even in the year 2020, arguing that it is not the time. Previously advocated for a separate Arab racial classification, El-Badry a renowned Arab demographer, has temporarily paused her efforts seeking official U.S. Census recognition, largely based on
the citing of the current political climate. Recently she stated, "Arab Americans fear being rounded up. While a box for ‘Arab’ was pursued for many years under the stance of fairness and accuracy of data collection, right now is not the time to pursue ‘the Arab’ box. By definition, the race question has White, and hence that is where we fit in" (Hijazi, 2012, p. 3). Similarly, Mezey (2003) pointed out that in the wake of September 11, adding a separate category for Arab Americans on the U.S. Census form is undesirable since it might be used for disciplinary purposes. In 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau released a report describing the demographic characteristics of the Arab American population based on ancestry questions. As a result, many Arab American leaders from the Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) and the Arab American Institute (AAI), argued that this action promoted collective suspicion and backlash against Arab Americans.

The validation of the fear and apprehension of Cainkar (2004), El-Badry (2004), El Guindi (2003), Mezey (2003) and Arab organizations became concrete after years when the New York Police Department (NYPD) investigators were infiltrating Arab American and Muslim groups, including postsecondary students, using the census data. The investigation shows in the clearest terms that police were monitoring people based on religion and ethnicity, despite claims from officials to the contrary (Goldman & Apuzzo, 2012b). Sullivan (2011) from Associated Press (AP) reported that even those Arab Americans and Muslims considered to be aligned with the NYPD were under surveillance of the NYPD units. Undercover officers and informants were assigned to spy and monitor not only Muslims in general but also the NYPD partners in the fight against terrorism, as one of them described it “a partner and a suspect at the same time!” (para. 7).
The Associated Press revealed the NYPD Demographic Unit’s existence in August 2011. The documents of this intelligence unit states that they will “utilize statistical information from the United States 2000 Census regarding countries of interest” (p. 2). The focus was the people of 28 countries considered ancestries of interest. Nearly all were Muslim countries, along with “American Black Muslim” (Goldman & Apuzzo, 2011). Consequently, Arab Americans and Muslims living and working in New York and New Jersey were subjected to surveillance as part of the NYPD's effort to build databases of where Muslims eat, work, shop, play, and pray.

The representation of Arabs and Muslims after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, became a major concern for them in the United States. Despite the backlash from this event, the pressures and difficulties facing this community should not be underestimated. Many people still do not differentiate between the actions of the individuals and the community at large. Arab Americans have been caught in the crossfire of the September 11 backlash. Arab Americans and Muslims in the United States were the primary targeted groups of blame following the September 11 attacks (Peek, 2003). As Bradford (2009) explained it, especially after September 11, poor communication with Arab American and Muslim communities and heavy-handed policing that fall short of clearly differentiating between those who create a threat and those who do not will almost undoubtedly drive the Muslim population into greater isolation and complicate our tasks of identifying those will commit terrorist acts.

Arabs and Muslims, however, are measured by a different standard when it comes to any committed terrorist crime in our society. Unfortunately, in our country, the Arab American and Muslim communities are blamed whenever a person from the same
background commits an act of terrorism. Community members fear that they are assumed guilty until proven innocent, which is the exact opposite of the established system in our country (Suleiman, 1999a). The Aurora, Colorado, Oklahoma, Boston, devastating Connecticut shootings, and the most recent murder of three young Arab American Muslim students in Chapel Hill in North Carolina are tragic events that remind us that killers and psychopaths come from all racial backgrounds and religious affiliations. Furthermore, Arab Americans and Muslims should not be held accountable for what others do in the name of their faith, and the terror is not confined to Muslim individuals or people from other religions or cultures. After all, violence has nothing to do with Islam, and as Americans we have to differentiate between mainstream and radical individuals of the same faith.

**Historical Perspective of Postsecondary Education**

In the Northeast, according to Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) 2008 projections, high school graduates will be increasingly diverse in the next decade, both ethnically and racially. This is despite the projection that the enrollments and graduates in the Northeast’s region will face a substantial and persistent decline in school enrollments and graduates. The report projected the enrollment to fall by approximately 348,000 students (4.7%) by 2010-11. The White non-Hispanic enrollment shortfall projected in the year 2012-2013 was 54,865 and the total from public and nonpublic was 108,353 students.

Even though there is increasing diversity in Advanced Placement (AP) classes, African American, Native American, and Hispanic students remain underrepresented in AP classes in many states. Arab Americans still do not exist in any of these reports
because these reports are denying the existence of the Arab Americans as an ethnic group and do not have a category for them; most of the time, they are recorded under “other” or “White non-Hispanic.”

In New Jersey, specific College Board reports did not show the Arab Americans’ ethnicity as they do other ethnic groups. The Advanced Placement (AP) report shows that Whites have been decreasing in taking AP courses since 2008; in 2009 it was 58,284 and in 2010 it was 57,357 (Baum, 2011). This is despite the noticeable growth of the Arab American and Muslim community; according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population in 2000 increased about 38% since 1990 and doubled in number from 1980 (AAI, 2011), which is reflected in the number of the students in this community. The educational paths of Arab American and Muslim students have shown in recent years a willingness on the part of students and their families to strive for educational excellence. For Arab Americans, 85% of the community graduated with a high school diploma and 45% with a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 28% of Americans. In another study conducted by CAIR in October, 2006, about American Muslim voters on a sample of 1,000 respondents, the results show that the characteristics of this Muslim voters sample was that 47% are in the 35-54 age group; 20% are in the 25-34 age group, and 62% of them have obtained a bachelor’s degree or higher.

A range of existing studies shows the effects of several aspects of college entry: persistence, attainment, selectivity, and resources of socioeconomic and other outcomes. These studies have found that choosing a college can affect one's future education, occupation, and income, as well as participation in civic and community affairs (Karen, 2002; Liu, 2010; NCES 2000; Pascarella, Smart, & Stoecker, 1989). Verba, Schlozman,
Brady, and Nie (1993) in their study of African Americans and Latinos found that socioeconomic status is a strong predictor of civic engagement and exercising political rights, stating that “a group's level of political participation depends upon the availability of resources derived from economic and social institutions” (p. 454). In addition, they found that education has the strongest effect on civic and political engagement, particularly for those with low income or for disadvantaged groups because education increases the interpersonal and social networking that bring them into civic engagement and politics.

In its summary on postsecondary education, the United States Department of Education (Feb 2010) report noted that disadvantaged youths and adults with limited literacy skills face barriers in postsecondary education; this includes training institutions and community colleges. These impediments can block their future pathway and keep them locked in low-income jobs. Furthermore, in the past years several researchers have highlighted barriers to college access and degree attainment for low-income and minority students. Some of these impediments include (a) being first generation, (b) low academic preparation, (c) socioeconomic status, (d) unwelcoming campus environment, and (e) high college cost, (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Green, 2006; Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005), and since then little has changed.

In 2010, the College Board published a report by Baum et al. entitled *Education Pays: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society*. Their report indicates that the benefits of higher education are numerous: longer life, healthier lifestyles, increased lifetime earning potential, an increase in the overall economy, and engaging in more educational activities with their children, to name a few. They even
went as far as to say college graduates have fewer incidences of smoking and incarcerations, while graduates have higher rates of volunteerism, blood donation, and civic participation. More important is the knowledge fulfillment, self-awareness, and broadening of horizons linked to the future of the graduates’ life and work. Indeed the most comprehensive and unprecedented of such studies (Bowen & Bok 1998) in which they studied more than 45,000 students of all races who attended academically selective universities between the 1970s and the early 1990s, found positive effects of selectivity on a variety of outcomes and showed that attendance at more selective institutions was positively related to socioeconomic outcomes.

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2007) shows that 29% of Muslims living in the United States are between the ages of 18 and 29, an age range in which many individuals attend college. Furthermore, Kulczycki and Lobo, (2008) found that in 2006, 40% of all Arab American adults aged 21-59 possessed a college or professional degree, compared to just 28% of all Americans. Native-born Arab American women have achieved considerably higher educational attainment levels than the general population and have registered the most significant gains in terms of college graduates or professional degree by reaching 45% in 2006, compared to 29% for all American women. Arab Americans have a high rate of female educational attainment but a low rate of female employment. In addition, most Arab Americans are retaining their Arabic language ability without letting this impede their social and economic integration with the mainstream society.

Kulczycki and Lobo (2001) pointed out that Arab Americans have strong English language skills and their median age is three years younger than all American population.
We can observe their influence in many areas, like other ethnic groups, and witness the level of contribution to the American lifestyle. The descriptive statistics provided in their study give a very optimistic future for the Arab Americans and have one important implication which is Arab Americans can easily adapt to the labor market of the United States. Among working-age Arab American women, nearly one-third (36%) hold a bachelor's degree or higher, 61.2% are native born, 78.4% are U.S. citizens, and 85.4% are proficient in the English language, all of which indicate favorable conditions for women's labor-force activity (Read & Oselin, 2008; U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000).

Khalil Gibran (1887-1931), the Lebanese American Artist and the writer of the third best-selling book of all times, *The Prophet*, said, “We, Arab Americans, are proud of our heritage and are proud to be Americans. It is this pride that keeps us all asking, “What more can we do for our country?” the good old U.S.A. (AAI, 2011).

**Diversity in Education**

Diversity in culture and experience creates an environment of learning for students, which is different from their own; it creates a richer flow of ideas and the potential to increase creativity and innovation. Supporting diversity on campuses will help create and develop the feeling among our young adults that they belong to multiple communities and shift the way they think about other cultures. Diversity is essential for any education system and society for many reasons; students can learn from different experiences and understand the beliefs, traditions, and perspectives that are distinctive from their own. Diversity helps students communicate, understand other cultures and complex societies, and most importantly, prepare them to be ready for their future careers. After the NYPD activities of monitoring Muslim students on campuses, Yale
University president emphasized that “The Muslim Students Association has been an important source of support for Yale students during a period when Muslims and Islam itself have too often been the target of thoughtless stereotyping, misplaced fear, and bigotry” (*NY Times*, 2012).

More importantly, diverse environments in postsecondary education institutions distinguish them from other societal venues; thus, as defined by Newman (2001), a university in its simple form is an “assemblage of strangers from all parts in one spot.” Simply, it is a school of knowledge of every kind, consisting of teachers and learners from every quarter . . . a place for the communication and circulation of thought, by means of personal intercourse, through a wide extent of country” (p. 6).

The Supreme Court in the *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) case decision was influenced by the benefits that campus diversity produce and can provide to society as a whole. Justice O’Connor articulated that "these benefits are not theoretical but real," including cross-racial understanding, the breaking down of racial stereotypes and enables students to better understand persons of different races (p. 330). The Court referred to the fact that "Major American businesses have made clear that the skills needed in today's increasingly global marketplace can only be developed through exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints” (p. 308). In addition, "Numerous studies show that student body diversity promotes learning outcomes, better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society, and better prepares them as professionals" (p. 330).

Colleges’ and universities’ most important obligation is to determine what the needs of the future graduates are and then deliver on these needs. Bollinger (2007)
posited that the colleges’ and universities’ admissions process obligation has less to do with rewarding students’ previous performance than it does with determining to build a community of diverse learners who will thrive together and teach one another. Above all, diversity will train them to reach out instead of clinging, and it offers many changes and productivity. Diversity is substantial to shape students to be tolerant and respect people different from them, including Arab American and Muslim students. Tolerance will create a society within one nation that promotes and emphasizes democratic values and legitimacy. Students, including Arab Americans and Muslims, must teach their future children that their peers, regardless of their religion, color, race or ethnicity, are their friends. Tolerance and respect of students with diverse backgrounds and experiences will enhance classroom discussion and the educational experience both inside and outside the classroom and might minimize the number of hate crimes against Arab Americans and Muslims. Students’ cross-racial understanding, tolerance, and respect of Arab Americans and Muslims, may transfer to the rest of society.

After the NYPD ethnic religious profiling of Muslim students on campuses was revealed, Columbia University spokesperson Robert Hornsby said, “American universities are admired across the globe as places that welcome a diversity of people and viewpoints. So we would obviously be concerned about anything that could chill our essential values of academic freedom or intrude on student privacy” (Hawley, 2012, para. 53). Consistent with that, Yale University’s president, Richard C. Levin, condemned the NYPD activities, stating, “I am writing to state, in the strongest possible terms, that police surveillance based on religion, nationality, or peacefully
expressed political opinion is antithetical to the values of Yale, the academic community, and the United States” (AL Baker & Taylor, 2012, para. 4).

The challenge for colleges is not recruiting a diverse student population; the challenge is creating a true culture of respect and incorporation of the minority students. Civil manners and the cooperation among society members and respect of diversity and its principles are discussed in the Quran. “O mankind! We created you from a single pair of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may know each other. The noblest of you in God's sight is the most righteous of you, God has full knowledge and is well-acquainted” (49:13). In this verse, the Quran informs us about the standards of the relationship of the members of the community towards one another.

Evidently, the benefits of seeking education at all levels are acknowledged among the members of the Arab American and Muslim community. Muslims in the states are diverse, similar to Christians, in their origin, language, nationality, and ethnicity (Kastoryano, 2005). Diverse ethnic groups bring many strengths to this society; Bollinger (2007) argues that diversity enriches the educational experience. Diversity helps students learn to communicate effectively with people from other cultures and various backgrounds. Exposing individuals to a diverse setting prepares them to become good citizens in a society, which encourages mutual respect and teamwork. The Prophet Muhammad declared that people were born inherently equal except by righteousness. He said, “People are equal like the teeth of the comb.” Moreover, he said, “There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, or of a non-Arab over an Arab, or of a White man over a Black man, or of a Black man over a White man, except in terms of piety. The people are from Adam, and Adam is from dust” (Al-Tirmidhi, 3270).
The history of America shows that it is a country of cultural and linguistic diversity (Garcia, 2001), which promotes critical thinking and challenges the stereotypes of other communities. Teranishi, Allen, and Solorzano (2004) pointed out that one of the most critical issues facing the educational system in the United States is the rapidly changing diversity of society of the 21st century. They stated, “Social mobility, structural inequalities, and educational outcomes are best understood and addressed within the context of our diverse society” (p. 2243). Therefore, due to the fast growth rate of the minority population, diversity in education should be accommodating the rapid demographic changes of the country (Niemann & Maruyama, 2005). Arab American and Muslim students are among these minority ethnic groups. Furthermore, many American scholars such as John Esposito, Nikki Keddie, Houston Smith, Yvonne Haddad, and many more argue that Muslims can play a key role in the revival of the moral system of American society (Saeed, 2002). In President Bill Clinton’s speech of November 22, 2000, he stated “We welcome Islam in America; it enriches our country with Islam’s teachings of self-discipline, compassion, and commitment to family. It deepens America’s respect for Muslims here at home and around the world” (Gudel, 2001).

Currently the United States is experiencing a high demographic transformation (Espinosa-Herald, 2003) and as the population of our society is changing, diversity is the most critical issue challenging the education system in United States. The U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010) documented these landscape changes, reporting the status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups. The report shows that between 1980 and 2008, the racial/ethnic composition of the United States shifted and became more diverse. In the past decade, the White
population declined from 80% of the total population to 66%, and the Hispanic population faced an increase from 17% to 21% and Black represented 11% to 12%. As a result, these changes were reflected in public school enrollment, SAT test takers, and college transition. Among the 18- to 24-year-old students enrolled in college in 2008, about 81% of Hispanics, 68% of Blacks, and 73% of Whites attended public institutions. In 2008, 44% of White 18- to 24-year-olds were enrolled in colleges and universities; this rate is higher than the 28% in 1980, the 32% of Black with an increase of 12% from 1980, and the 26% of Hispanic 18- to 24-year olds enrolled, with an increase of 10% from 1980 (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010).

Among the diverse ethnic groups, Arab Americans and Muslims now have a well-educated population. According to AAI, 19% have a post-graduate degree, which is nearly twice the American average of 10%. Overall, there are 13%, and 57% of the population is in an elementary or a high school, 22% enrolled in college, and 7% are conducting graduate studies. The Arab American Institute reported that 79% of the Arab community work in the private sector with a median income of $59,000, compared to the national median income of $52,000. Arab Americans, like other minorities, are invisible in higher education and lag behind every other ethnicity in attaining recognition and acknowledgement.

For the United States to maintain its prosperity in a globalized world, it is necessary to make effective use of the different talents and bring them to the workplace from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The multicultural education theorist James Banks (2001) pointed out that one of the essential goals for democratic nations characterized by cultural, ethnic, language, and religious diversity is to maintain a balance between unity
and diversity. “One of the challenges to pluralistic democratic societies is to provide opportunities for cultural and ethnic groups to maintain components of their community cultures while at the same time constructing a nation in which diverse groups are structurally included and to which they feel allegiance” (p. 5). The value of culture should be a part of the learning process, and classroom instruction should be consistent with cultural orientation of ethnically diverse students. The former Justice of the Supreme Court Thurgood Marshall (1992) said, “The legal system can open doors and sometimes even knock down walls. But It cannot build bridges . . . . We will attain freedom if we learn to appreciate what is different and muster the courage to discover what is fundamentally the same” (para. 10).

The demographic changes are poised to continue to change the dynamics of American society; and as a result, the minority groups, including Arab Americans, need to be educated and recognized in order to perform successfully and balance equality in the workforce and global marketplace. A seminal study by Bikson and Law (1994) posit that “colleges should make better use of the cultural diversity already available in their student bodies and localities to cultivate global awareness and cross-cultural competence” (xiv). Therefore, the education system needs to find ways to engage a number of different minorities within its landscape, or “the risk is that the workforce will become more divided” (Bial & Rodriguez, 2007, p. 29). One of the first initiatives in providing education for a diverse contemporary population in our country, including the Arab minority, is ensuring equal access to higher education institutions. As Reid-Wallace (1992) pointed out, the ultimate social role of education in a democratic country is to ensure equal opportunity access to diverse individuals and groups.
Colleges are racially and ethnically diverse learning environments, and ideal for students to encounter differences, build awareness and appreciation of difference, and learn how to treat each other as equal citizens. The results of the Higher Education Research Institution (HERI, 2012) research underscore the need to monitor the climate for underrepresented minority students even as campuses become more diverse, as there is still considerable residential segregation that students experience prior to college entry.

The Arab American minority ethnic group is growing according to El-Badry (IAAP), and that is consistent with the U.S. Census Bureau that the Arab population in 2000 went up about 38% since 1990 and doubled since 1980 (AAI, 2011). Like other ethnic minorities, there has been a visible demographic growth of Arab Americans and Muslims in the United States between 1980 and 2006; the Arab American population more than doubled and became more diverse, dominated less by Lebanese/Syrian ancestries. Arab Americans tended to be younger, more educated, had more intact family structures, and earned higher incomes than the U.S. adult population overall (Ahmed, 2004; Cainkar, 2009; El-Badry, 1994; Kulczycki & Lobo, 2008; U.S. Census, 2005). As a result, the prosperity of the nation will be increasingly dependent on the knowledge and contribution of minority young people, including Arab American and Muslim youth. In his inspirational speech in July 1926, Khalil Gibran said, “I believe you can say to the founders of this great nation, ‘Here I am, a youth, a young tree, whose roots were plucked from the hills of Lebanon, yet I am deeply rooted here, and I would be fruitful.’ It is to be proud of being an American, but it is also to be proud that your fathers and mothers came from a land upon which God laid His gracious hand and raised His messengers” (Overland, 2000, p. 31).
According to Rabbi Jonathan Romain, “If Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and other children do not mix, they become ignorant of each other, then suspicious, fearful and hostile” (2001, para. 8). In an interview with the BBC, the education spokesperson in Bradford, England, David Ward, said, “Prejudice is created when people are kept apart.” He added, "I also believe automatically, naturally that prejudice is broken down when people mix" (2001, para. 3). Knowledge of religious and cultural differences provide students with effective resources and power to change their world, and students must learn to use this power to create opportunities to build bridges of dialogue and understanding between and among all those who hold different beliefs and spiritual worldviews, along with how these principles impact students’ lives.

Despite their alarming segregation conditions (Teranishi, Allen, & Solorzano, 2004), the public education institutions remain places in which diverse groups of students come together, creating our global community. Creating such environments will promote our basic cultural principles and prompt further a just and peaceful future for our society. This environment offers and provides educators with excellent opportunities to develop habits of mutual respect, practices of coexistence and to involve students with conflicting perspectives on local and national issues (Abu El-Haj, 2007).

Arab Americans and Muslims in the United States are a significant ethnic minority group that promotes our understanding of the perspectives, circumstances, and the internal complexity—cultural and political—of the states. Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee (2002) pointed out that diverse environments carry multidimensional ways of looking at objects and researchers should change their traditional approaches in studying our diverse landscape and the experience of its evolving global village. Furthermore, they
added, “It is not appropriate to continue to view diverse populations all through the same lens and rely on traditional theories to explain their development” (p. 56). Arab Americans and Muslims in the United States are considered an important minority group that promotes our understanding of cultural differences of the community and of the Muslim populations. Altogether, the contributions established a tremendously useful collection for a comparative study of the Muslim presence in Western cultures (Kastoryano, 2005).

The Arab American and Muslim student population is growing; Speck, (1997), Holly (2002), Menandez (2005), Schmalzbauer (2007) and Mubarak (2007) mentioned that the number of Muslim students at American colleges and universities continues to rise. The Pew Center’s (2007) report suggests that the number of Arab American and Muslim students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities is more than 308,000, and their number is increasing; also the number of Muslim Students Association (MSA) chapters have been increasing. Currently, the number has risen from ten in 1963 to more than 600 chapters in the United States (Schmalzbauer, 2007) up from around 400 ten years ago (Mendez, 2005).

The study of HERI (2012) indicates that more hospitable racial climates are at the most diverse campuses and suggests that campuses must continue to work to improve intergroup relations, even as enrollments begin to change. Louis Olivas, in his foreword to the study of Castellanos and Gloria, mentioned that colleges and universities are historically slow to change; they must quickly reset the process and vision with which they support Latino students’ success (2007). In order to comprehend the benefits of
diversity on campuses, students need opportunities in classrooms and co-curricular experiences to interact with others from different backgrounds, perspectives, and beliefs.

The instructors’ position on campuses is essential; their responsibility is to try to put all issues on the table in order to initiate true dialogue. This discussion can only be done when minority students are being heard with open hearts and minds and are unafraid to raise their questions freely about discrimination with students from a different color or background. “The results of such interactions may be the most powerful and empowering coalescence” for all teachers and students in their educational environment and surrounding communities (Delpit, 1988, p. 297). Bikson and Law (1994) argue that for colleges to meet the challenges that are presented by an increasingly global marketplace, they have to produce globally effective and oriented graduates and implement changes in many areas, including the curriculum and extracurricular activities.

Consistent with the previous arguments, Teranishi, Allen, & Solorzano (2004) argue that, with the history of racial inequality of postsecondary education access and achievement in our country, “Better serving all groups in our changing society should be of the utmost concern for higher education institutions” (p. 2224). As a result, postsecondary educational institutions should modify and improve their roles, means, and systems to fit the diversity of their global community. Higher education institutes will achieve this goal if programs and policies are relevant and correlate with the needs of its twenty-first century diverse society in which the Arab Americans and Muslims are considered as positive contributors.
Academic Preparation

The ultimate goal of education is to create an educated person who will become a responsible citizen. For the transition to be successful from high school to college, the student’s academic preparation, family support, financial factors, and community resources are the most important elements of successful college enrollment. Parents are considered an effective resource for improving student achievement, and their involvement has a positive influence on their children’s performance and academic achievement. The cultural values, traditions, and belief system that ethnic families have in respect to education impacts their involvement in school, and the development outcomes become a significant matter when examining individual environments such as family and culture (Anguiano, 2004).

In general, parents' education is positively related to persistence in college and degree completion. Parents’ involvement in the education of their children is one of the significant contributors to improving academic achievement. Researchers demonstrate overwhelmingly the substantial importance and benefits of parental involvement, including all types of communications, in the education of their children from diverse backgrounds through their education pathway (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007; Gloria et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Rygus, 2009).

Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that active students who are involved in social, community, and religious organizations and clubs experienced a positive impact on their sense of belonging which facilitated the transition process. Successful student transition depends on the ability to manage academic, social, and cultural environments. Yet, accessing resources, including student campus activities and support services (i.e. family,
relatives, friends, guidance counselors, internship opportunities, cultural centers, and student clubs) are essential factors that support students’ through their college life (Castellanos et al., 2006; Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005b).

Experiences dealing with issues of alienation or discrimination on a daily basis can negatively influence one’s confidence in one’s ability to successfully complete tasks. Many studies suggest that experiences of daily hassles and stressful life events are related to greater levels of psychological distress and mental health difficulties; scholars posit that perceived experiences of prejudice and discrimination may also be related to mental health problems (Moradi & Hasan, 2004). In 2004, Moradi and Hasan examined 108 Arab Americans to determine the link between perceived discrimination experiences and mental health. They found that perceived discrimination events are related to lower levels of perceived control over one's life, and lower perceived control in turn is related to lower self-esteem and greater psychological distress. Furthermore, the study found that because of discrimination, one-third of the study population was classified as having depressive symptoms, increased psychological distress, and lower self-esteem.

**Family Structure**

For Arab Americans and Muslims, achievement in life is primarily based on the interests that benefit the family because everything in their life revolves around the family (Harik & Marston, 1996; Moss & Wilson; 1993; Nydell, 2006). The Quran discusses relationships starting with direct family members and then expanding the circle until reaching society at large, “Serve God, and do not join any partners with Him; and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who
are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer you meet, and what your right hands possess: surely Allah does not love the arrogant, the vainglorious” (4:36).

An individual is obligated to support his or her family in return for the services that they offered him or her during their life. The Quran (17:23-24) states, “Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him and that you be dutiful to your parents. Whether one or both of them reach old age in your life, do not say a word of disrespect to them and do not brush them aside, but address them in terms of respect and honor. In addition, lower to them the wing of submission and humility through mercy, and say, "My Lord! Grant them Your mercy much like they raised me in childhood.” In addition, the Prophet Muhammad said, "May his nose be rubbed in dust; i.e., may he be humiliated (He said this thrice), who found his parents, one or both, approaching old age, but did not enter Paradise, by serving them" (Al-Nawawi, 1983, # 317); this statement clarifies the interdependent style of life within the Arab American and Muslim population. For the majority of European-Americans, it seems that attaining individual objectives and achievements in the United States is more valued than working to help maintain the family unit (Killen & Wainryb, 2000; Trandis, 1989). Greenfield and Suzuki (1998) argue that both individualism and interdependence are evident in a culturally diverse society such as the United States; but mainstream Americans prefer individualism, while many American minorities and new immigrant populations prefer interdependence.

The average size of the Arab American family tends to be larger than the American family, with extended family living near or in the same household. As Arab culture is built around the extended family structure, it is no surprise that considerations
of family structure and loyalty play a substantial role in Arab Americans’ and Muslims’ decision-making, including pursuing and completing college education.

The success or the failure of the individual affects the family as a whole. In the Arabic American culture, traditions of extended family values are reinforced by a unit cherished as the foundation of the society regardless of religion or nationality. Within Arab American families, religion is often a basis for maintaining identity and provides a common base for its followers. The family values in the Arab culture are strong and one is obligated to help one’s family and community; one cannot just turn one’s back on family and relatives. According to the Islamic teachings, supporting one’s family is better than supporting fighters for the sake of God and liberating slaves. This is because home is the place where beliefs and morals are built. Therefore, supporting the family is the best “investment” a person can ever think of. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said, “The most rewarded expenditure is what a man spends to support his family” (Al – Bukhari).

As a result, family unity is valued over and above any commitment, friendship, or work relationships; and in return, families offer security and emotional and financial support (Nydell, 2006). Additionally, Arab American and Muslim immigrants have a balance between individual achievement, needs, and personal desires, which often play a secondary role to that of family, especially social order, respect of tradition, and politeness, whereas for many people growing up in White American society, individualism is a highly cherished, valued way of life (Marr, 1978). Arabs share several cultural values with Asian American minorities such as emphasis on education, filial
piety, family relationship, responsibilities, modesty, high respect for the elderly, and group orientation (Min, 1995).

The involvement of parents and their level of education and financial status affect the students’ college process and choice (De le Rosa, 2006). According to the U.S. Education Department report (Chen, 2005), students whose parents did not go to college and were not educated past high school perform worse in the college classrooms and take fewer mathematics, science, and humanities courses than peers whose parents have some postsecondary education. Maintaining family relationships and support has been identified among the most significant aspects of transition that facilitates minority student adjustment to college and, ultimately, decisions regarding college attainment. In fact, family shapes students’ personal, cultural, and community values that affect students’ perceptions and navigation of the university environment, integration within the university, and sense of purpose toward their education (Gloria et al., 2005).

Parents’ education has been noted as one of the best predictors of students’ educational achievements (Hodgkinson, 1993; Koretz, 2008). In addition, parents’ education has shown direct influence on the type of institution students attend, irrespective of high academic achievement and ability (Karen, 2002). Parents’ level of income, education, and work status are key factors that help design children’s educational opportunities and development. In Mari Luna De La Rosa’s research titled “Is Opportunity Knocking?” (2006), results indicate that students whose parents have less education would also be less likely to involve their parents with financial aid information, suggesting that the students may take on this task on their own (De la Rosa 2006). Rowan-Kenyon’s (2007) study shows that students with lower socioeconomic status are
less likely than their higher socioeconomic status peers to gain access to college at any
time. Moreover, high school graduates who delay college enrollment have lower
socioeconomic status, lower parental involvement, less academic preparation, lower
expectations, and less high school support services for enrollment than do students who
enroll in college immediately after graduating from high school.

Parents’ educational, cultural, and financial background, along with the school the
student attends, affect how well the financial information relevant to college enrollment
is understood by parents and students. In their study, Rowan and Kenyon (2007) found
that the absence of parental involvement in college preparation goes back to the lack of
knowledge and information. The structure of Arab American and Muslim families is
more likely to provide that sort of involvement for their children; furthermore, they place
a greater value on high achievement and academic success. Their families are generally
financially and socially stable and consist of married couples. This is because religious
law carefully regulates divorce.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) shed light on the importance of
taking care of the children and said, “One who is tried with bringing up girls right from
their childhood and treats them well till their maturity will find that they will become his
shield from the Hell Fire” (Al-Nawawi, 1983, # 268). As a result, Arab American and
Muslim children are more likely to live with both parents than American children are. In
addition, the family may play a huge role in their children’s decisions, including choosing
and completing the college degree. These sociocultural ethics and religious values for
both Arab American Christians and Muslims emphasize traditional family structures and
gender roles, creating parental involvement opportunities in college preparation (El-
Badry, 1994; Bilge & Aswad, 1996). Furthermore, in terms of belief, “Muslim and Christian Arabs hold similar attitudes on female achievement, indicating that cultural schema are more broadly cultural than specifically religious or, put differently, that Arab cultural values both reflect and subsume religious ones” (Read & Oselin, 2008, p. 310).

**School Academics and Preparation**

Adelman (2005) considers two predictors for college enrollment, stating that the pursuit of qualifying curriculum and academic achievement and knowledge about the college process will predict postsecondary enrollment. Furthermore, the school guidance counselors play a critical role in preparing students for the enrollment process, the application, finding scholarships, applying for financial aid, and college selection (Gloria et al., 2005; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Counselors are often considered as the source of information about college through the application process. Many students have a reason to be wary because of lack of individual attention from their school counselors. The high staffing ratios of counselors leads to the lack of personal relationships with students, making them lose a significant positive impact about their education choices on the postsecondary decision. If students do not actively seek out the advice of a counselor, chances are they will meet their counselor only once each year to plan their schedule for the following year. At times, underrepresented minority students have received better aid packages at private schools because private schools need students more than state schools do. McDonough and Calderone’s (2006) results of interviewing 63 high school counselors shows that the “private schools as a group were more proactive than public schools, and college counselors were more knowledgeable and aware of the issues of financial aid and college information” (p. 1710).
Students must make plans to become academically qualified and ready by fulfilling the state and school’s graduation requirements, which takes four years to complete. In general, the curriculum includes four courses of English, three courses of math, three courses of science, three courses of social studies, four courses of physical education and health, one course of visual art, two courses of world language, one course of career education and four courses of additional electives. After all of these necessities are satisfied, the student can earn a high school diploma. Besides that, to become qualified for enrollment at a college, students need to take appropriate standardized tests.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2010 reported that public school enrollment rose 25% during 1985-2010 (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). As a result, the percentage of students attending private schools fell from 12.4% in 1985 to 10.8% in 2010. The center reported that the number of bachelor’s degrees awarded to females increased to 34%, while those awarded to males increased to 32%. Furthermore, in 2008-2009, females earned 57% of all bachelor’s degrees. The number of White students increased 26%, compared to the larger increase of 53% for Black students and 85% for Hispanic students for the same year, 2008-2009. Therefore, the demand for a college education will increase and minority students will tend to enroll in less selective colleges or universities than their academic credentials would predict (Bowen, 2009).

**Arab American and Muslim Students and Stereotyping**

**Stereotyping of Arab Americans and Muslims**

The stereotyping of Arab Americans and Muslims is aimed at their identity in general, men and women alike, in order to disrupt it and to contaminate its original sources. No doubt, many points of this stereotyping targeted Muslim females in
particular, with the aim of opposing their traditional dress of virtue by which they have been known throughout history. Since the significant presence of Islam started in the last quarter of the twentieth century, Islam is poorly understood in the United States, and Muslims have been subjected to unfair stereotyping (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Mead et al., 2001; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). The people of Middle Eastern origin or descent dramatically faced an increase in hate crimes against them (Panagopoulos, 2006; U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). A movie producer explained that the image of Arabs is a ready-made stereotype just waiting to be tapped (Shaheen, 2003). The media misrepresentation of Arabs, the American war in the Middle East, and the September 11, 2001, event all fuel racism towards Arab Americans (Cainkar, 2002; Perry, 2003; Suleiman, 1999; Wingfield, 2006).

Michael Savage’s syndicated radio program, which gained notoriety for offending immigrants and minorities, is a vicious critic of Arabs and Muslims. He called the Muslim holy book, the Quran, a “book of hate” and stated, “Arabs aren’t really human and most Americans would just like to drop a nuclear bomb on them—any of them” (ADC, 2008 p. 90). In a similar hate statement he said, “I think [Muslims] need to be forcibly converted to Christianity . . . . It’s the only thing that can probably turn them into human beings” (ADC, 2008 p. 91). Similarly, Neil Boortz, in his radio show, has been a consistent and merciless condemner of Islam and Muslims, denying any distinctions between extremists and mainstream Muslims. He says, “Islam is a deadly virus. It is perfectly safe to say all terrorists are Muslims. All of them. If it was not for the religion of Islam, this world would be a much, much, much more peaceful place today” (ADC 2008 p. 91).
American Muslim women, because of their head covers, were hardest hit by these hate critics and hate crimes. Cainkar (2004) pointed out that post September 11, media stereotypes, hate crimes, and government surveillance all placed Arab American families in precarious situations. Some Arab American and Muslim people have avoided going out in public, especially females, and have even stopped allowing their children to ride their bikes in the street or go to a park because of threats of violence against Arabs. They adopted certain strategies to adapt to their new environment, such as being vigilant and more observant of their surroundings, walking in groups, restricting their freedom of movement and modifying travel patterns (Livengood, 2004). Following the September 11 attacks, some parents refused the risk of sending their children to their schools for several days; other parents asked their daughters to take off their headscarf to avoid any harassments or crimes against them, and some Islamic schools shut their doors for a few days.

Children used to return home from their schools with serious tales of racial remarks and harassment made by their peers and sometimes by their teachers or administrators. The school climate became unbearable for Arab American and Muslim students because of the vituperation of the unprintable epithets that were used against them. Jandali (2012) stated that Muslim students were described as terrorist, son of Bin Ladin, towelhead, camel jockey, etc. Various incidents of harassment and bullying were reported to authorities and school administrators, but the outcome was limited. Even when one of the female students defended her rights, the teacher responded, “Her people had caused a lot of problems in the world, and she should understand if people were frustrated with her” (Jandali, 2012 para. 5). Similarly, school teachers’ and
administrators’ misconceptions at times made intervention and prevention more challenging. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2011), a Muslim student in fourth grade from Delaware was the subject of ridicule by her teacher for wearing her hijab (headscarf). Furthermore, the Department in 2011 reported another incident when Somali students from Minnesota endured uneven discipline by their school personnel, while being buffeted by harassment from their classmates from the majority population.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) in the past few years has documented complaints reported to their offices. In 2002, they received 1,516 complaints; in 2007, they received 2,652; and in 2008, they received 2,728 complaints about people subjected to incidents of bias-motivated harassment and violence, including several murders. This number of incidents represents a 3% increase in reported cases from 2007 and an 11% increase over cases reported in 2006, which were 2,467 reported cases. CAIR reported that for the fifth year in a row, this figure marks the maximum number of Muslim civil rights complaints reported to them. CAIR’s (2008) report states that because of perceived religion and ethnicity, the daily experiences of Muslim individuals in schools, workplaces, public areas, and airports have often included incidents in which they were singled out, denied religious accommodation and discriminated against.

Thousands of Arabs, Muslims, Sikhs, and individuals of other ethnic groups who appeared to be of Middle Eastern descent were mistakenly identified as Arab; for example, Hispanics and South Asians were targeted and became the victims of racial and religious profiling, discrimination, harassment, and verbal and physical assault (Maria, 2004; Peek, 2003; Zogby, 2001). Furthermore, despite the support and reassurance of
the administration of several colleges and universities that the campuses would be safe, several undergraduate students noted that they were ready to drop out of school for the semester because of harassment or assaults. They froze all their activities and felt that as Arabs or Muslims, they were not allowed to say what they felt because they would be thought of as unpatriotic (Peek, 2003).

Arab Americans are one of the most misunderstood ethnic groups in the United States. (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Ayish, 2003; Bradford, 2009; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Shaheen, 2003), and the marginalization of and discrimination against Muslims were increased after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack. Despite their growth in size and importance, to many Americans, Arabs and Muslims remain unknown and a mystery; they have not met Arabs nor been exposed to objective reading about them; they are ignorant of the real truth of Arabs and their culture.

Hitlan, Carillo, Zarate, and Aikman (2007) in their research investigated the effects of the September 11 attacks on prejudice-related measures towards Arab immigrants and Mexican immigrants. The participants were about 420 undergraduate students from the University of Texas. The results of the study show that Arab immigrants were viewed as a greater threat to the prevailing culture within the United States. They perceived Arabs to be threats with more negative effect on the American symbolic way of life, beliefs, attitudes, local culture, and norms, in addition to being personal threats to individuals. These threats include perceived cultural or symbolic threat, intergroup anxiety, and stereotyping. The study concluded that the prejudice expressed toward Arab immigrants was significantly higher by about two times than toward Mexican immigrants.
There are important common components among individuals that are highly prejudiced toward Arabs. They have had limited interaction with Arabs, have low education, and are more likely to believe in authoritarianism, racial prejudice, social dominance orientation, conservative ideology orientation, and religious fundamentalism (Echebarria-Echabe & Fernandez-Guede, 2006, 2007; Johnson, 1992; Oswald, 2005). Similar to that, Haddad (1991) clarified this negative behavior, concluding that the most common explanation for the negative stereotypes Americans hold about Arabs is that they have not read about or have read inaccurate and false reports about Arabs. Therefore, the stereotypes are mainly the result of this ignorance.

Furthermore, because alleged threats endorse negative stereotypes of Arab Americans regardless of the perceived level of security, in our society Arab Americans are stereotypically associated with terrorists and support for terrorism (Huddy, Feldman & Weber, 2007). Some members of our society are even instigating a deceptive campaign to make Arabs and Muslims the threat of the world. On June 3, 1992, Fouad Ajami, a Johns Hopkins University Professor, condemned Arab nationalism as “the most deadly ideology in the world.” At the same function, Dr. Henry Kissinger, former Harvard professor, U.S. Secretary of State, and White House National Security Adviser, stated flatly that “you can't really believe anything an Arab says” (Finkelstein, 1992, p. 1). The consequence of these statements is that the concepts, beliefs, ideas, and the groups and peoples associated with these terms are viewed as a threat to American society and government.

Often Americans use the terms "Arab American" and "Muslim" interchangeably, and yet studies have indicated that 75% of Arab Americans are Christian (Sprangins,
York (2009) states that when it comes to Muslims and Arabs, it seems that there is a special kind of ignorance amongst White Americans. They do not know the difference between Muslims and Arabs, and they think Muslims and good people are mutually exclusive. They do not realize that most Muslims are not Arabs. They think “Middle Eastern” is a race, except that on the census they assume that all Arabs are Muslims. During John McCain’s town hall meeting on Oct 10, 2008, a White woman objected to Obama by saying, “But he’s . . . he’s an Arab!” It was apparent to many people that what she really meant to object to was his religion, but she got confused and cried “Arab.” McCain’s response was, “No, he’s not, ma’am; he’s a decent family man.” McCain was aware that the woman meant to say “Muslim,” but chose to defend Obama not just by saying “No, ma’am he’s not,” but also added, “he’s a decent family man,” as if being an “Arab” disqualifies a man from being a decent family man.

**Stereotyping in Textbooks**

Negative stereotype content is widely considered to cause and perpetuate prejudice (Park & Judd, 2005). Investigating 42 high schools’ various social sciences and world history textbooks shows that stereotypes are present there and framing youth attitudes towards Arabs and Muslims. The information presented in the textbooks was often found to be defective and negative, its depictions of Arabs and Muslims lack warmth and competence. The literature usually presents Arabs and Muslims as prone to violence, mistreating and oppressing their women, being backward, religiously fanatic, deceptive, dirty, lazy, and anti-American. Most often, the books ignore the great achievements of Muslims and Arabs and openly denigrate their accomplishments as
insignificant (Perry, 1975; William, 1975). In 1977, Suleiman conducted a survey on high school textbooks in six states, including New York, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, and California; he indicated that Arabs and Islam were discussed only occasionally. Since then there has been some progress toward improvement, but it has been minimal.

American literature is racially biased against Arabs and Muslims. While discussing the stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims in American Literature, Said (1977), Terry (1983), and Christison (1987) noted that in general Muslims and Arabs are presented in negative terms in American writing. American biased literature includes terms such as terrorist, extremist, militant, radical and fundamentalist (Sheikh, Price, & Oshagan, 1995). This image is fostered by sources including the press, nonfiction, books, films, and novels. This is common and includes novels of adventure, romance, mystery, crime, and espionage. Therefore, there is a considerable foundation to believe that many Americans have been influenced by these negative stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims.

**Media Stereotyping**

The national political context since 9/11 and the war in Iraq have brought Islam into the media forefront. These circumstances have sparked the attention and renewed interest in Islam and Muslims. Visiting any chain bookstore, a person would notice the large amount of books on Islam and Islamic terrorism. Because this attention has been largely negative, Arabs and Muslims across the United States are gradually more fearful of discrimination and violence against them. Media played a major role in spreading hatred against Muslims and the misinterpretation of their religion. Ali and Baghri (2009) pointed out that, “While Islam was misunderstood prior to 9/11, the media coverage of
the tragedies focused on the extreme differences between Muslims and Western traditions and religious beliefs” (p. 49).

In his book, *The TV Arab* (1984), Shaheen concluded that the media perpetuates four basic stereotypes of Arab and Muslim men: that they are (a) fabulously wealthy, (b) barbaric and uncultured, (c) obsessed with White slavery, and (d) revel in acts of terrorism. Shaheen in his detailed study documented pervasive negative imagery of Arabs by all American television networks and by practically all leading newscasters and personalities. He examined more than 100 popular television programs, totaling nearly 200 episodes, and interviewed numerous television executives, producers, and writers. Shaheen (2001) concludes that American television, including popular entertainment, comedy, drama, documentaries, news, sports, religious programs, advertisements, and even children's broadcasting across the board has at one time or another presented distorted and demeaning images of Arabs. In fact, he argues that the entertainment industry's vilifying of Arabs and Muslims helped prepare the American public, as well as our fighting men and women, to go to war in the Middle East. As a result, many Arab American children are not only aware of racism but also experience it both in and outside of school. Therefore, the Arab American and Muslim community has its own social and cultural system that must be understood on its own terms and not in terms of other cultural models.

The media rely on news frames that simplify and prioritize news to fit existing societal concepts, values, and knowledge. These frames convey dominant meanings and are based on the prevailing societal narratives. Despite the journalistic principle of objectivity, the media play a major role in providing information about Arab and Muslim
community at home and internationally. Usually, they reflect the government’s foreign policy in the reporting of the news and coverage of events. Shaheen (2003), discussing the role of the government in the media, mentioned that “the fact is, the government has a history of playing a role in what movies do and don’t get made” (p. 190).

Tom Koch, a journalist and author of books on journalism, said, "For twenty years content analysis studies have shown that between 70% and 90% of our content is at heart the voice of officials and their experts, translated by reporters into supposedly ‘objective’ news. People don’t trust us anymore . . . because the way we quote and attribute and build factoids as if they were truth is a lie. And folks are catching on” (Koch, cited by Harwood, 1994, para. 11). Saeed (2002) pointed out that Muslims in the United States are denied the right to represent themselves in the media, which is rooted in the “Manichean metaphysics of American journalism that divides the world into two absolute categories of good and evil, rejecting any possibility to change . . . insisting on the exclusion of those considered evil from the public discourse” (p. 43).

Jack Shaheen in his documentary Reel Bad Arabs (2006) pointed out that politics and Hollywood’s images are linked. They reinforce one another; policy enforces mythical images, and mythical images help enforce policy. Furthermore, Shaheen quoted Jack Valenti, former president of the Motion Picture Association of America: “Washington and Hollywood spring from the same DNA.” Many Hollywood movies have been designed to elicit racist attitudes in the public mind against Arab Americans and Muslims. One of the most racist movies is Rules of Engagement (2000), written by Department of the Navy Secretary James Webb. The Kingdom (2003) was one of the same types and a continuation of the stereotyping of Arab Americans and Muslims. In
addition, the Hollywood film industry injected a horrific sense of Arabs in movies that has nothing to do with the Middle East such as Back to the Future (1985) and Gladiator (2000). The message of these movies is that Arabs should not be trusted.

This industry has consistently ignored and avoided representing the humanity aspect of Arabs and Muslims responsibly. Media depictions, misinformation, and stereotypes of this kind are not only demeaning to the Arab American and Muslim community; they are dangerous. The portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in mainstream media present them in negative images as terrorists and fanatics, which has created stereotypes of them. Because of this stereotyping, Arab Americans and Muslims in the United States experience discrimination in myriad forms: harassment and attacks from strangers on the street. Moreover, Islamic institutions and centers across the country frequently report vandalism. In the months following September 11, 2001, discrimination against Arab Americans increased remarkably (Livengood & Stodolska, 2004; Peek, 2003; Perry, 2003; Wingfield, 2006).

In Military Presences and Absences, Saliba (1994) points out that the Arab woman, particularly, is “absent” in the U.S. media. She is either literally missing from the media or she is “present but only in order to serve as a subordinate to the Western subject of the scene” (p. 126). As indicated by Shaheen (2001), the U.S. Department of Defense, as well as the Army, the Marines, the Navy, and the National Guard have provided technical assistance to Hollywood producers to ensure that films like True Lies (1994), Executive Decision (1996), Freedom Strike (1998), and Rules of Engagement (2000) accurately portray U.S. armed forces mowing down Arabs. The FBI aided producers of The Siege (1998), a movie showing Americans of Arab heritage and Muslim Arabs
attacking Manhattan. The more serious baddies appear in bad films such as *Black Sunday*, *Death Before Dishonor*, and *The Delta Force*, in which Arab terrorists swarm (and are squashed) like insects, bringing to mind treatment of the Japanese in World War II films.

The Defense Department, Shaheen (2008) says, has assisted in the making of some particularly insulting anti-Arab fare, such as *Iron Eagle*, *Navy Seals*, and the most inflammatory work, *Rules of Engagement*, released in 2000, in which armed women and children lay siege to the U.S. embassy in Yemen, based on the story of the former Navy secretary and junior senator from Virginia, Jim Webb. To get a laugh from a television talk show audience, Merv Griffin once brazenly equated Arabs with animals: "If you lie down with Arabs, [you] get up with fleas.” Once, referring to traditional Arab dress and fashion, Jewish television comedian Joan Rivers laughingly told her viewers, "I can never tell if it's the wife or the husband because they're all in bed sheets.” Even programming aimed at children has not been free of demeaning portrayals of Arabs. Among the popular animated cartoon characters that have fomented derogatory or hateful images of Arabs are *Bugs Bunny*, *Yosemite Sam*, *Goofy*, *Woody Woodpecker*, *Popeye*, *Scooby-Doo*, *Heckle and Jeckle*, *Porky Pig*, *Plastic Man*, *Richy Rich*, *Pinky and the Brain*, and *Duck Tales* (Shaheen, 2009).

Shaheen (2008) discussed a new phase of Hollywood's falsification of Arab Americans and Muslims living among us. Before 9/11, at any rate, as far as Hollywood was concerned, they were invisible. Now, however, they are portrayed in the media and TV programs as members of sleeper cells, waiting to receive a call to become active terrorists. Since 9/11, he found that more and more prime time TV dramas include the
theme of out-of-control Arab and Muslim terrorists. Shaheen argues that American films
and TV dramas shot since the September 11 attacks have reinforced screen images of
Arabs and Muslims as extremists, fanatics, and villains and have become more vindictive
and damaging, instilling harmful stereotyping and negative portrayals of Arabs and other
peoples from the Middle East. In conclusion, after many years of television viewing and
750 emotionally disturbing movies, Shaheen (1984, 2001) holds the belief that after years
of being represented as "belly dancers, bombers, and billionaires," it is time for Arabs to
be given a fair representation on the screen. Arabs, Arab Americans, and Muslims desire
from the media simply to be seen in an objective light, no better and no worse than
anyone else. He concluded, “Why can't Arabs and Arab Americans be seen as politicians,
doctors, scientists, writers, and teachers?”

**Stereotyping on Campuses**

In their study of the university environment, Crosby, Bromley, and Saxe (1980)
have found that African American students reported racial tension, perceived hostility,
and felt marginalized on campus. They concluded that data suggest that anti-Black
sentiments are much more prevalent among White Americans than the data lead one to
expect and the prejudiced attitudes result in discriminatory behavior. In addition, they
pointed out that racism may be observed at two levels: discriminatory behavior or
prejudiced attitudes. Furthermore, stereotyping, which involves the presumption of
certain attributes in an individual solely on racial basis, is one form of prejudice. Studies
of American Indian university students similarly have found that they experienced the
university environment as racist, oppressive, and indifferent (Benjamin, Chambers, &
Long before 9/11, Muslim students were suffering from stereotyping, but their situation after that date has become significantly worse. After 9/11, Arab and Muslim students were singled out for harassment and physical assault, even stripping of the *hijab* (the headscarf) from females wearing it (Naber, 2008). The serious misconception in the campus community of Arab American and Muslim females who practice veiling, or wearing the *hijab* (scarf), is largely misunderstood and often perceived as a symbol of women's inferiority to men (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Jandali (2012) reported that Muslim students were given many labels on campus including terrorist, towel-head, rag-head, jihad girl, etc.

Similar to Arab American and Muslim student experiences on university campuses, Latino college students have also encountered challenges because of their ethnicity. They reported discrimination, felt unwelcomed, marginalized, faced direct insults or threats, and were subjected to low educational expectations, which lend a sense of normlessness and academic deterioration (Gloria & Ho, 2003; Gloria et al., 2005; Castellanos et al., 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Many Muslim and Arab students avoid reporting harassment and bullying cases out of fear of making the situation worse. In one of the recent studies conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (2012), the data illustrate the conditions apparent for underrepresented groups on campuses. Furthermore, the research indicates that many campuses are unaware of the magnitude of the problems faced by racial/ethnic groups in environments where they are underrepresented. Nationally, many incidents of stereotyping or harassment go unreported. Only about 13% of all students report racial incidents to a campus authority.
The Invisible Community

The contributions of Muslims and Arabs to the world civilization were ignored by most of the American scholars and absent from their writing. A distinguished American history professor, Leuchtenburg (1977), after reviewing American history books, concluded that from the perspective of the American historian, it is striking to note that the relationship between Arab and American cultures is that to Americans the Arabs are people who have lived outside of history. Furthermore, he added that a person might read the history of America until the most recent time and develop the impression that either the Arabs have had no history or that it was only of the most inconsequential sort. Similar to that, after two decades Suleiman (1999a) argued that, following the second wave of Arab immigration post-World War II, there was a palpable American tendency to ignore the Arab American ethnicity of positive role models. Instead, they popularized the Arabic or Islamic origin or affiliation of anyone accused of a terrorist act—even before they know whether the perpetrator is or is not Arab or Muslim.

Suleiman (1999b) describes Arab Americans as invisible in the eyes of many Americans. The long list of famous Arab Americans includes White House Press Corp’s Helen Thomas; former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, Consumer Advocate Ralph Nader; Actors Danny Thomas, Marlo Thomas, and Jamie Farr; musicians Frank Zappa and Paul Anka; broadcaster Casey Kasem; and the list is long. Despite the economic and educational contributions of Arab Americans, they tend to lack recognition (Nydell, 2006; Samhan, 2001). Arab Americans and Muslims play a productive and increasingly public role in American society. They work in a wide variety of occupations and come with various professional backgrounds. Certainly, it is one of
the most highly educated ethnic communities in the country, with nearly 62% having a college degree (Ahmed, 2004).

Thousands of Muslims have served in the United States military since the First World War. According to Kozaryn (2002), ten years ago, an estimated 15,000 Muslims were serving in the U.S. military. As listing one’s religious preference is voluntary, military personnel do not have to disclose their religions, and so it is unclear how many Muslims are currently on active duty in the U.S. armed forces. More than 3,500 Muslims have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, according to official figures; and as of 2006, some 212 Muslim-American soldiers had been awarded Combat Action Ribbons for their service (Elliott, 2009).

Arab American and Muslim efforts, sacrifices, and risking their lives to save those in danger is unfortunately overlooked and receives little attention from the mainstream press. They have been doubly impacted by the 9/11 attacks. In addition to the pain and loss that all Americans experienced, they have also been seriously investigated, even hostilely, on the basis of their ethnicity and faith. The media usually announces the affiliation of the Arab of Muslim origin to terrorist acts without investigating the background of the individual. The media ignores the background and the positive role of Arab Americans such as Michael DeBakey and Ralph Nader. Arab Americans have served in the cabinets and other high offices of Republican and Democratic administrations, including former White House Chief of Staff John H. Sununu, Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala, and most recently, Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham and Office of Management and Budget director Mitchell Daniels.
Despite their major success, Arab Americans are still struggling to be recognized in the census as an ethnic group or to be accepted in American society.

Although many Arab Americans have achieved a high level of their profession, the media highlights the negatives about them. Arab Americans remain the only ethnic group criticized, and their image is disparaged in the media (Shaheen, 2001, Naber, 2000). Shaheen stated, “The culture for which Hollywood has shown its greatest contempt has been the Arabs” (2001, p. 1).

Arabs are the primary target of these stereotypes but have been largely silent because they were not alert to the implications of such portrayal, although there have been well-established links between the way Arabs are projected in Hollywood films and how they are perceived by the community. They were treated prejudicially in some exceptional situations by authorities in the United States, and after 9/11 these prejudices materialized in numerous incidents. Arabs who were being viewed as an enemy culture, especially after 9/11, found it both unacceptable and inexcusable to allow Hollywood to continue its campaign. As Congressman Paul Findley (2002) succinctly put it, they can afford to be “silent no more.”

Arabs are frequently targeted for negative stereotypes and discrimination (Shaheen, 2001; Naber, 2000), and their image remain negative throughout society. Furthermore, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination against Arabs, which predicts discriminatory acts against them, is not a new phenomenon (Johnson, 1992; Oswald, 2005). Americans hold several negative stereotypes about Arab individuals, which may feed into feelings of prejudice. In 1992, in his study of 418 participants about anti-Arabs prejudice in Indiana, Johnson found that Americans believed that Arabs are
untrustworthy, uncivilized, radical Muslims, and either terrorists or supporters of terrorism. The consequences of stereotyping are giving the government a free hand in establishing regulations and policies that are discriminatory and infringe on civil liberties (Haddad, 2002; Zogby, 1998). Historically, other ethnic groups have experienced the same treatment, such as Native Americans, African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics (Hajjar, 2001; Moradi & Hasan, 2004). African American experiences with discrimination seem to be declining somewhat. Ogbuagu (2013) posited that the post-September 11 conditions of Arabs and Muslims may change and soon they may become mainstreamed. “It may not be long before another set of ‘New Blacks’ are identified and constructed . . . to provide much needed relief from the negative attention that, current scapegoats, Arabs and Muslims and others within our society currently face” (p. 478).

Islamophobia

Discrimination has been aggravated because of growing hostility towards Islam in the West, sometimes called Islamophobia (Haddad 2002). Islamophobia is defined as the unfounded fear or anxiety and hostility against Islam (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2002; Hafez, 2002, p. 212). Smith (2010) described Islamophobia as a misguided emotion that many Americans have about Muslims. Such fear and hostility lead to discrimination against Muslims, such as stereotyping among a host of other consequences (Crosby, 1980, 2008; Haddad, 2002; Smith, 2010). In a study conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2004), the study found that a plurality of Americans, 46%, believe that Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence among its believers. In a similar study about Islamophobia, Gallup in 2011 collected information detailing public opinion about various aspects of respect, treatment, and tolerance relative
to Muslims. The poll shows that 52% of Americans say that the West does not respect
Muslim societies. In addition, the study concluded that the lower the level of education of
the individual, the more prejudice he or she will have toward Muslims. The American
perception of Muslims is characterized by a lack of understanding and fear because the
Arab American and Muslim community have their own dynamic that must be understood
on its own terms, and not in terms of other cultural models.

Investigating the situation of Muslims and Arabs, the United Nations Commission
on Human Rights (UNCHR) 2003 reported that, there is cause for concern about respect
for human rights in the United States; and without question, the repercussions of the
attacks of September 11 were most deeply and widely felt by Arab American and
Muslims. Systematic violence against persons and property, arguments, physical
aggression, and discrimination in employment were common activities against the Arab
community. Both Muslim and Christian Arab-Americans are still wary of such acts.
Furthermore, the overall role played by the media is a negative one. The report mentioned
that these ideas have been reinforced in major news media, including the CBS interview
with Bob Simon that was broadcast during the 60 minutes program when Reverend Jerry
Falwell, the leader of the Southern Baptist Convention, described the Prophet
Muhammad as a “terrorist.” Meanwhile Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian
Broadcasting Network (CBN), is said to have called him a “killer” and “brigand,” while
claiming that the Quran preaches violence. In addition, the report was concerned about
the consequences of these activities, like the adoption and implementation of special
discriminatory legislation, open and public expressions of hatred, rejection and ostracism;
stereotyping and demonization of the other; a hostile interpretation of diversity, especially religious, cultural and ethnic diversity.

Arabs and Muslims are usually negatively viewed and stereotyped in the media. They constantly fear that they will become the target of official sanctions and public attacks in times of incidents of domestic terrorism (Haddad, 1991). Following Oklahoma City bombing, the Arab and Muslim community were the target of all negative and hostile reactions. Our society jumped to conclusions immediately, blaming the Arab American and Muslim community before establishing who was responsible for that despicable crime. In three days, the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) reported 222 acts of harassment and violence against Arabs and Muslims. In addition, seven mosques were vandalized or burned. The media talk shows were engaged in irresponsible hate speeches directed against Arabs and Muslims, adding fuel to the fire without any basic investigation. Self-appointed experts on terrorism hastily identified the attack as consistent with Mid-East terror tactics. The worst of all these acts was connecting the crime to Oklahoma City Arab and Muslim community residents because they have three mosques (ADC, 1991). Despite all this, local police authorities at times refused to call (or refrained from calling) such activity “hate crimes,” and occasionally even used the incident to investigate the victims themselves (ADC, 1995).

Dr. Hitti, about 60 years ago, in his book *Islam and the West* discussed this phenomenon of stereotyping. He argues that in the medieval European literature, Muhammad is generally portrayed as an imposter, a false prophet, the Quran as a fabrication and Islam as an immoral way of life. He emphasized that Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and other less highly developed religions were never subjected to such a
barrage of abuse and condemnation as Mohammedanism was. They posed no threat to the
Medieval West and offered no competition. It was, therefore, primarily fearful hostility
and prejudice which colored the Western view of Islam and conditioned its attitude.
Islamic beliefs were enemy beliefs and, as such, suspect if not false (p. 49). Decades
later, while examining the conditions of Muslims in its report in September 2010,
Amnesty International U.S.A. (AIUSA) raised deep concerns about the growing number
of crimes committed against people of the Muslim faith and other anti-Muslim sentiment
and activities in the United States. The report added that these crimes, together with
activities such as the proposed "International Burn a Qur’an Day" sponsored by a Florida
church and protests against mosques in other cities, foster a climate of fear,
discrimination, perceived external threat and persecution against Muslims. They have no
place in a society that values freedom, justice, and equality.

Community under Active Surveillance

Arab Americans and Muslims are a minority group, mostly comprised of
immigrants, African-Americans, converts, and the children of immigrants that have
dreamed of a climate of religious tolerance and civil rights in America. Unfortunately,
Arabs and Muslims often complain about being placed under surveillance or investigated
by American government officials. Recently, the release of details by the Intelwire News
service on December 4, 2010, about the Nixon era’s systematic racial profiling targeting
Arabs anywhere in the world confirms that complaint. The “Operation Boulder”
established by the Nixon Administration in 1972 ordered the government to investigate,
place under surveillance, and strictly enforces laws against Arabs and Arab Americans.
As a result, Arab American and Muslim individuals and organizations were placed under
surveillance and were harassed and intimidated. One part of this operation was the gathering of political information about Arab Americans and their organizations.

The intimidation, harassment, and violence directed at Arabs and Muslims were carried out openly, or in secret, by individuals, groups, or governmental agencies, such as the State Department, the Internal Revenue Service, and the Transportation Department, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) (Bassiouni, 1974; Hagopian, 1975-1976). Most Arab Americans perceived these activities as ways to ensure that they are politically voiceless in the United States. As Cainkar (2002) pointed out, in the view of Arab Americans and their children, for the past four decades they have not been accorded the freedom of speech rights on the same scale as others as defined by the constitution.

The policies and initiatives of the U. S. government after the September 11 attacks have had a profoundly negative impact on Arabs and Muslims in the United States because most of these policies have targeted members of these communities indiscriminately. In addition to the Patriot Act, of the roughly 20 policies and initiatives, largely the creations of the executive branch implemented in the first twelve months after 9/11, 15 explicitly targeted Arabs and Muslims (Cainkar, 2004). The USA Patriot Act passed after the 9/11 considered as a source of growing anger among Muslims because although the Act applies to all citizens, it was written with Muslims in mind. The USA-Patriot Act led to mass arrests and detentions of innocent Arab Americans. The remnants of these undertakings are still present today. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2007) in their preliminary report of racial focal groups for the 2010 U.S. Census, the report pointed
out that since September 11, 2001, many Arab Americans have felt that they are not treated like other Americans. Because of these feelings, many Arab Americans were skeptical about how the census would be used and were, therefore, hesitant to participate. The impact of the Patriot Act on the Arab American and Muslim community was reducing legal limits on wiretaps imposed by investigator activities and granting sweeping powers to law enforcement and international intelligence agencies to raid the homes, offices, organizations, and mosques suspected of engaging in terrorist-related activity (Abdo, 2005; Ahmed, 2004; Cainkar, 2004). In 2006, the USA Patriot Act received a four-year extension and again in May of 2011.

Anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments continued throughout the years until recent days. The Associated Press correspondents Goldman and Apuzzo’s (August, 2011) investigation revealed a vast New York Police Department (NYPD) “Demographics Unit” intelligence collecting effort targeting the New York City, New Jersey, and neighboring states’ Arab American and Muslim minority with no apparent reason other than their faith since 2006. The Demographics Unit is at the heart of the NYPD extensive spying program, built with help from the CIA to monitor Muslims at the places where they eat, shop, work, and worship (NYPD: Muslim, 2012). The administration in Washington, when asked about the NYPD activities that put American Muslim neighborhoods under surveillance, answered that the White House has no control over how the NYPD spends millions of dollars in grants to pay for their programs (Sullivan, 2012).

Furthermore, the investigation found that the NYPD was following useless, totally racist and animosity-based claims. The NYPD has been spying on persons of the Islamic
faith in 250 mosques, 12 Islamic Schools, and hundreds of Muslim organizations, including 31 Muslim Student Associations and numerous individuals, including students on all levels of their lives in New York and neighboring states (Goldman & Apuzzo, 2011; The Columbia Daily Tribune, 2011). The stereotyping drove the NYPD to spy on Muslim college students on college campuses throughout major academic institutions. This practice moved beyond the borders of the state of New York to follow them in other states. Furthermore, officers from the Cyber Intelligence Unit had the “daily routine” of monitoring the websites, blogs, and forums of Muslim student groups since 2006 (Al Bker & Taylor, February 2012).

The NYPD was spying on Muslim American students and monitoring them because of their religious background within the tri-state area. The Arab American and Muslim students became deeply offended at the notion that they would be tracked by NYPD, which is out of its jurisdiction, simply based on their religion (Goldman & Apuzzo, 2011). All the NYPD extensive monitoring and information gathering complicates the trust in the fairness and equality of our civil rights and our legal system. The higher education students are more skeptical and cynical; it seems that the Constitution is saying that freedom of speech and freedom of religion is not for all. Moreover, most recently are the astonishing changes allowing the little-known National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) to examine the government files of U.S. citizens for possible criminal behavior, even if there is no reason to suspect them. Furthermore, due process and equal protection rights have been suspended under the guise of national security, allowing databases of U.S. civilian information to be shared with other U.S. agencies and with foreign governments for their own analysis; this is another act against
the freedom of American citizens, not only Arab Americans and Muslims (Ahmed, 2004; Angwin, December 12).

In violation of the civil rights of Arab American and Muslim students and citizens of the tri-state area, the NYPD monitoring did not stop on the borders of the local universities. The NYPD was looking more and more like a domestic CIA. The AP correspondent Hawley (February, 2012) reported that the NYPD monitored Muslim college students far more broadly than previously known, including Yale, Rutgers, Syracuse, CUNY, the University of Pennsylvania, and many more. Moreover, the report mentioned that the NYPD talked with local authorities about professors in Buffalo and even sent an undercover agent on a whitewater rafting trip, where he noted how many times Muslims prayed. In addition, detectives monitored Muslim student websites every day despite the fact that professors and students had not been accused of any wrongdoing.

The behavior of the NYPD in monitoring Muslim students did not stop at the level of collecting information about them and monitoring their websites. According to the AP reporters Goldman and Apuzzo, the NYPD intelligence unit paid a 19-year-old American of Bengali descent $1,000 to “bait” Muslims into saying bad things, snapping pictures inside mosques, and collecting the names of innocent people attending study groups on Islam. This young informant later denounced his work, saying, “I hated that I was using people to make money” (Goldman & Apuzzo, 2012c, para. 36).

More disturbing is the effort made by colleges to ignore well-established principles and rights that stem from one’s status as a U.S. citizen. It reached a point, according to Goldman and Apuzzo, that some colleges cooperated in this process by providing cooperation, information, and sometimes even access to records. In other cases,
school police let the NYPD use campus buildings as a quiet place to interview informants after hours. Law professors stated that the colleges may have broken the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act if they handed over student records without the students' consent because federal law bars schools from releasing students’ information (Diamond, 2011). Mir (2006) pointed out that to some degree, university officials and even faculty tend to look the other way in matters such as alcohol and stereotyping of minority students. These recent investigations show that the Arab American Muslim community, including school and college students, is a frequent target of negative stereotyping and remain the only ethnic group routinely disparaged. This sounds similar to Suleiman (1999b) when he concluded that even scholars and groups established specifically to look for and document bias against ethnic groups in the United States are often blind to bias and discrimination directed at Muslim/Arab Americans.

On the other hand, others issued statements warning that the spying at campuses may have violated civil rights laws. School leaders from the Northeast such as Yale, Rutgers, and Columbia expressed outrage over the NYPD tactics and spying on the Muslim students (Goldman, 2012). Following that, numerous law professors at the CUNY School of Law signed a statement warning that such surveillance on Muslim students may have violated students' civil rights. The Faculty Council of Brooklyn College passed a similar measure.

**Educational Discrimination and Arab Americans and Muslim Students**

Despite educators’ commitment to create a multicultural environment, racial, and ethnic minority students attending predominantly White institutions continue to experience the university environment as stressful. While the country is undergoing
dramatic demographic changes, our society provides a frame of unequal educational opportunities and college admission rates to fulfill the needs of the diverse minority population. Banks (2008) pointed out that ethnic minority students in the United States and throughout the world often “experience discrimination because of their cultural, linguistic, religious, and value differences” (p. 133). The finding of Teranishi, Allen, and Solorzano’s (2004) study on 823 state high schools in California show that there is substantial evidence that “access to California public higher education is associated with racial/ethnic segregation and educational disparities in the state’s public high schools” (p. 2239).

Like other minority group members, Arab Americans and Muslim students frequently encounter anti-Arab and Muslim discrimination and endure various levels of racism in U.S. educational institutions. Ali and Bagheri (2009) and Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) pointed out that victims of discrimination and hate crimes among Muslim students suffered from significant physical, psychological, and emotional consequences. Sometimes this is due to ignorance or to the biased personal attitudes of individuals. Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) noted that within higher education, Muslim students’ encountered challenges from administrators and professors in regard to observing religious practices such as dietary accommodation, space for prayers, acknowledgment of Islamic practices, academic calendar, class schedules, and holidays. One of the students described it as “We have come to realize that the practice of Islam in the college setting is at once intensely personal and painfully public. We always feel at risk of being judged or misunderstood” (p. 22). Muslim students reported that frequently other students were judging them in terms of negative stereotypes about Islam such as “Muslim terrorist” or
“oppressed Muslim women,” and their academic performance was affected by the lack of understanding or prejudice of their professors (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Speck, 1997). Being a minority in the class sessions may create an uncomfortable learning environment for Muslim students. In classes that discuss social, cultural, and religious topics, the potential for discrimination is always present (Ali & Bagheri, 2009 p.50). Stereotyping of Muslim students might affect their academic performance. Students who suffer from discrimination and contention tend to perform more poorly academically (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Furthermore, Muslim students mentioned that they are hesitant to correct their professors because they view them as figures of authority with power over their grades and course standing (Speck, 1997).

Speck (1997) reported, “On the outside, professors want to look like they are open . . . ready to accept any idea” (p. 39). Speck in his study found out that Muslim students encountered four problems from their professors: (1) misrepresentation in classrooms because of misunderstanding of Muslim practices, (2) using biased media to present Islam, (3) failure to preserve an attitude of respect toward certain religions in their sessions, and (4) making no efforts to accommodate students’ religious practices. After 940 college students completed a large battery of questionnaires about the prejudiced attitudes toward Arab-Americans, Bushman (2004) concluded that very few studies have addressed discrimination and intolerance from the broader American community against individuals of Arab descent. Cainkar’s (2002, 2009) and Perry’s (2003) studies suggest that many Arab Americans have experienced discrimination and racism, and these experiences were not mentioned except by Arab American organizations. In addition, research must focus on less visible forms of discrimination
against Arabs because more visible forms of discrimination are unlikely to be exhibited, (Crosby, Bromley, & Saxe, 1980) especially after the attacks on September 11, 2001 (Bushman, 2004).

Allport (1954) originally described extreme forms of discrimination as resulting from the worst kind of prejudice. Within one year following 9/11, discrimination and violence against Arab Americans had reached unprecedented proportions (Cainkar, 2002, Nassar-McMillan, Lambert, & Hakim-Larson, 2011, U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). In their November 2002 report, Human Rights Watch reported a 1,700% increase in reported hate and bias crimes against Arabs and Muslims. Racism does not focus on discrimination only, but rather individuals are seen as live domestic targets of an international war (Maira, 2004). Hate crimes against individuals “have consisted of telephone, internet, mail, face-to-face threats, and assaults resulting in serious injury and death” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). The Civil Rights Division, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and United States Attorney’s offices investigated over 800 incidents in the first six years after 9/11 involving Arab Americans, Muslims, and individuals perceived to be of Middle Eastern origin (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011). Livengood and Stodolska (2004) in their study about how discrimination has affected the leisure behavior of American Muslims following the September 11, 2001, events, found that the discriminatory acts experienced by the participants ranged from racist epithets, hostile looks, obscene gestures, verbal abuse, social isolation, and avoidance to more serious acts of hatred such as threats, vandalism, and physical attack. Furthermore, Arab Americans began to fear the abuse of other Americans and the government surveillance and questioning (Cainkar, 2004).
Poignantly, Inman, Yeh, Madan-Bahel, and Nath’s (2007) study on South Asian family members who lost a relative in the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001, illustrates some of these events. According to the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) 2007 report, Arab American students continue to face significant problems with discrimination and harassment in schools around the country. In some instances, bias is institutionalized and built into curricula, textbooks, and school policies.

Diversity is what makes this nation so special, according to Bollinger (2007). “Diversity is one of the great strengths of American education which is under siege today” (p. 29). The professional ethics of multiculturalism, like the Bill of Rights and the Civil Rights Laws, provide a strong institutional basis from which to combat anti-Arab discrimination. Because Arab Americans were largely excluded from organized discussion of racism and discrimination, from multicultural education, and from textbook treatments of racial and ethnic groups (Cainkar, 2009), this discrimination reached the curricula, textbooks, and other materials used in the students’ classes. The discrimination that manifests itself in schools clearly has a damaging effect on Arab American students. Many Arab American children are aware of racism, and they experience it both in and outside of school. At times, educators fail to respond adequately to incidents when they occur, allowing them to continue until physical violence erupts. In 2001, the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) reported that they received many complaints from Arab American parents, feeling that teachers or administrators were unfair in resolving conflicts between Arab American and other students. They cited instances of suspensions and expulsions in which Arab American students were treated
more harshly. Arab American students complain that, in determining who is at fault, school authorities give greater credibility to the version of incidents reported by non-Arab students.

One of the less visible forms of institutional discrimination against Arab Americans is the use of the official U.S. system of racial and ethnic categories: White, African-American, Hispanic, Asian-Pacific, and Native American. Arab Americans and other Middle Eastern Americans are officially classified as White. They are thereby rendered culturally invisible and often excluded from multicultural programs. In 2007, the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee Research Institute (ADC-RI) reported that the patterns of detected educational discrimination that have come to ADC’s attention since the first published report in 2001 was about the same; the only difference is that it has become intensified in recent years. Some of these discrimination patterned incidents include acts of physical violence, harassment, and bias against Arab Americans, Arab nationals, Muslims, and South Asians.

The Sesame Workshop in a study published in 2003 found that Arab American children were experiencing more vivid and immediate anxieties and a sense of shame about violence that exists in the United States. Regardless of the increased number of reported incidents, many educators are aware of the problems and take pro-active steps to solve these problems and create a safe, accepting environment for Arab American and Muslim students. Arab Americans and Muslims believe that investment in education is a compensatory method for overcoming many of the effects of discrimination but also that it leads to a better life.
The aftermath of September 11 brought about a climate of fear, bigotry, intimidation, violation of civil liberties, and suspicion. According to the "Stereotypes and Civil Liberties" (2002) report released by the advocacy organization CAIR, Arab Americans and Muslims are facing very serious discrimination in the form of ethnic and religious profiling, detentions, and interrogations. El Guindi (2003) a distinguished professor of anthropology stated, “This negative climate affected Arab and Muslim Americans in particular, a situation worsened by the absence of adequate education about them. This environment tacitly encouraged the official and public targeting of Muslims” (p. 623). Doumani (2006) agrees with the findings of El Guindi (2003); he pointed out that the question is not simply how to preserve academic freedom but rather what to do with it. The U.S. academic climate is suffocating and facing its most important threat since the McCarthy era of the 1950s. “In the aftermath of September 11, government agencies and private organizations have been subjecting universities to an increasingly sophisticated infrastructure of surveillance, intervention, and control” (p. 11). The Assistant Secretary of Education, Carolynn Reid Wallace (1992), in her commencement speech reminded the students about the growing gap between those privileged to receive a college education and those who are not. She said, “As college students, you have been given the opportunity to dive beneath the surface of pop culture to learn values that enable one to look critically at an endangered society, marked by growing poverty, racism, drug addiction, crime, and violence” (Paust, 1992 para. 8). In the name of the war against terrorism, civil liberties have been seriously eroded, open debate limited, and dissent stifled (Beinin, 2004). Moreover, after the scandal of the 2011 NYPD in which
they were spying on Muslim students on campuses, parents and students now wonder if continued participation in the university's Islamic community of worship is a risk.

School systems remain one of the institutions most open to and supportive of Arab-Americans and Muslims. The education profession is giving increased attention to the Arab-American and Muslim communities and to the problem of anti-Arab and anti-Islamic discrimination. The Ford Foundation (2002) funded a three-year study of Muslims in New York City schools to find out what happens to students whose culture is treated as an enemy of the state. They published an instructor’s guide to help maximize sensitivity towards Muslims and promote diversity in New York public schools. More school districts are attempting to accommodate the specific needs of Arab and Muslim students.

Although their official classification in the U.S. Census is White, Arabs have suffered from racism experienced by other minorities such as Blacks, Asians, and Latinos. This contradiction emphasizes the impossible position of the Arab Americans, as they seek to obtain equal political and legal rights in the United States. Positioned awkwardly within the category of Whiteness but subject to racial profiling and racist cultural stereotyping, Arabs are denied the rights of other recognized minorities and excluded from the racial privileges of the White majority (Hassan, 2002). Insisting on using those forms make Arab Americans worried that they might lose their fair share of federal government allocations and private dollars because institutions often depend on census data to allocate funds. Tristam (2009) mentioned that he had seen significant evidence to suggest that systematic racism is practiced against Muslims or those with Arab-sounding names regardless of faith in the United States. The exclusion of North
Africans from being qualified as “African American” on the census and on scholarship applications means they are doubly discriminated against; they are not really White, but not non-White enough to benefit from certain programs (p. 3). In other words, the racial classification today for Arabs in particular is White, but the way they are viewed by the public and the way they are commonly treated are similar to the non-White “other.”

Hassan (2002) pointed out that the “national security measures” that were taken by the Justice Department were targeting almost exclusively people from the Middle East and South Asia. In addition, these measures led to the detention, deportation, and interrogation of several individuals who had nothing to do with September 11. In seeking to clarify the status of the Arab American in the United States, Said (1999) indicated that Arabs and Middle Easterners are classified racially as White according to the U.S. Census and most affirmative action forms since the 1960s. However, the US government has unofficially classified them as a distinct racial group by associating Arabs with terrorism and threats to national security. This racialization of Arabs appears to be linked to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and its translation into the domestic context (p. 18).

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI, 2003) reported that 9% of college students identified with a religion other than Christianity, while the Harvard University Institute of Politics (2008) reported that 18% identified with a non-Christian religion (Mayrl & Oeur, 2009). These low numbers reported by HERI may have contributed to the lack of attention to the perspectives of religious minority students, especially Muslim students. Since educational studies of minorities in the education field tend not to focus on religious identity, limited literature on the experiences of religious
minority students in American educational institutions is available. As a result, it is difficult to identify frameworks amenable to study religious minorities, more specifically if they are Muslims. This makes it difficult to view them through frameworks developed for very different populations and circumstances. Mainly post September 11, the Arab American and Muslim as a religious minority are facing particular disadvantages that are quite extraordinary in the American context.

There are little data available on Muslim students in postsecondary education. Studies of religion in higher education seem to treat Christianity or Christianity and Judaism as the concerned religions by default, just as universities often focus on serving students of these traditions (Mays, 2003). However, other studies examining religious pluralism on college campuses have focused on Christian pluralism, meaning various denominations within Christianity, but not much emphasis has been given to pluralism outside of Christianity (Cherry, Deberg, & Porterfield, 2001; HERI, 2003).

In her study of Muslim students and based on her research findings, Mir (2006) argues that college campuses are cultures that do not facilitate “healthy” identity work for many minority students. She pointed out that many college campuses claim to value diversity and multiculturalism, but investigating if true multiculturalism exists may produce an answer that differs from the message administrators may be circulating. Mays (2003) pointed out that most studies on religion and faith within higher education have focused on Christianity; and generally, Christian students are provided with more opportunities and spaces, both physical and emotional, than students who are not Christian. U.S. universities and colleges have not yet created an environment that is able to take full advantage of its diverse social fabric. There is a dearth of true efforts in
changing the institutional culture; it is a challenging and time-consuming practice that may take years to accomplish. As a result, Arab Americans and Muslims will continue struggling for educational advancement, facing the historical barriers which other minorities have faced. Consistent with Mir (2006) and Mays’ (2003) arguments, Banzhaf (2011) reported that a Catholic Bishop at Catholic University of America in Washington DC has been charged with violations of the Human Rights Act. He allegedly discriminated against Muslim students by denying them equal access to the university facilities and services enjoyed by other student groups, solely on the basis of their religion.

The United States Student Association Foundation (USSAF) in the diversity project 2002 mentioned that discriminatory anti-terrorism and immigration policies undermine the civil rights of people of Arab and South Asian descent as well as all immigrants. In addition to the undermining of human rights, the USSAF went on to say that these policies served to legitimize anti-Arab hostility and have developed and encouraged bigotry against Arab people and West/South Asians. All of these policies increased and contributed to the racial profiling by police and other government agencies. Law enforcement, the media, politicians, and terrorism “experts” have repeatedly, and often mistakenly, rushed to blame tragedies and crises on Arabs and Muslims, disregarding the dangers of such speculations and negative consequences on the Arab American and Asian community.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has addressed the Arab American and Muslim demography and historical perspective on postsecondary education for minorities and barriers facing their
postsecondary education pathways. This chapter has highlighted the diversity of the available research in literature that sheds light on Arab American and Muslim students’ experiences in education and their relationship with other minorities. Despite the dramatic demographic growth of Arabs and Muslims, throughout the review of the available literature, it was evident that there is a need for further research about the Arab and Muslim minority. Many studies strongly indicate prejudice against Arabs and Muslims, including racial profiling, stereotyping, and discrimination practices against the Arab and Muslim community, specifically after September 11. In addition, this chapter has also revealed that there have been some attempts to understand this ethnic group although it was very little. Some researchers recommend more qualitative studies to provide a better understanding of the Arab American and Muslim student at the postsecondary level to address their postsecondary experiences. These studies suggest factors associated with postsecondary education experiences such as culture, religion, society, and institutions. From the literature review, it was evident that displaying the experiences of Arab Americans and Muslims through their lived experiences is imperative. This literature review is a modest attempt to help clarify the religious, social, cultural, and institutional implications of the Arab American students’ postsecondary education experiences to achieve their dreams in this country.

Chapter III includes the description and outline of the method used to investigate the study. In addition, a description of the approach, population, sample, data collection procedures, and analysis are provided.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological qualitative methodology was used to examine and draw conclusions from the resources and explore the existing relationship between the social, cultural, institutional, and religious factors concerning Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education experiences. Participants of the study included students in postsecondary education who are members of the Arab American and Muslim community. The primary focus of the phenomenology qualitative approach is to identify the “essence” or lived experience itself and how the experience converts into consciousness. This qualitative inquiry has a strong philosophical component, which is associated heavily with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who is considered as the pioneer developer of phenomenology because of his several key concept contributions to this theory (Creswell, 1998, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

This qualitative methodology research was an attempt to explore postsecondary transition experiences of Arab American and Muslim students in New Jersey. Qualitative research is a situated approach that is interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences and how they construct their world. Therefore, the qualitative researcher studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of the phenomena or interpret it, in terms of the meanings people bring to the phenomena (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Fraenkel & Wallen 2003; Merriam, 2009).

A phenomenological study was conducted to understand how a group of Arab American and Muslim students from New Jersey described their perception of their
postsecondary transition experience. I was interested in understanding the meaning they have constructed; that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in this world. The study aimed to use the phenomenological qualitative method to explore the understanding of the lived experiences and reactions of Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary transition. The phenomenological research, according to Gay et al. (2009), focuses “on capturing the experiences of an activity or concept from participants’ perspectives” (p. 604). Researchers explore various reactions and perceptions of a specific phenomenon to gain some insight into the world of the participants to describe and interpret their experiences through their essences (Fraenkel & Wallen 2003; Merriam, 2009). In addition, phenomenology is the study of how people describe their experiences. “We can only know what we experience by attending to perception and meanings” (Patton, as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 9). Therefore, researchers who apply the phenomenology approach are concerned with the lived experiences of the people involved. They assess these to understand the issue that is being researched, which is known as “the phenomena,” from the perspective of the study participants (Groenewald, 2004).

This qualitative methodology allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the postsecondary transition experiences of the Arab American and Muslim students through analyzing their narrative stories and descriptions. A qualitative approach was particularly useful to this inquiry because it allowed me to examine the multiplicity of individuals' experiences as well as consider how cultural, social, historical, and religious values and political contexts shape individual experiences (Creswell, 2003). In addition, Merriam (2009) and Rubin and Rubin (1995) posited that a qualitative study is flexible
and that the researcher can be responsive to changing conditions during data collection. In fact, quantitative research is not the most appropriate approach for this study because the specific issue in question is identified (Creswell, 2003; Gay et al., 2009; Merriam, 2009), which is the transition from high school to postsecondary education.

There is an essential need for more studies to focus on this faction of the Arab American ethnic group. The goal of this study was to attempt to gain an awareness of the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition experience. Through this study, my intent was to add a significant study to the literature related to the experience of Arab American and Muslim students in United States, for which there is currently very little literature on the students’ transition from high school to college.

For many years, researchers discussing Arab Americans and Muslims in the United States have recommend the increased use of qualitative research methods to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences in the United States (Ansari, 1992; Kim et al., 2001; Mays, 2003). There has been a lack of studies that have focused on Arab American and Muslim students in United States until the present time (Ahmed, 2004; Ayish, 2003; Altareb, 1997; Bradford, 2009; Pulcini, 1993; Suleiman, 1996, 2001). Even fewer qualitative studies have focused on Arab Americans and Muslims in the United States (Ansari, 1988, 1992; Buda & Elkhouly, 1998, David & Ayoub, 2002). As a result, I experienced major difficulties in finding literature providing guidelines relating to my methodology or topic. Furthermore, recruiting informants for the study was another challenge because of its topic and due to the portrayal of Muslims in the news and the feeling toward research after the recent NYPD investigations, especially at the postsecondary institutions in New Jersey.
This study has tried to make a valuable contribution to the field of postsecondary education because of the specific diverse ethnic group on which the present study focuses. It is my hope that this methodological approach will make a humble but important contribution to the current research based around Arab American and Muslim students, in particular, their postsecondary education transitions and the factors affecting their experience. This research area is a desired area of focus according to the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (2010). Recently, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education noted that, although many efforts are currently underway to assist youths and adults with their transitions to and through postsecondary education, only a few are conducting, or planning to conduct, rigorous evaluations of such transition interventions.

**Research Design**

In matching a research design and a problem, three factors should be considered: the research problem, the audience, and the personal experience of the researcher (Creswell, 2003). Creswell (2007) pointed out that “qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37).

A qualitative research approach is suitable to understand the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition experiences. I was interested in collecting the perception and experience of the study participants regarding their transition experiences to postsecondary education. Because “[Muslim] community members have been denied the right to speak for themselves” (Saeed, 2002) in the media in the United States, this approach helped to explore and understand the
participants lived experiences through their own voices and perceptions about their transition experience from high school to college.

It is evident from the literature that it is imperative to hear the information from those who live the challenges and the experiences to be able to understand their perception about their experiences. In addition, little research has been done on this specific group and their experiences in the United States. Moreover, the opportunity to create social change is one of the main advantages in using the qualitative studies (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Glesne (1999) and Patton (1990) suggested that qualitative research could be a vehicle for effective social change as well; this minority needs to be acknowledged and recognized. Furthermore, our society should celebrate its diversity by giving voice to the marginalized groups, including the Arab American and Muslim community to be able to represent themselves in all possible means. Qualitative inquiry is helpful to study marginalized group issues, like inequalities, inequity, dispossession, and exclusion from the mainstream (Creswell, 2005, 2007; Cox, Geisen & Green, 2008; Gay et al., 2009; Hammersley, 2000).

This approach is suitable for studying new topics, such as this one, and for working with individuals from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds because it is exploratory and can be used to discover, share perspectives, raise consciousness, evaluate, or even test theory (Creswell, 2003, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Glesne, 1999; Patton, 1990, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). This method was utilized in this study because its focus was human society and culture. It tells how people describe and structure their daily life. Furthermore, Schwandt (2001) pointed out that “qualitative inquiry deals with human lived experiences. It is the ‘life world’ as it is lived, felt,
undergone, made sense of, and accomplished by human beings that is the object of study” (p. 84) and it attempts to understand the “essence and underlying structure of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23).

Qualitative research is well suited for the purposes of exploration, description, interpretation, and explanation. In particular, it can effectively address questions such as “What is occurring?” and “How is it occurring?” Some of the studies conducted on Arab Americans and Muslims have used grounded theory, narrative method, ethnography and many other methods. The qualitative approach provided me with the ability to "engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features” (Johnson, 1995, p. 4). According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), “Traditional qualitative research holds interpretivist assumptions: knowledge is viewed as subjective; the researcher should engage directly with participants to understand their worldviews” (p. 92).

Following my attendance in some research methodology courses, self-study, and investigation, I came to the conclusion that the most appropriate design for this study would be the descriptive phenomenological inquiry. At the heart of phenomenology is dense description (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The aim of phenomenological research is “to facilitate people expressing themselves in their terms, especially those whose voices are not usually heard” (Hammersley, 2000, p. 5). Merriam (2009) advocates for this approach of research to provide enough descriptions so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation and hence whether the findings can be transferred. Using the phenomenological study approach allowed me to obtain a holistic picture (Creswell, 2003; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Miles & Huberman,
of the subject of this study with emphasis on exploring transition experiences of students through interviewing them.

In this research, a phenomenological approach was used to understand the experiences and challenges of a group of Arab American and Muslim postsecondary students in their everyday life experiences. Merriam (1998) stated that the focus of qualitative research is to understand and explain the world as others have experienced it and provide a dense description of the social phenomenon. Phenomenological inquiry studies participants’ conscious experience of their world, which is their everyday life and social action.

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative design research was to understand the lived experiences of Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary transition in New Jersey. A study project was conducted to hear how a diverse group of Arab American and Muslim students described their perception of the experience of postsecondary transition. Based on the subject of the study, the population, the methodology, and the literature review, a small sample was selected. A questionnaire to collect demographic and personal data in addition to the in-depth focus interviews was used to collect the information to explain the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Two of the postsecondary institutions from North Jersey were purposefully selected to complete this study. Twenty-four students were recruited from among those Arab American and Muslim postsecondary students who volunteered and expressed their willingness to participate in the face-to-face focus interviews.

The instrument, which was a semi-structured, in-depth, focused interview, consisted of the research open-ended questions as the primary data collection method
from the participants. The research questions encompassed students’ experiences in respect to the influence of the social, religious, institutional, and cultural factors on their postsecondary education transition. Each interview was audio recorded. Recording these interviews hopefully led to valid, reliable, and diverse construction of realities. Following each focused interview, the recording was transcribed. Students were emailed the transcripts of their interviews to give them the opportunity to reflect or clear up any misunderstandings.

The data collected from the in-depth one–on-one interviews provided details and examples explaining the perception of the students concerning the influence of the religious, social, cultural, and institutional factors on their postsecondary transition experience. Students were profiled and the data were analyzed descriptively following Creswell’s suggested approach (1998, 2007) through the methodology of reduction, analysis of themes, and finally a search for meanings, which Creswell adapted from Srevick-Colaziz-Kenn’s (1978) study. This approach enabled readers to gain insight into the perception of the students in respect to the influence of the religious, social, cultural and institutional factors on their postsecondary transition experience.

**Sample Population**

In qualitative studies, the sample size is small. Creswell (2007) pointed out that phenomenology has a narrow range of samples, and criterion sampling works well with this type of study in order to recruit qualified participants that provide the study with their credible stories. It is critical that all participants have experienced the phenomenon of the research and are willing to speak articulately and share their information openly and honestly. Creswell stated that Dukes (1984) recommended studying 3-10 subjects, and
Duke conducted one study with one subject (p. 128). Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) pointed out that “qualitative studies with more than 20 participants are rare, and many studies will have fewer” (p. 135).

Based on the population perspective, subject and purpose of the study, the methodology, data collection method, and the related literature, a small purposeful sample of 24 volunteers from the Arab American and Muslim college students who reside in New Jersey were selected to obtain a homogeneous group, consistent with the study criteria that were outlined. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 24 years old.

I solicited participants for this study in two ways. The departments of students’ activities at both academic institutions approved a flyer for solicitation (Appendix A), and it was posted on bulletin boards at different sites at the two institutions’ campuses. In addition, I contacted the Muslim Student Organizations, and they were able to email the solicitation flyer to their club members. In other cases, some students introduced the study flyer to their friends or emailed it to them. All recruited students in the sample were informed that their participation was voluntary and confidential. The participants were contacted to obtain the time and days of their availability to conduct the interviews. The informants were provided with a letter, describing the project and its purpose, with a note stating that they have the right to opt out at any point from the study with no obligation. Participants gave their signed consent to contribute their perceptions to the research concerning factors influencing their postsecondary transition experiences. Following the consent signing, the participants were asked to complete the questionnaire. All interviews took place from November 2013 to May 2014.
Instrumentation

The primary data collection method utilized in this study was a qualitative interview. Qualitative interviewing was an extremely helpful approach to conduct this qualitative study because I needed to learn and obtain a deeper understanding, knowledge, and insight of my study interviewees (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The purpose of the phenomenological interview is “to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 104). For future studies of the experience of Muslim students at campuses, Mays (2003) mentioned that she believes that the unstructured interview technique provides the most natural and true view into life on campus for Arab American and Muslim students. Through the primary one-on-one focus qualitative interviews, I focused the discussion to obtain more in-depth, detailed, vivid, and nuanced (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) responses on a narrower range of topics to collect the data for my study. Furthermore, the research questions were used to collect the data during the interview with the participants.

Qualitative in-depth interviews are useful for getting a large amount of data, which allows for immediate follow-up questions, explanations, and clarification (Marshall & Rossman, 1989), and it explores social, political, and economic changes (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). According to Rubin and Rubin (1995) the qualitative interview design remains flexible so that the researcher has to work out questions to explore new ideas and themes that merge during the interview. This flexibility keeps the study results fresh and interesting. The value of the interview lies in its focus on the culture through a native perspective and a firsthand encounter (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, 2006).
design was helpful because I was able to adjust the questioning so that individuals were asked about specific subjects that they knew the best. A qualitative focus interview technique is an interaction method of data collection that may be described as a friendly conversation with a structure and an explicit purpose to obtain valid and reliable information (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

A qualitative interviewer listens to people as they describe how they understand the worlds in which they live and work, to pick up on key words and ideas, to mark important omissions and hear the meaning of what is being said. It helps explain how and why culture is created, evolves, and is maintained and to explore specific topics, like this study, events, or happenings (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In short, its “goal is to understand specific circumstances and how and why things actually happen in a complex world” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995 p. 38). Cox et al. (2008) and Morgan (1996) pointed out that more and more studies are utilizing qualitative interviewing because this approach has the ability to “give voice” to marginalized groups, like the group under study here.

As no specific format is ideal for all participants, this type of qualitative interview allowed the researcher to develop listening skills that point out issues to pursue in later questioning and provided me with the space for contouring the interview process and format to best fit the specific participant.

My intent was to engage the participants in a conversation, rather than just systemically probing them. I modified the nature of the interview to be a more interactive one, especially after the initial part. This process helps the interviewee be more trusting of the interview process and give more powerful and in-depth information. As Merriam (2009) mentioned, as a researcher, I am interested in understanding how the students
interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (p. 5). At this point, the participants shared their perceptions regarding our topic, explaining how they are managing and coping with their experience.

The interview process began with one of the four main types of interview questions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002) to serve a specific function. The first category included standardized or fixed response questions, which is a set of predetermined questions to obtain fixed responses such as the demographic data. The second set included the semi-structured interview questions, which is a set of questions pertaining to the personal experiences of the individuals and begins with the assumption that the interviewees do not know the questions in advance. The third set of questions was the unstructured interview questions, which uses open-ended questions through asking participants to share stories about their particular experiences. The final set focused on experience such as inviting the participant to tell his or her life stories. In other words as a researcher, I used a semi-structured format in conducting my interviews, utilizing open-ended questions.

Utilizing a focused in-depth interview in a nonthreatening, semi-structured setting as a research method helped me to narrow the gap between participants and myself to uncover the essence of the individuals’ experiences and convey the idea that the participants’ information was acceptable and valuable for me (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

A focused interview technique obtains data about a single topic or a limited range of topics determined by the researcher through semi-structured setting. The goals of the focused interview are to capture and explore students’ perceptions and responses in
respect to the influence of social, religious, institutional, and cultural factors on their postsecondary education transition experience. The researcher gave an overview of the project and its overall direction, emphasizing that the participant would do most of the talking. In addition, the researcher informed the participant that he or she was contributing to a professional project. Following the recommendations of Cole (2001), a portion of time toward the end of each interview was given for the participants to reflect on the research process as well as an explanation of what the next steps in the study would be. An extended offer to meet again for each participant if he or she thought of additional information or wanted to clarify something further was made at the conclusion of every interview. To acquire the data needed, students were interviewed in an informal setting from November 2013 to May 2014. The focused interviews ran on average from 50 to 60 minutes and took place at several locations, at each participant’s convenience.

The qualitative focused interview method was combined with a questionnaire to obtain demographic data related to the participants. The demographic questionnaire had general background information such as gender, age, race, country of origin, place of birth, and family status and education-related questions such as level of education, level of English language proficiency, grade point average, degree pursued, and financial resources. The questionnaire is found in Appendix D.

**Instrument Questions**

The aim of this study was to gain understanding about how the cultural, social, religious, and institutional factors influence the postsecondary transition experiences of Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey. The instrument, interview guided questions, was designed to cover these four major areas. It explored the
relationship between these factors and the Arab and Muslim postsecondary education transition. Therefore, researching this segment provided an insight into this particular community and increased the understanding of it. The instrument, which is a semi-structured in-depth interview, consisted of the research open-ended questions as the primary data collection method from the participants. This design avoids bias because all participants were asked the same questions regardless of the question sequence. Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggested three types of questions, the “main questions” to direct the discussion about a specific topic or experience and link the different interviews to the overall design. The second type is the “probe,” which helps in specifying the desired level of depth; it gives a signal that longer and more detailed information is wanted or to finish a segment, and it indicates that the researcher is interested and paying attention. The purpose of the third type, “the follow-up question,” is to get the depth that is a hallmark of qualitative interviewing by tracking themes that are discovered, explaining the context of answers, and exploring the implication of what has happened (p. 151).

Consistent with Rubin and Rubin, Creswell (2007) suggested identifying two focused and broad questions to collect related data necessary for rigorous analysis, “What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced your experience of the phenomenon?” (p. 61). “Other open-ended questions may be asked, but these two, especially, focus attention on gathering data that will lead to a textual . . . and structural description of the experiences, [and] ultimately provide an understanding of the common experiences of the participants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). For phenomenological studies, Seidman (1998) suggested three types of focus in-depth interview questions, one about past experience, the second on present
experience, and the third joining the narrative of the first two to describe the participants’ essential experience with the phenomenon (Seidman, as cited by Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The interview guide questions served as a guide for me to persist in my objectivity and neutrality. Merriam (2009) pointed out that the questions are at the heart of interviewing; asking fewer carefully worded open-ended questions allows the researcher to collect rich meaningful data. The interview questions were drawn from the common theme of this study to encourage participants to identify the influence the phenomenon had on their lives and the importance of interpreting the lived experience in an exclusive way. The research open-ended and the subsidiary questions were generated with the intent of gaining a greater insight into the experiences and needs of Arab American and Muslim college students. The open-ended research questions and the subsidiary questions were asked in face-to-face interviews after each participant signed the designed interview protocol. Before submitting the interview guide to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval, the members of the Dissertation Committee reviewed the guide to ensure that the content was aligned with the instrument and the purpose of the study.

To address this phenomenon, the following three open-ended, in-depth research questions, along with the subsidiary ones, guided the interviews:

1. How do religious beliefs and practices, social factors, and cultural characteristics influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition?
2. What are the institutional factors that influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition?

3. What types of support structures and barriers at institutions influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition and how are they utilized or coped with?

The focus of this study was to explore the stories and experiences of the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition. Seeking answers to these questions was through interviewing members of the Arab American and Muslim students community to attain more in-depth understanding of their practices and what factors affect that experience.

Data Collection

The main collection procedure in this study was the interview. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with Arab American and Muslim students from two universities in northern New Jersey. The data for this qualitative study were compiled from the participants’ perspective; it was flexible and matched the dynamic demands of the immediate research conditions. The researcher, in preparation for data collection, developed the demographic questionnaire and interview guide questions. The demographic questionnaire was helpful in providing information about the participants. Data for the study were collected through the demographic questionnaire that was designed to solicit information about the participants who were recruited to be part of this study from the two postsecondary institutions in North Jersey.

Based on the literature review and the researcher’s experience, the study’s semi-structured questions were developed and divided into different aspects in an attempt to
answer the study questions. Some questions dealt with religious and social aspects; other questions involved institutional and cultural lived experiences of the participants, their reactions, reflections, responses, and perceived impact of such experiences. A panel of experts, a counselor, a school administrator, and a college student were consulted to review and give feedback about the survey. The dissertation committee and the IRB of the three academic institutions evaluated and validated the interview guide questions prior to the interviews. Participants at times were requested to elaborate on their experiences. The last question in the interview investigated how these Arab American and Muslim students handled their experiences, specifically how they cope with these challenges on campuses. The interview guide questions are available in Appendix C. All interviews were audio recorded. In addition to the interview questions, during the research process and the interviews, a journal was maintained to keep my detailed notes regarding experiences, thoughts, opinions, and impressions or to question the direction and the process of the research. Reflections on issues or experiences that I have encountered before each interview were provided to maintain objectivity and to protect the validity of the study. Furthermore, through my journal notes, I kept track of the participants’ responses to the questions in an attempt to ask the unanswered questions later in the interview. After each interview, the interviews were recorded and transcribed in full; the journal notes were examined along with the transcripts to attain full understanding of the meanings that developed from the interviews. All interview transcriptions, questionnaire information, and journal notes were included in the data collection. Participants were emailed copies of their interview transcripts to give them the opportunity for personal reflection or to clear up any misconceptions.
There were obstacles that I faced during collection of data for this study. I experienced challenges in securing the Institutional Review Board approval for the study from three different respected institutions. Recruiting participants and then scheduling and securing the interviews was another difficulty, especially after the college atmosphere that was created following the NYPD activities that occurred on different campuses.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative researchers direct their investigation to that which is “out there” to understand a world closely, not in the mind, but in between people working hard in the world while trying to make sense of what to do next (Cox, Geisen, & Green, 2008). The main concern of qualitative studies is to provide an understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the participants’ perspective (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, Merriam, 2009). The focus of data analysis is organizing many ideas that have emerged from analysis of data; organizing what has been seen, heard, and read so that sense can be made of what is learned (Strauss, 1987). Patton (2006) clarifies that data interpretation and analysis involve making sense out of what people have said, looking for patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what is said in another place, and integrating what different people have said. Wolcott (1994) suggested three phases of data analysis: description, analysis, and interpretation of the culture of the study group. Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested three stages to confirm organization during the data analysis process: data reduction, then data display, and finally drawing conclusions and verification.
Phenomenological analysis aims to explore and understand human experience and examine the details of the participants’ life world and their experiences of the phenomenon. The central focus of phenomenological analysis is to uncover and comprehend how the everyday social and cultural life is perceived (Schwandt, 2000) from the participants’ perspective. Its concern is exploring and understanding how people describe their lived experiences of a particular phenomenon, how they have made sense of these experiences, and the meanings they convey to them. This is illustrated in Husserl’s statement, “We can only know what we experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 9). This inquiry engages only in establishing knowledge of essences. The essence is the primary meaning and perspective of the experience shared among the different individual lived experiences of the research participants.

The information collected from the qualitative interviews provided details, evidence, and examples to explain the perceptions of the students concerning the influence of religious, social, cultural, and institutional factors on their postsecondary transition experience. The data collected from the focus interviews was analyzed descriptively, and special attention was given to issues of cultural relevance on how respondents' social, religious, institutional and cultural factors relate to postsecondary transition experience. Creswell (1998, 2007) suggested that the phenomenological data analysis be conducted through the methodology of reduction, analysis of themes and finally a search for meanings (pp. 52, 61).

Creswell’s (1998, 2007) modified approach, which was developed from Moustakas’ (1994) method that he developed from Srevick-Colaziz- Kenn’s (1978) approach was followed in the data analysis of this study. The researcher began by
describing his personal experience regarding the influence of social, religious, institutional, and cultural factors on postsecondary education transition in full, which is called “reduction” (p. 159). The researcher started with a description of the personal experience with the phenomenon in an attempt to set aside his experience so that full attention could be directed to the subjects in the study.

In the next stage, I read the text multiple times (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) to identify categories and develop a list of specific and significant statements or quotes of interest to the various categories or codes. I identified statements from the interview transcripts related to how the participants experienced the influence of the social, religious, institutional, and cultural factors on postsecondary education transition. Then I listed these significant quotes or statements, which is called “horizontalization of the data,” in which all statements are treated with the same weight and equal value to develop a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements reviewing data from all possible angles. These significant quotes and statements, when grouped, generated larger themes, which are called “meaning units” (p. 159). Then I described what the participants experienced with the phenomenon, or “what happened,” in combination with examples; this is called "textural description" (p. 159).

Writing a description of “how” the experience happened is the next step of the analysis. This is called “structural description” (p. 159). Then a reflection and structural description was provided on where and how the phenomenon was experienced.

Finally, a combined description regarding the influence of social, religious, institutional, and cultural factors on postsecondary education transition incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions provided to address the study questions was
the last step. This combined description shows the “essence” of the experience and the culminating aspect of our study, telling the reader “what” the students experienced with the postsecondary education transition and “how” they experienced it. The phenomenological interviewing, despite its advantages, has disadvantage, Marshall and Rossman (2006) stated that it is “labor intensive and requires a reflective turn of mind on the part of the researcher” (p. 105).

A discussion of the study findings in conjunction with the literature review in Chapter II and the survey is presented in Chapter IV. The conclusion and recommendations of the study in Chapter V include a synthesis of the findings of the study.

**Description of the Participants**

Arab American and Muslim postsecondary students who currently reside in New Jersey were included in this phenomenological study. The participants from both genders and a different culture and origin were selected because they fit the phenomenon that I am studying, and they play a functional role in their colleges. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 24 years old. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit 24 volunteers from the respondents of the flyer invitation. Purposeful sampling allowed me to use my judgment, experience, and knowledge to select a sample that I believed, based on my prior information, would provide the data the study required (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009).

Purposeful sampling, as stated by Patton (2002), is used "to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study.” Merriam (2009) described purposeful sampling as a nonprobability sampling type that is used in
qualitative research methods. Merriam identified six types of purposeful sampling (p. 78). Maximum variation sampling was used to recruit interview participants from the flyer and email respondents because it allowed the diversity of the population to be reflected. Selecting the maximum variation sampling strategy enhanced the transferability of this study and provided the opportunity for a greater range of application by the readers (Merriam, 2009). Maximum variation sampling of Arab American and Muslim postsecondary students would involve identifying and seeking out those who represent the widest possible range of the characteristics of interest for the study. As indicated by Glesne (1999), with maximum variation sampling, the researcher looks for common patterns that exist in the variations identified in participants.

Two postsecondary education institutions from North Jersey were purposefully selected. Both institutions have an increasing number of Arab American and Muslim student enrollment; and at the same time, they are among the largest in North Jersey. From among the Arab American and Muslim postsecondary students, 24 participants were recruited for the one-on-one interviews during the period of November 2013 to May 2014. The following table (Table 1) includes a description of each participant.

Table 1

*Profiles of Individual Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Years at College</th>
<th>Income in K</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years in U. S.</th>
<th>Academic Track</th>
<th>Major</th>
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<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Born</td>
<td>Hon</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$25-35</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$25-35</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
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<td>$75+</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Born</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Comp Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Grade</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Major</td>
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<td>105</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>History</td>
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<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Art Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>107</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Biology</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Acct/Psychology</td>
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<tr>
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<td>112</td>
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<td>114</td>
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<tr>
<td>116</td>
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<tr>
<td>117</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>118</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>119</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Education</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nursing</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hon/CP</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engineering</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>123</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hon/CP</td>
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<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Education</td>
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</table>
Most of the Arab American participants were second generation. Choosing sites for the interviews was done after ascertaining the Arab American and Muslim student body composition, locating a local contact, and securing the agreement of the administrations.

The subjects’ participation was voluntary; subjects were informed that they had the right to refuse to participate or to discontinue participation at any time. The informants completed certain forms designed by the researcher, including a consent form that clearly outlined the (a) objective of the research, (b) requirements for participation, (c) participant’s rights to discontinue the research at any time, and (d) time frame involved in the study. This study adhered to the guidelines and policies put forth by the Committees for the Protection of Human Subjects and the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at Seton Hall University and the other two academic institutions.

**Validity and Reliability**

Questions concerning reliability and validity in all studies are imperative. Maintaining objectivity and neutrality in gathering the data and data analysis is desired in conducting qualitative descriptive phenomenological studies. Many researchers discussed the need to deal with validity and reliability utilizing various ways of validating research findings (Creswell, 2007; Lewis, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 985; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology, through its approach, ensures the validity of the results by establishing the focus or the purpose of the study in the structure of the research from the beginning. Using the Critical Race Theory as a framework for the current study to explore the impact of institutional racism provides an opportunity and supports the use of
narratives from the perspective of the participants experiencing the issue. In this study, my focus was exploring experiences, beliefs, and feelings toward certain concerns. The phenomenology study creates data by collecting in-depth individual storytelling, thereby acquiring a cumulative essence of experience.

This study, in accordance with the qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach, employed the suggested criteria by Marshall and Rossman (1989, 2006) which was developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for constructing validity or trustworthiness. In terms of establishing credibility, or “truth finding,” the study utilized two sources of data, the in-depth interviews and the demographic questionnaire. Each participant was provided with copies of his or her interview transcripts to make changes or to clear up any misconceptions that may have developed and ask them to identify areas of concern. In addition, an in-depth description of the phenomenon was provided to convey the stories of the participants. The investigator also used member-checking techniques to increase the credibility. “The participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question” (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). The selected sample was valuable in fulfilling the purpose of the study.

In respect to transferability, in this investigation the research findings are presented in the best possible manner “so that the researcher, in the end, can forge a common understanding” (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). Through the in-depth interviews, the study can provide rich, dense description of the participants’ backgrounds, methodology, context, settings, details, and location. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed, “The responsibility of the investigator ends in providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgment possible” (p. 298). Marshall and Rossman (1989) also suggested
the use of triangulation, which was applied in this study by using the questionnaire and the in-depth interviews to collect the data.

Dependability, or “consistency,” of this construct of descriptive qualitative method is to maintain the data stability over time and in different conditions. Reliability in qualitative research refers to the ability of the research results to be replicated if used by other researchers (Lewis, 2009); in qualitative research, it is rather “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 2009, p. 221). The investigator presents a detailed description of all employed techniques in collecting, exploring and interpreting the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using variety in data collection allowed me to increase the reliability of the study. Gathering the data through the in-depth interviews at different times with different participants from various locations and using the questionnaire, I intended to increase the reliability of the study. In addition, this was achieved by having the participants review their transcription and analysis of all data collected.

The investigator established an audit system in which all interviews were recorded, transcribed, clarified, and verified with the participants. Finally, the external audit, as suggested by Creswell (2007), was established and conducted by the mentor and dissertation committee, which assessed all the processes and results.

**Role of the Researcher**

Like most qualitative research, this study was largely dependent on the researcher as the main instrument for gathering and interpreting the research data. As noted by Merriam (2009), the researcher is “the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.” That is one of the characteristics of qualitative research. The researcher
attempts to understand the meaning of the ongoing situation or set of activities that cannot be predicted in advance. The trustworthiness of the research rests on the credibility of the researcher. Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to discover the unique perspectives participants may have toward the world of work and postsecondary education (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999). Therefore, the quality of the research is determined by the quality of the researcher; it is enhanced by an ongoing close relationship with the interviewees and the obligation to protect his or her participants from any harm that might result from the research. Merriam (2002) explained that “a good qualitative study is one that has been conducted in an ethical manner [and] to a large extent; the validity and reliability of a study depend upon the ethics of the researcher” (p. 29).

This phenomenological study relied on interviewing the Arab American and Muslim students to understand their perception of their experiences in respect to the influence of the social, religious, institutional, and cultural factors on their postsecondary education transition. In addition, a demographic survey was used to collect general information from the participants. Many believe that a phenomenological approach offers a wealth of detailed description that is especially useful for understanding the studied phenomenon (Cox, Geisen, & Green, 2008; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). In short, my goal as a researcher engaging in phenomenological study was to search for the “essential structure” of the phenomenon in as thorough, accurate, and vivid a manner as possible so that readers can truly understand the participants and what they do. In other words, it can be viewed as an attempt to determine how students give meaning to their activities.

What makes a qualitative interview work is the researcher’s self-confidence,
adaptability, and willingness to listen to what is said and his/her ability to modify
direction to catch a thread of insight or track down a new theme. Therefore, to maintain
the validity of the study, I sought to avoid any potential threats to the validity of the
study. I actively engaged myself in critical self-reflection about any potential biases
(reflexivity). Therefore, the awareness of reflexivity enabled me to design and choose the
proper wording of the questions; I was able to address all the interviewees with the right
questions without confusing them. Furthermore, the ongoing analysis of the data made
me aware of question topics that can be potentially inappropriate. The reflexivity helped
me to become more aware of any biases (epoche), and to monitor and control them
(Johnson, 1997). It allowed me, as Creswell (1998) puts it, “[to] gain clarity from her
[my] own preconceptions, and it is part of an ongoing process rather than a single fixed
event” (p. 150). To facilitate reflexivity, a journal was used for self-reflection: to examine
notes concerning assumptions, opinions, thoughts, and feelings about the interviews, as
well as the research process.

In addition, to avoid any validity threats throughout the interviews, the same
questions were asked in a different manner to follow the threads of the information
provided by each individual. The 24 participants were interviewed at different times and
different places. Each interview was audiotaped; and following each focused interview,
the recording was transcribed. Furthermore, each participant was provided with copies of
his or her interview transcripts to clear up any misconceptions that may have developed
and ask them to identify areas of concern. Maintaining descriptive validity was
accomplished through accuracy in reporting the information gained from the participants
because this was an essential objective in my qualitative study.
Participants

To make sure that the study complied with the requirements for selecting and recruiting participants, approval of the investigation was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at Seton Hall University and the IRB of the other two respected higher education institutions.

To ensure that the data obtained in this study are ethical, the right of any participant to refuse to participate in the research or to withdraw from it at any time was respected. Before the interview, each participant was handed a copy from the study flyer (Appendix A) and an informed consent form that was approved by the IRB of the respected colleges (Appendix B). To familiarize the participants with the study and its questions in advance to the interview sessions, the informants were given some time to review the set of the interview guide questions (Appendix C).

The consent form was obtained from each participant as is required by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the IRB of the other two institutions. Each participant was provided with a copy of the consent form so that if at any time they had comments or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions, they would know how to contact me, my mentor, or the IRB at Seton Hall University or the other two institutions. In addition, all subjects were assured that all data about them would be held in confidence, and that they would not suffer any harm because of their involvement in this research.

Due to the confidentiality, the present study does not disclose the research subject’s personal information such as the names and locations of the participants or the names of the universities. In addition, to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the
individuals, information in this study was assigned a randomized number identifier. Furthermore, the confidentiality of each participant in the current study was ensured according to each respective institution’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). To provide the participants with accurate information, the consent form of each institution contained the IRB contact information, including the contact person, phone number, physical address, and email.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore issues in the postsecondary education transition of Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey. The study examined the factors influencing the postsecondary transition, and the data were collected to highlight these issues. The instrument questions were generated from the related literature on the transition experiences, and each sub-question was relevant to one of the study questions.

This chapter presented research procedures and a description of the population, instrument, instrument questions, data collection, data analysis techniques, the validity and reliability of the study, and ethical considerations.

Qualitative study design gave the investigator an opportunity to reflect on the findings within the natural context of the issue. This research collected its data from the interviews conducted with 24 Arab American and Muslim students as the main source of information. A demographic questionnaire was used to gather general information about the participants. In analyzing the data, this study utilized Creswell’s (1998, 2007) modified approach in which the first stage is called “reduction,” the second stage is called “meaning units,” the third stage is “textural description,” the fourth stage is a description
of “how,” or “structural description,” and finally the reflection on where and how the phenomenon is experienced. All efforts were made to report the findings that represent the participants’ own voices in their own words. All ethical issues regarding anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were outlined and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the three institutions.
CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

Reporting numbers about the Arab American population are almost never exact; it lacks consistency because the United States federal government does not officially recognize them as a minority. Rather, Arabs are classified as White by race. The Arab American and Muslim population growth rate is estimated to double every 17 years, according to research conducted in California, or every six years, according to another study in Illinois (Pew Center, 2007). In addition, the Pew Center (2007) study illustrates that 22% of the Muslim population is enrolled in colleges and universities. The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of social, cultural, institutional, and religious factors on the postsecondary education transition experience of Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey.

The enrollment number of minority students in postsecondary education is growing, including that of Arab American and Muslim students. Beaman (2003) requested researchers to give more attention to minority and religious groups. In view of the growth of the Arab American and Muslim student population in the United States and the essential need to understand this minority group, Bradford (2009) pointed out that this minority remains poorly understood and deserves more academic attention. Furthermore, for many years, scholars have discussed the factors affecting minority groups’ academic progress and success in the education system (Ogbu, 1990). Nevertheless, the results of these investigations were taken as secondary ones and were ignored.
This phenomenological qualitative study was an attempt to explore perceptions and valuable information regarding Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition experiences. Further, the study attempted to shed light on factors affecting their decision to continue their postsecondary education, their sights on higher education institutions, challenges they encounter during their transition experience and how they constructed new meanings out of their experiences. Using Critical Race Theory as a framework, the study was guided by the main research question: How do religious beliefs and practices, social, cultural, and institutional factors influence Arab American and Muslim students’ transition from high school to postsecondary education in northern New Jersey? The factors that influence the transition of the Arab American and Muslim students from high school to college were classified into four general categories: religious, social, cultural, and institutional.

The results displayed in this chapter include information that was collected from (a) a questionnaire to gather demographic and personal information, (b) twenty-four face-to-face interviews, and (c) supplemental notes from the interviews. The findings reflect the participants’ perceptions of their postsecondary transition experiences. The 24 Arab American and Muslim students, 13 females and 11 males, were enrolled in two postsecondary education institutions in northern New Jersey. Twenty-one (87%) of the participants were considered second-generation; they were born and reared in the state of New Jersey, and three migrated to the United States when they were young. Twenty-one students attended public schools, and three attended private Islamic schools. Ten of the female participants wore the hijab (traditional Islamic headscarf) and three did not. During the face-to-face interviews, students were asked semi-structured questions to
share their stories about their experiences during their transition. A holistic view of the collected data was taken in relation to the research questions; certain patterns emerged as common to all participants, yet others are not. Table 1, which appeared originally on page 130 and is repeated below, illustrates the demographic data of the study informants, which enables the reader to relate individual participants to their interview data.

Afterwards, a brief constituent profile of the 24 participants is provided to familiarize readers with them.

Table 1

Profiles of Individual Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Years at College</th>
<th>Income in K</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<td>$50-75</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Born</td>
<td>Hon/CP</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>$75+</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Born</td>
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<td>Accounting</td>
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<td>108</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>116</td>
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<tr>
<td>119</td>
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<tr>
<td>121</td>
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<tr>
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</table>

Participants signed the informed consent form before the interview activity. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Transcript copies were emailed to informants for review and comments. To protect their identity and maintain the confidentiality of the participants’ responses, participants were given codes and their names were not used in the study. Furthermore, to maintain anonymity and avoid any potential risk, pseudonyms were utilized in the study and the names of the institutions were omitted for the same reason. This chapter of the phenomenological study explored the research questions in an attempt to find answers that will provide assistance and guidance to the study.
Research Questions

1. How do religious beliefs and practices, social factors, and cultural characteristics influence the Arab Americans and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition?

2. What are the institutional factors that influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition?

3. What types of support structures and barriers at institutions influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition and how are they utilized or coped with?

Results of the Study

The findings presented in this chapter were directly based on (a) a demographic questionnaire and (b) the face-to-face interviews. The first short section presents the demographic data that were collected from the questionnaire. The second section includes a comprehensive discussion through the examination of the data to understand the factors that influence the transitions of Arab Americans and Muslim students from high school to postsecondary education. Flyers were posted in different locations on campuses and passed through student associations’ emails to their members to recruit volunteers. Even though, it took some time to get students involved in the study, participants were open and presented themselves in the best manner, setting the example for their fellow siblings, families, and community and displaying their commitment toward their family, religion and education. This group of students was active and involved in many clubs, including the MSA, reflecting their diverse backgrounds because their parents originally came from different countries.
Demographic Questionnaire

The questionnaire was used to gather information about the 24 participants involved in this study. The questions intended to collect data from the students related to their general background, such as years at college, gender, age, race, country of origin, place of birth including father and mother, number of years lived in the United States, family status, father’s primary work, and mother’s primary work. This is in addition to education-related questions, such as level of education, level of English language proficiency, grade point average, degree pursued, and financial resources.

Twenty-four students, 13 (55%) females and 11 males, participated in the study; their ages were between 18 and 24. Twenty-one (87%) were born and reared in the state of New Jersey, one student was born here but spent some years living overseas, and three migrated to the United States at a very young age.

The data illustrate that three students (15%) attended private Islamic schools; the rest of the participants attended public schools. In addition, ten students (42%) were enrolled in the honor track at their high school, five students (20%) were registered in the honor and college prep tracks. Nine students (38%) were attending college prep programs.

The questionnaire shows that 50% of the students received some type of college scholarships and financial assistance, which was crucial for some participants. Furthermore, the data illustrate that the income of 45% of the students’ families was more than $75,000, 15% was more than $50,000, 20% was more than $35,000, and 20% was more than $25,000.
Twenty-three participants indicated that they were reared by both parents; only one student did not provide any information about his father. Nine students (38%) noted that their mothers are homemakers. Seven students (29%) reported that their mothers are working as teachers or student teaching, and the rest are working in different types of careers such as banking, nursing, or business.

Six participants (25%) pointed out that their parents finished their master’s degree, nine (38%) parents finished their bachelor’s degree, six (25%) parents completed high school, two (8%) parents finished their associate’s degree, and one was not reported. Students indicated that their fathers are working in different types of careers: business, six (25%); engineering, six (25%); and the rest are working in different fields such as medical, wholesale, or other services.

Ten mothers’ (40%) proficiency level in English is excellent, nine (38%) had a good proficiency level, and five mothers (23%) have a fair proficiency level. Thirteen participants (56%) reported that the proficiency level of their fathers in English is good, six (25%) students reported that the proficiency level in English of their fathers is excellent, and four fathers’ proficiency level in English is fair.

**Participant Interviews**

This section examines the collected data relevant to the factors that influence the transitions of Arab Americans and Muslim students from high school to postsecondary education which are classified in four general categories: religious, social, cultural, and institutional. Codes are used to retrieve and organize the data to enable me to find the segments that are related to the themes. The themes and patterns that frequently appeared in the responses of the participants in the study were identified and organized into five
major sections. Each section tries to provide answers to the study research questions. The five major recurring themes were religious beliefs and practices, social factors, cultural characteristics, institutional factors, and barriers and supporting programs. Subthemes associated with all five themes also appeared, but many of them overlap one another.

Analyzing the data according to Creswell’s (1998, 2007) suggested methodology of reduction, analysis of themes, and finally a search for meanings gave me the ability to ensure that the themes belong primarily to the investigated phenomenon. The focus of the analysis process is to examine the experiences from the perspective of the students who experienced them rather than the imposition of other people’s constraint, bias, and expectation. This focus allows a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and offers an overall essence of the experience. The analysis of the collected data gave a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. In addition, the analysis of these themes or patterns gave a broad picture of the study, and its findings provide answers to the study questions. What follows is a composite of examples taken from the informants’ interviews in their own voices.

**Research Question 1.** How do religious beliefs and practices, social factors, and cultural characteristics influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition?

**Category 1: Religious beliefs and practices.** This theme highlights the students’ understanding of their religious beliefs and practices.

*Question 1: Do you pray? Where? Do you pray on campus with others?*

From the responses, an overwhelming majority of the students indicated that they perform their prayers daily and sometimes with others in the halls, the office of the
Muslim Students Association (MSA), empty rooms, in cars, or at home. Most of the participants indicated that performing prayers depends on the flexibility of their schedules. Only one participant mentioned that he does not pray.

One of the participants expressed her commitment to perform prayers on time, even if under a stairwell:

I pray on campus. Sometimes I pray in the MSA room. If I am close to the MSA room and have enough time, then I will pray with whoever is there. However, most of the time while I am on campus, I do not because I would be in class and pray under a stairwell sometimes (108).

Other students commented as follows: “. . . based on the schedule I have for college, mostly the MSA room” (114) and “We pray at the MSA room, we try and do group prayers and sometimes at the mosque” (123). Another informant said, “I usually pray in the MSA room. Or if it’s a long class, I just go to an empty room and pray there and go back to class” (107).

One participant mentioned, “On campus I usually find a small room or a little closed area where nobody’s there . . . I try to pray with others if I make it on time for the gathering” (110). Another student noted, “Sometimes I pray with others depending on if I know anyone who is there. Usually, I am alone and pray alone” (109).

A few students reported that they perform most of their prayers in their cars or at home. Some of them never prayed on campus, as noted below:

I never did pray on campus. I never found a place to pray there. I just look around and pray in the car. I never prayed at college. Otherwise, I pray at home. In addition, I never really ask for a place to pray (117).
[I pray] wherever I get a chance. Majority of the time it is at my house, work, or school. Not with other people, but if I get the chance to [pray] with friends I will pull them aside (113).

Another student indicated, “On campus, if I am stuck, I pray in the car. Otherwise I pray at home. I never prayed at the college campus” (118).

One informant stated, “. . . mostly at home. I do not pray on campus because I do not have time” (101). Another responded as follows:

Depending on my day and my schedule; if I know I am having a busy schedule, I try my best to pray in advance. Whatever I am going to miss or make up, I pray mostly at home. I never prayed at campus (119).

One of the participants said, “Usually, I do not have except 15 minutes between classes. If I can’t walk to a prayer room, I pray in any empty room, or at the student center in the prayer room” (116).

Along the same lines, another student’s comment follows:

I pray at home or work, and sometimes in the car if I do not have time to catch up with each prayer because each prayer does have its time. Usually, I do not pray with others on campus. I do not have time on campus, because after my class I head home or go to work (102).

Some other students mentioned, “[I pray] at home and sometimes on campus” (103) and “I pray by myself. I do not pray with others” (120).

**Question 2. Do you think prayer is important? Why?**

The participants indicated that prayers are important to them. Some of the insight from the participants indicated their agreement regarding the importance of prayer in
their lives. It is one of the pillars of Islam. The Prophet Mohammed said, “Islam is based on five principles.” The second is “... To offer the [compulsory congregational] prayers dutifully and perfectly ...” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 2, Hadith 1). Hence, it is obligatory to pray and distinguishes Muslim from non-Muslim. He also said, “That which differentiates us from the disbelievers and hypocrites is our performance of Salah [prayer]. He who abandons it, becomes a disbeliever” (Riyad as-Salihin, Book 9, Hadith 89). “Indeed, prayer has been decreed upon the believers a decree of specified times” (Quran 4:103). A person should be thankful to God for everything; the relationship with God should be taken seriously. Prayers make them feel safe and protected and prayers remind them that they are with God. Some of the participants’ insights are as follows:

To me prayer is everything. It gets you through your day, it teaches you right and wrong, you feel closer to God, and it makes you feel safe and protected (118).

It is a constant reminder of God. It puts things in perspective (101).

It connects the person to his God. It is an essential relationship everyone should have with God (102).

Yes, it is one of the main aspects of the religion of Islam and without it, it is hard to feel close to God (122).

It is one of the pillars of Islam (106, 124).

Yes, I do think it is important because prayer is one of the most important basic fundamentals of Islam (121).
Yes, the ability for a person to go about every single day of life and stop for something for a bigger purpose to make the day easier, I think if you can keep 4 out of the 5 prayers and it becomes part of the day, it makes the day easier (113). First . . . it distinguishes Muslim from non-Muslim. Second, if you pray five times a day, it will hold you back from doing something bad, you will think twice about doing it (117).

In addition, another student said, “I think it is very important; it is very spiritual, it keeps you intact and it keeps you reminded of what is important and overall achievements and goals. When I see certain things or do things, or hear people acting a certain way, sometimes if I remember verses from the Quran, it fits the Quran, it is a nice thing to see. It gives us a lifestyle to live” (114).

Another participant shared her views by pointing out that she will not feel calm if she misses her prayer, stating, “It is mandatory by the religion . . . . If I don’t pray every day or miss prayer time, I feel uncomfortable throughout the day” (103).

Two students indicated the significance of prayer, as it was the first issue addressed, and said, “The first question God asks us on the Day of Judgment is about prayer” (104, 120). Another participant indicated how prayers affect the individual’s life and how it becomes a personal choice for him, “It forces a break on you and calms you down and you think only of Allah [God] and you reposition yourself and organize your day, it clears your mind, it reminds you that you have higher goals in life” (105). One student said, “For me I just feel that everything happens from Allah [God] and I feel that Allah has a big influence on my life and I always want to show that I am thankful for everything” (119).
Another student shared her thoughts, stating, “[Prayer] maintains my identity as a Muslim” (108). Along the same lines, other students mentioned, “It keeps me on the Islamic path” (115, 123). One participant elaborated on that idea and said, “Prayer connects you with God and makes your faith better. It is a place where your stress is relieved. Because you tell Allah [God] your problems and you pray that Allah helps you, and Allah does help” (116).

In addition, one student mentioned that it is a process to cleanse the soul, stating, “[Prayer] is a renewing process. Whatever sins you make, it helps clean the soul” (109).

**Question 3. Does your knowledge of the Quran/Bible affect your daily life?**

**How?**

For the participants of this study, the knowledge of the Quran affects every aspect in their lives and daily practices, and it does not keep them back from practicing anything lawful. They described their perception of how the Quran affects their daily lives in numerous ways (e.g., making decisions, diet, conduct, attire, etc.). Only one person did not mention that knowledge of the Quran has any influence on his daily life.

One participant commented as follows:

My knowledge of the Quran is my knowledge of Islam in general. So, if I do something that contradicts with the teaching of the Quran, then I am not following the teaching of the religion . . . . One of the things the Quran is talking about is women and wearing *jilbab* and covering themselves modestly. [*Jilbab* is a long, loose-fitting garment worn by Muslim women that covers the entire body, except for head, face, and hands]. Therefore, I try to follow it as much as I can on my daily dress (106).
Another student noted the following:

It always reminds me to be thankful, to appreciate all the situations that I encounter whether they are good or bad. It helps me to reflect a lot about my daily experiences, especially working with children. Sometimes I work with children with special needs; I try to reflect on what the Quran says about understanding people despite their differences, never judging anybody, I always reflect back on the Quran (119).

One of the students mentioned that his beliefs keep him conscious of his actions by stating, “If I find myself veering towards something I should not be doing, I tell myself you should not be doing that, fear God, you should know better than that . . . . I keep reflecting on my action” (105).

One participant said, “It affects the choices I make on a day-to-day basis” (101).

Another one said, “I would say about 95% percent, once again because it allows you to determine whether or not something is morally acceptable. In a bigger decision if I did not know the answer off the top of my head, I would have to go back to consult the book” (113).

Another participant pointed out that the knowledge of the Quran affected her daily life by staying focused on her general affairs:

In ways when you are going to make a decision, Is this good for me and my religion; and if not, how is this going to affect me in a negative way? And so in this way I try to follow the Quran and Sunnah [Sayings of the Prophet Mohammed] (109).
Along the same lines, a participant mentioned, “[Prayer] keeps me away from committing wrong, keeps me out of trouble. It protects me when I ponder in my daily life. I just feel like it keeps me where I am supposed to be, close to God and on a straight path” (118).

Another student commented as follows:

Yes, it does. My knowledge of the Quran makes me unique in avoiding many of the bad things that many of the students my age do, such as drinking alcohol or going to night clubs, and instead Quran saves me from these bad things by asking me to pray, spend time with my family, and getting an education (121).

Similar to that, another student noted that the Quran formulizes the daily lifestyle of Muslim individuals. He said, “The Quran has the rules and has a lifestyle. As Aisha [the wife of the Prophet Mohammed] said, ‘The Prophet is the best example of the Quran. He is the walking Quran.’ So it is pretty much a lifestyle . . . . The Quran has everything that I need to build my character, my actions, my speech, and everything” (114).

Knowledge of the Quran gives meaning and more comprehension for everything around her, explained another study member. “In my science classes, when they say, ‘Oh, wow, the human body is amazing,’ I think, ‘Wow, Subhan Allah [glorify God]’ and I remember how in the Quran God tells us some of this stuff and how it all happens . . . When they say a researcher found it, I think, ‘But in the Quran it already tells us this.’ It helps take away stress” (108).

Many of the students gave practical examples from their daily lives. One of the participants stressed this idea and said, “Most of the things I can or cannot do are written in the Quran. Therefore, it has an effect on me in my daily life. I am not allowed to eat
pork, and if I’m out with someone, I will not eat it” (110). Knowledge of the Quran is considered as a filter for daily life practices, as indicated by a student in the following:

Everything I’m going to do, I have to run through my head. If it’s based on what’s in the Quran, based on teachings of the Prophet Muhammad . . . I take all that into account before I make a decision. If I meet a guy in my class, and he says, “Hi” and he wants to shake my hand, I tell him I’m sorry I can’t do that. (107)

Yes, I believe that my knowledge of the Quran allows me to make the correct choices on a daily basis when it comes to what is right and wrong (122).

Another student commented, “I think of the Quran during difficult times. If I get angry, I think of different hadiths [Sayings of the Prophet Mohammed] or verses to help me. I think there is a hadith that says when you are angry you should make Wudu [Ablution] “. . . so when one of you becomes angry, he should perform ablution” (Sunan Abi Dawud, 4784)]. So put water on yourself, so I do that to make me calmer” (101).

Along the same lines, one of the participants mentioned, “If I encounter a situation in which there is a problem and I remember reciting something from the Quran, I know how to resolve the problem or deal with a conflict at times” (115).

Two participants said, “I make sure everything I do is in accordance to the Quran” (102, 123). One study member said the following:

It does in a good way because I am doing what the Quran says; my actions are according to what the Quran says. It is the Allah (God) words. It affects my studies, work, communicating with others in good manners, and generally my daily life. The way I carry myself is different because of it (103).
Question 4. Did religious beliefs and day-to-day practices of religion influence your transition from high school to college? How?

The participants in this study indicated that religious beliefs and practices did influence their transition in different ways, and for some even created opportunities to grow. One of the participants said the following:

Yes, because in the Quran it explains how everyone should better themselves and in the Quran it emphasizes the importance of furthering your education. You know we have the saying, “Seek education even if you have to walk to China.” I think this helped me to get into college. It makes me do school work much more honestly. If I have homework I try to get the most out of it, learning as much as possible. I just try to be more credible to myself and honest (102).

Another student responded as follows:

No, I do not think so. For me getting an education is a personal choice. I do not believe that it had a lot to do with religion. I always pray that Allah will give me the opportunity to study and go to college; that is about it. I feel now, as I got older, I became more mature and religion became a bigger part of my life. At high school, I was not praying at that time and (I hate to say) religion was not the main part of my life (119).

Reflecting on their experiences and the changes in their academic environment, other students shared as follows:

College is much different than high school. You are thrown with much different kinds of people who are different than those in high school. You have to be conscious of religious beliefs in the back of your mind, like what friends you
make and what decisions you take. The subjects, for example. I am a biology major and we study evolution. In the most general idea, Islam does not believe that we evolved from apes; in that sense, it is a conflict of beliefs, but it is something I have to study regardless. I do not dorm because I prefer not to. With dorming, there is an issue. People drink on campus; it’s better to stay away from that, so I just commute (109).

I would say [it did influence my daily life] a little bit, I think just, you know, helping you stay out of trouble, not doing things you’re not supposed to be doing. Usually many college students get into, like, drinking, partying, or drugs, but then religious beliefs and prayers. Applying the Quranic beliefs in your daily life as a Muslim Arab in a society like this keeps you away from these things (118).

Along the same lines, one of the participants stated, “I am prepared for college religiously. I know what to avoid and how to just focus on my studies, I know to stay away from parties, drinking, and smoking and go to my classes” (115).

Another participant noted the following:

I feel like if you are religious and you know what is right and what is wrong. I think it should not influence which college you go to. My school is a religious Catholic school. The influence was the school, the education, and the major (117).

Moving from high school to college, students will realize the different people and environment they are in. One student emphasized this:

I went to a private school. They told us when you go to college it is going to be different. It helped train me to have this mentality that I’ll be around people very different and don’t interact that well with because I’ve lived in a bubble. When I
went to college, people asked me why I wear a scarf, but I was prepared because I knew I would face those questions. I did not feel that there was a cultural shock. The transition was a lot smoother with the religion, because at the end of the day, although everything was new, the stress did not feel as much as people who did not know there was a purpose in the end. I had someone to turn to and go back to God (108).

In that sense there was a good amount of change because I went to Islamic School. There was a difference and the first two years I did mess around a little. However, I was able to pick myself up Islamically and now I believe I have transitioned properly. In terms of hanging out with a different group of people. I did the EOF [Educational Opportunity Fund] Program before my first term so I spent the entire summer around a group of people different than those from home and when you are surrounded by more negatives than positives, some things may change (113).

Expanding on this idea, another member of the study shared her story about her transition, expressing her commitment to essential aspects of her religion:

In high school I went through a very difficult time because I went to three different high schools. I was always trying to find myself. I did not really understand many things about life, and I was growing. When I got to college, I knew it was different because of the level of maturity there was. And one day when deciding what I wanted to be, I was scared to do something with Art but I then prayed Salat Al-Istikharah [to seek guidance from God] and woke up the next morning after an amazing dream and felt the most amazing feeling I have
ever felt in my entire life. I knew that it was okay for me to follow my passion as though Allah [God] told me to go for it and to do what I loved. And ever since then I feel like I am closer to Allah for that, and I have just been a better person since this incident and it helped me grow (106).

Another student mentioned, “In a sense they do because they help relieve my stress through college. I could relieve my stress, I could pray to Allah when I need help or luck” (116). Another participant mentioned that going to a private school helped prepare him for the college life, “I used to go to a private school. It was much easier to practice my religion . . . we had Quran class and Islamic Studies. What I learned in school helped me practice it in college. It gave me a push into the real world” (110).

Another study member stated the following:

My transition was unique considering I was in private school till 11th grade, then went on to a public school. I could not replace my friends that I have had since first grade so I was alone my senior year of high school. I was a Muslim; nothing really shook that. Then I came here; the first group I meet here is the MSA (105).

Two students stated religious beliefs and day-to-day practices of religion did not influence their transition from high school to college:

I’m going to say no. Beliefs didn’t do anything (114).

No they did not. Throughout my high school and college career I have assimilated with American culture and therefore my religion did not really affect anything (122).

Question 5. Did religious beliefs and practices of religion influence your college choice? Why?
Many students indicated that their religious beliefs and practices did not influence their college choice. Choosing their college was purely dependent upon academic and career desire. Some of them mentioned that it is after all to serve their communities and making a difference in the lives of others. Responses of a few students were as follows:

No, it did not influence my college choice. It is the school and major after all (117).

No, I think it did not influence my college choice (122).

No, I do not think so. When I chose where I want to study, I never really associated it with religion. However, when I chose the field that I want to go into, yes, I did relate that to being a Muslim because I knew I always want to help people, give back to the community, and work with students who are at a disadvantage. When it came to that, yes (119).

Similar to that, another participant said the following:

No, not really; I do not know. I just felt like college is your choice as to what you want to do; it is your passion. I do not see how religion would stop me from becoming a teacher or a nurse. I always worked in the medical field. I like learning about diseases, sicknesses around the world, making a difference in people’s lives, helping them feel better. I would like to be a part of helping someone, for example, being treated for cancer (118).

On the other hand, other participants pointed out that religious beliefs and practices influenced their college choice partially or fully. A member of the study mentioned that it did influence the choice partially:
College choice, no. For my major, partially. Only because I am studying speech pathology, I thought how great this would be for Islam. In addition, if I do research and can do my Ph.D. in this in the name of religion, it will be really good because Muslims in the media have a really bad image. So if I could show that we as Muslims are contributing to society for like communication disorders and speech delay, that’s a big thing; and if I can help with that all in the name of Islam, it’ll be a lot better than what the media is portraying (108).

Another participant said that she was alone at her high school and was looking for a Muslim community at her college,

No, not really. Because most colleges are the same. It’s in my own self, what I do at college (110).

No, because I chose my college based on my future career (124).

No, it did not; it was purely educational (104, 120).

No, because I chose my college based on my major (115, 123).

No, my religion did not affect my college choice. I knew what I wanted to do—something in computers—and pursued my college choice accordingly (122).

College choice for some of the study members was just a career desire; our religious beliefs are encouraging us to seek education. One member stressed that by saying, “No, not really. Because I did not think there would be any barriers for Muslims attending a college. I was not caring about how they will accommodate my religion. I am studying accounting, and it is a career desire” (102). Another student said it was his choice. “It didn’t really affect my college choice. I just wanted to choose the best college for me” (109). Another member of the study agreed, “No, not at all. I did not think it
would be . . . when I was looking at the colleges I was hoping to apply to, all of them had Muslim Student Associations. So I kind of knew that no matter what college I go to, there would be a group of people I could be with, a room I could pray in . . . it did not really have an influence” (107).

Another student mentioned that he was looking for a Muslim community on campus, which he will find wherever he goes:

Not really, I do not think they did. I knew I was going to be Muslim wherever I was. I knew that there would be a community of Muslims there. I just needed to find them. Most colleges have MSAs. I knew that right off the bat that I was going to go to the MSA of any college and find friends and make connections there (105).

Similarly, another student responded as follows:

Not really. Basically I wanted an MSA, and most colleges had MSAs . . . I think that the MSA helps in keeping me on track with my religion. It helped me learn many new things about my religion. I cannot go to the masjid [mosque] every time because I do not drive; and when I am free, my parents are working, and this helps me get what I need in my religion. (116)

Yes it did, I made sure the college I went to had a good Muslim population. To a certain extent, I wanted to make sure it had a decent MSA. Why is that important to me? Because I do not want to feel left out, I want to feel part of the community. I went to high school where I was the only Muslim, so I wanted to be part of the Muslim community (101).
Another member of the study reflected on her experience by discussing her college choice as well as a cultural issue Arab American and Muslim students deal with, which is dorming. She explained as follows:

Exactly, it did influence it. I mainly came to this college because it was the best choice for me, most convenient; and financially speaking, they gave me the best scholarship . . . All in all, I do not think the religion actually influenced my decision to come to this college . . . Because religion and culture are so intertwined sometimes, it is hard to differentiate the two. My family is against me dorming [living away from home] or going to school far away. That’s why I applied to this college, because it is close to my house if it was up to me, I would have gone to another school. I think it is a cultural thing, not a religious one (106).

Another participant elaborated about his experience, explaining that he needs to stay close to his family. He expressed the following:

For me primarily, I kind of wanted to stay close. Family is important to me, and I tried going to another college. That was the goal and then there was a problem with financial aid. It kept decreasing and then I was in the summer, and I was not going to that college, so I ended up choosing this university, which worked out much better than I thought. I do have a couple of friends here who came from the same high school . . . and brought me to MSA. Because of them, now I have many Muslim friends on campus (114).

**Category 2. Social factors.** This theme addresses the students’ understanding of their socioeconomic status, gender, racial issues, social environment, lifestyle, and the students’ understanding of Muslim as a marginalized minority group on campuses.
**Question 6. Can you take me through a typical day on and off campus?**

From the answers of the participants, most students are religiously devoted to their beliefs as well as to their studies and daily life. Some students mentioned the challenge of driving from a long distance or taking the bus for two hours to get to their colleges versus dorming. Three students indicated that they are married, two of them are parents, and the third one is expecting after her graduation. Some participants pointed out that they work on-campus or off-campus in the morning or the afternoon as well as help in family affairs. They are involved in different clubs such as Minority Association for Pre-Med Students (MAPS), Teacher Education Club (TEC), Equestrian, Muslim Students Association (MSA), Future Healthcare Professionals club (FHP), National Student Speech Hearing Language Association (NSSHLA), Art Association, Student Government Association (SGA), and physical activities.

Some of the insights from the students regarding their typical daily life were as follows:

I usually work at a doctor’s office for a few hours as a receptionist . . . then I go to school for a few hours . . . . Say I am here at 9:30; I leave at 5:00. So I have four classes in a row depending on the day. I usually have a break for an hour or a little; and in the break, I’m doing my work (110).

I wake up and go to the gym early. I stop at the dining hall on my way home, get in the shower and get dressed for my day. I usually attend class and in between visit my friends throughout the campus and go out to eat with them. I get home pretty late and work on homework till I go to sleep (122).
In the morning, get ready, go to classes and in between classes study and do some homework, hang with friends if I have time, and go home and study and finish doing the homework. That is basically my day (117).

I wake up in the morning at 5:00 to pray Fajr, then I try to go back to sleep. After that, I wake up at 7:00, then I leave to campus. My classes are back to back with only 10 minutes in between them. Sometimes I use the 10 minute break to pray Jamah [group] with other students. I leave campus at 4:00; and when I’m at home, I do my homework. After that I watch some movies, read some Quran, then I go to sleep (121).

In between classes I make sure to make any appropriate prayers . . . at the end of the day I catch the bus and go home. I pray at home, eat dinner, and go to work depending on the day (105).

Now, being that this is my last semester, a typical day for me: I wake up, I have an early start, I go to my field placement so that it is mainly most of my day from 8:00--3:30. Sometimes after my field placement, I have classes at campus. I go home, I cook, I clean, I do everything else that I have to do, and do my assignments. I live with my husband; I do what I have to do, but still I want to be a good wife and make sure that I fulfill my responsibilities at home (119).

Similar to that, another participant said the following:

In the morning, I wake up at 5, pray; and then if I am free, I go back to sleep, wake up, take care of the baby. That is number one; as soon I open my eyes, I go to the baby, feed him, make sure everything is okay with him. Then I just go on with my daily life until I go to school or work. Having a baby does affect my
daily life. For some people it is the whole thing of stress and it can get stressful, but in a way for me it is motivation because now you are going to school and doing all success for someone, which is your child, and that is a big thing. Last semester I took five courses and finished with 5 A’s. I did make the Dean’s list, and that was with the baby (118).

I go to college early to do some work, and after class I hang out with some friends, and then afterwards if it is prayer time, I head to the MSA room in the student services building and pray by myself there (103).

Typical day on campus would consist of waking up, going to class, and coming home. If there is more than one class, I try my hardest to get in groups to study. If there are no study groups, then I just sit on my computer and do research or something like that. I work about 30 hours a week, mainly focused on Friday and Saturday, to just make money for my own expenses like food and gas (113).

I work here on campus; I would work from 9-3 and have class during the rest of the day (101).

I go to work in the morning and then head over to the college after work and then home . . . After my class, I hit home or go to work. This is repeated every day (102).

I wake up, pray, eat, go to classes, do homework, go to the gym, and study. I’m not involved in many activities other than MSA (104).

One student described her round trip to college. She stated the following:

I pray the Morning Prayer, then take two buses to get to the campus; it takes about two hours to get to college. Then I go to the writing center or the science
enrichment center. I finish my classes, then make my prayer in any empty open classroom. After classes I go home. During my journey, many people on the bus stop are begging for money. In the begging, I used to give some money, but later I realized that these people do not want to work. Then I stopped giving. When I reach home, I have my dinner, do my homework, then if I have some time I will recite some Quran (116).

Another participant mentioned the following:

On campus, first class is at 9:30 . . . so at 6:00 a.m., I try waking up and I call some people up to wake them up for Fajr [dawn prayer, one of the five daily prayers performed by practicing Muslims]. We pray and then go back to sleep. I wake up at 7:30-8:00 a.m., take a shower, bring some food, and drive to the business college. Take my class from 9:30-10:45, then drive over to the main campus . . . walk over to the MSA room and hang out there all day till about 6:00 p.m. for my next class . . . then go home after class, eat, watch TV, and obviously prayers are throughout the whole day, and then eat and go to sleep (114)

*Question 7. Why did you decide to attend this college? How much did financial issues affect your decision?*

The responses of the participants show that most students indicated that financial issues were the main factors in choosing their college in addition to other reasons such as distance from the residence or home, majors, college population, dorming, and programs offered. The amount of scholarships contributed heavily to the students’ decisions to attend their college of choice. The demographic questionnaire analysis shows that more than 50% of students are receiving scholarships from their colleges. In addition, the
demographic questionnaire data illustrated that the income of 45% of the participants’ families was more than $75,000, 15% was more than $50,000, 20% was more than $35,000, and 20% was more than $25,000.

Financial assistance was a central element for some participants. “Financial reasons affected [my decision] a lot considering I got a full scholarship, which is why I chose to come here” (101).

One student provided an answer to this question as follows:

My main reason for attending this college is that I really like how student-centered it was. I did not feel that I will be one of a thousand students. I felt like I will be one out of 20 students at most in a class. I felt that I will be getting more of that individualized attention. I also noticed how accepting they are of cultural differences. I see it is a diverse population; they want to get to know you. Many of my professors ask me where I am from; they want to know about my culture, they want to know about what we practice, so I felt that I was accepted here.

Going to a private college, it is always going to be more expensive than other universities or colleges; but at the end of the day, my parents supported me no matter where I decided to go. When it came to finances, they did not mind; they just wanted me to be comfortable wherever I chose. I have been married for the past three and a half years; I got married after starting my college. When I was in my junior year at college, I got married. Because I started my college education before I got married, my parents always paid for my education; not that my husband does not find education is important for me, but my parents desire for me
to finish my education. From the beginning they always said that their daughters’ education financially will be on them (119).

Another student explained by stating, “I decided [to come to this college] because they gave me the largest scholarship, and also because it’s like 5 minutes away from my house . . . so I thought it would be a great idea to come here” (107).

One of the participants stated the following:

My major and the school that it was affiliated with. It did affect it a lot. Based on how much scholarship I was getting, based on financial aid. My school is a very expensive college, and it is more expensive than any other college. I could not go to other colleges because part of their programs EOF [Educational Opportunity Fund] is to dorm, and my Dad did not allow me to dorm. He was completely against it. Therefore, I lost my chance to attend any one of those colleges. This college offered me some scholarships beside financial aid and some student loans (117).

When the scholarships came in, it was decided by my dad that this college would be a better option because of the fact that I would not be able to afford other colleges without taking massive loans . . . . In the end, the financial aspect played a big role in me deciding what college I went to. Finances in this economy have to affect your decision, especially if you do not want to come out with a massive ball-and-chain wrapped onto your foot by the time you graduate (105).

Another student shared her thoughts as follows:

I like it; it is more like a small community, smaller classes, not too crowded, I don’t like crowded places, I just felt like it’s very small. You are not stuck with
classes of over one hundred students, confused, and stressed out. I felt comfortable. I mean the school is pretty expensive, but I do not think it affected me too much because I got all of it taken care of through financial aid, loans, grants, and through my husband. My husband supports me, supports the fact that I am in school. He pushed me to it; he is a great help (118).

One of the students indicated that distance was more of an issue than financial cost because his financial aid was covering tuition. “It was good for my major in biology. I had other choices . . . but it was very far for me. Financial issues did not affect my decision because financial aid and loans currently take care of my college tuition” (103).

Another participant mentioned that finance was behind her decision:

I applied to other schools and some private colleges, and they were very expensive, and I was accepted here so I decided to come here. My dad told me you could go to a private school if you want and I will pay it because I got a scholarship, but it was not enough and in that sense I felt very guilty because I don’t want my family to pay it. It was either that or loans, and loans are a touchy subject for Muslims because of the interest. It was my decision to come here to relieve my parents of the financial burden because my mother is going to college and my brother will be going to college in a year, then my other brother. It is one after another will be going to college (116).

I decided to attend this college; it has my major as an undergrad, and financial issues did not really affect my decision (115).

One of the participants noted that distance and financial aid affected his enrollment decision at this college:
The financial aid had some [problems] and North NJ College was out of the picture, and then it was summer so it was already late and I didn’t really want to go to UNJ . . . I thought it was too far. I wanted NNJC because it had what I wanted. I was originally looking at civil engineering. I then found out about another community college and this college, I contacted it, and they told me that they would give me a scholarship and they would help me out and that they had a program with NNJC for civil engineering (114).

Another informant said the following:

I originally was not planning to come here. I was going to go to [another university], but at the last minute I found out they do not have my full program, only for a master’s. I did not want to waste time or tuition. I got a full scholarship here. So I figured I should just come here . . . . Yes, financial was a part of it. I was offered a full ride (108).

Some other insights of the participants were as follows:

Just because it was close and they gave me more in scholarship than they did in another college. Financial reasons was 100% of the decision as to why I came here. I felt I could not go very far (106).

This college isn’t that expensive so it was mainly because this was the most reasonably priced college (104).

For money purposes solely. I was accepted into [other universities] but didn’t receive scholarships (109).
Financial issues were the main reason I attended this college. I was accepted into many other schools but did not receive money from them, and therefore chose to go here (122).

At first, I didn’t really want to go here. But my sister went here, so it made it easier for the ride, and also because I got a good amount of scholarship. So it was the best choice for financial issues (110).

A student whose experience seemed different from the rest responded as follows: I have many friends that recommended this college for my major, and it is also close to my work. It is also affordable compared to other colleges. Actually, it did affect my decision. I have no family to support; I can afford to pay for my college (102).

**Question 8. Do you feel that being a male/female influenced your college enrollment decision? How?**

Among the participants in this study, gender did not influence their college enrollment decision. When it came to attending college, there was no question about it. Education was the only option; it seemed to be a priority for all of the participants and their families, regardless of the type of education or the name of the college. Participants in the study were looking to attend colleges for different reasons, such as cultural pressure, growth, better opportunities, having a good career, being more independent, and experiencing things that challenged their beliefs and gender. Some of the participants’ insights were as follows:

No. I always had in mind that I was going to go to college (110).
No. It is not really a factor. It is more academic, based on whether I liked the campus . . . I’m sure by the time I’m done with my college years I would have experienced many things that challenge my beliefs or my gender (109).

No, I don’t feel like I attended college primarily because I’m a girl. I attended college because I want to have a good career (101).

No, my gender did not influence my college enrollment (121).

It did not affect anything at all. I’m an independent female and I know how to think for myself. Gender did not influence my college choice at all (103).

No. I just feel at this day and age if men and women are not looked at equally, then it will be soon enough. I just don’t think it matters (113).

No, I don’t believe me being a male decided my fate. I strictly looked at colleges according to what would best suit my major (122).

No, not really. I don’t see any difference in being a female attending college (108, 124).

No I do not. I did not think it would make a difference. It does not matter . . . male or female. If I was going to dorm . . . I did not really think of that, but I would not have gone to a faraway college because I would not have wanted to dorm; that is just personal (107).

In this university? That is a tough question; I do not think so. Because it was financial aid. I mean I cannot think of it. If I was a female, where would I apply to? Actually, maybe it would be better to go here because it is closer. But because I am a male, did I choose this college because of this? No I don’t think so. I made it clear to other colleges that I wanted to stay close (114).
Others had a different opinion on the gender issue through the lenses of cultural values and perspectives. One student who reflected on this topic stated the following:

Yes, because my mom, ever since I was young, she always instilled in me the importance of having a degree, having an education as a woman. She said do not ever feel like you can’t do whatever you want to do. She just always wanted me to have a backup in life and never feel like if, God forbid, something were to arise, I would not know what to do or where to go. So for me education is always important (119).

Another participant indicated the following:
As a Muslim and an Arab person, usually society puts pressure more on males to become better and better in their life. If you really want to avoid criticism in the future. People keep saying, you are the man; you have to do something. It is a strong factor that influenced me, as a male, to do more than I do (102).

Other participants responded as follows:
Being an Arab and female, there are some positions out there that aren’t really meant for women (118).

Not really. Just as the man of the house, you know you need to be educated to take care of the family. Without education, you will not be able to do that (104).

Gender did not influence my decision. I do not think if I was a guy I would go to another school. Basically, I am coming to school for higher education and better job opportunities. I did apply for some jobs, but they would not hire me, giving many excuses. I decided to come to college. If not having a college degree did not work out, hopefully having a college degree will work out (116).
A few informants shared their experiences on this issue. Parents had no reservation about females going to college. Some students mentioned that their parents, due to cultural values, are against their attending colleges away from home or dorming on campus.

It made a big difference because culturally it is harder for a female to dorm. My brother fought to dorm at his university. My parents were against it. So my options were limited coming out of high school (106).

Another participant mentioned that dorming was a key factor in her choice, not gender. “Being a female did not influence my enrollment decision; the only thing that I knew I could not do is to dorm. I don’t feel comfortable dorming, and my parents will not let me. That’s why I drive 50 minutes to college” (115).

Along the same lines, another student stated the following:

Yes, I feel that being a female did influence my decision regarding the choice of college. As a Muslim/Palestinian female, my parents had more restrictions as to how far it is and whether I would have to dorm or travel. A college more than an hour commute would probably be out of the question. I also believe I should correct myself; as an "Arab," I had more restrictions. I believe culture has more of an effect than religion does because nowhere does it say it’s haram to dorm or it’s haram to travel for school. Culture plays more of a role because questions such as “What will people say about us letting our daughter dorm or travel and she is not married?” or something like, “You are a girl and a girl only sleeps elsewhere when she is married” (117).

Question 9. Do you feel safe at campus as an Arab/Muslim student? How?
According to most participants, being an Arab or Muslim did not affect their feeling of being safe on campuses due to the tolerance among students and staff, emergency assistance stations on the ground, security or police force presence, students’ diversity, and the presence of the Arab and Muslim student population. Comments from the participants on this topic were as follows:

Yes, I mean I’ve been here for three years now. I feel very safe. I can stay late on campus until 8:30 or 9:00 pm and never fear anything ever happening to me. You feel that sense of safety (118).

The students are so polite, the professors are amazing, and you really do feel the sense of a community here, no matter where you are from. I have met people from many different countries (119).

Along the same lines, another student indicated, “Definitely, nobody ever discriminated; nobody ever made me feel left out or that I was different. On the contrary, they were treating me nicely. The teachers are nice and extremely comforting. I have a good experience there” (117).

Someone else said, “Yes, I feel safe, I do, especially because I feel like there are a lot of Muslims around on campus. I know that there are other people there. It makes me feel secure. If I need anything, I know they are there. The environment around the school is pretty secure; it’s not bad” (110).

Yes, I feel like where I am is very diverse so I do not feel like I am targeted. There are other places that people are very racist; however, on this campus not at all (104).
I do, I usually do not interact with people, but I think it is because the school is so diverse, you do not feel targeted for your race (102).

I feel safe. I do not walk around with paranoia that anyone is going to harm me in any way or say anything negative to me. People are very diverse and seem to be very tolerant for the most part. Tolerant in the sense that even if they do not like you/your culture, they will be accepting it (109).

Yes, I do. I have never once been targeted by people and therefore have never really felt concerned about my safety (122).

Of course, I feel very safe on campus. I have many non-Muslim friends and a lot of Muslim friends and I have never felt discrimination or racism upon me due to the diversity that is located on campus (103).

I do feel safe, maybe more than others because they are very open in this school. I noticed that a lot. With the professors and the students, they are very accepting. I feel very safe (107).

Yes, I do. Well, I feel like there are a lot of Muslims and Arabs on campus.

Whenever I see a fellow Arab/Muslim, they say salam [peace] to me. Also, there are many on-campus police who make me feel safe (101).

I know that there are police around, and there are stations where you could press a button when you need any assistance (115).

Other participants responded as follows:

I feel very safe. On this campus, everyone is very nice and very tolerant, and that is why I feel safe. And you don’t see this at other college campuses (106).
Yes, I do. I have not done anything to anyone, and no one has done anything to me. I go along with my day knowing I will not agree with everyone, and not everyone will agree with me; but I know I have to treat everyone with civility. For most people I know here on campus, I am one of the first Muslims they have ever met. In my ethics class, I was talking; and it was the first time they heard anything from a Muslim (105).

In terms of security, I think I stand in the same place as others, which is normal safety. However, in terms of what I say, I usually keep myself neutral and I do not really care. I do not think there is any type of physical security issues. However, mental security arises when you are afraid to say something in public in case the wrong person is around the corner listening to what you have to say (113).

One of the participants had a different opinion on this topic, as was apparent when she spoke openly on the NYPD spying activities on Muslim students. The language she used was strong as she stated the following:

"Partially. I feel safe in the sense that I do not feel there is any physical danger. But law-wise, not really because of the thing that happened with the NYPD and how we found out they were infiltrating MSAs in our universities in New Jersey during my freshmen year, which is morally wrong. And when I found out, I was in the MSA, and I actually became an officer the year after. I started getting worried and double-checked everything we do. Non-Muslims even attended our meetings. I did not want to get charged with something like terrorism or something (108)."

Other students mentioned the following:
Last year . . . one of the MSA members was told by one of the university officials that somebody was coming here to speak to us about why we have been spied on. The meeting never happened and the person never came as much as I knew. That was weird; I am sure this never happened to any club. I brought this matter to a previous MSA official, and I was told that during his time, one random person came to their room and started asking them about their political stances regarding different issues. They said they never met that person; that was weird and during that time I was aware from my reading that spying was going around in other states on mosques and schools (114).

Yes, I do feel safe at campus as an Arab Muslim student because I have many friends who respect me. In addition, I see myself as part of the college because I am enrolled in many of the clubs and activities provided by my college. Yet, many students were disturbed when they learned about the NYPD spying on the Arab and Muslim college students at different universities in New Jersey (121). Following a conversation with two students on the issue of Syria, one of the participants said the following:

The last thing I did not hear it clearly because of the music playing, but I am 90% sure I heard one of them saying all Muslims are terrorists. His attitude shows that he hates Muslims. I asked him what did you say? He said never mind and they left (114).

On the same topic, another student noted the following:

I remember two years ago when the Arab/Muslim students were suspecting one of the students was spying on them for one semester, then they did not see that
person after that time. We are not doing anything wrong to hide or be afraid of (109).

**Question 10. Who is the most helpful to you when you have a question about a problem at college? Why?**

Students provided different answers regarding this question, and this depended on if the question was academic-related or not. For the participants, the most helpful persons when they had a question about an issue were family members, bosses, friends, professors, and counselors or advisors. Some of the insights from the students on this issue were as follows:

Usually MSA members. Pretty much anything I need whether it’s helping out with choosing professors or related college homework, I go to my MSA friends. They are always here to help; and they have just as much, if not more, experience. They are always my number one choice when it comes to help. We know each other on a personal level, and they have become more of a family (114). Along the same lines, another student said, “I would ask a friend going to this college, or I would go to an advisor or ask the professor or the department head; it depends on the question” (116).

I would have to say, most of the time I confided maybe in another student who is with me in the class. Because usually they know what is going on. They are with me in the same class, and they are sharing with me the same experience. So that I feel it will be easier to convey the question to them. If not, I will talk to a professor (119).
I usually go to my parents or my advisors or other students. All good choices and options. My mother knows a lot; she was raised here and has a good understanding of college (105).

My mother, her experience. She deals with everyday situations. She had already gone through the college experience with my sister and is there for me for any type of questions I have (113).

My mother because she gives very good advice. I feel more comfortable and she is my mother. She is very smart and knows about certain things (109).

Mom, she is older and she went to college before in the U.S. (115).

My older sister because she already went through it. She knows if she did anything wrong, she would not want me to do the same. And she has always been helpful even through HS, I always went to her (110).

Well, it depends on the issue. Academic problems I would definitely go to my professors. I have a good relationship with my professors, and my mentor is very helpful. She taught me some courses (106).

I usually ask my college staff and professors because they always are helpful (121).

Usually my boss; she works on campus, and she got her master’s from this school. I go to her because I trust her opinion, and I can relate to her a lot. She got a scholarship to this school just like me, and she studied psychology just like what I am currently studying (101).
If it’s an academic problem, I usually just go to professors or my friends. I would go to my friends first because I do not feel the need to bother my professors with every question (102).

My advisor . . . whenever I speak to him, I feel very comfortable, more than I probably would with other advisors. I feel because I am Muslim, he pays close attention to me. He tells me to come to him for help. He is also in my department so I will probably end up taking classes with him in the future (107).

If I have any academic problems, I usually go to an adviser or the chair of the department. If I have a social problem, I just bring it up with my friends. I do not involve my family in any things that happen at college because college is my area and my family would not understand (103).

My dean has been there for me since day one; and whenever there are any questions, I go to him. I believe because we relate to each other in so many ways is the reason why he is my number 1 choice (122).

Another participant responded as follows:

[I ask] my mentor and my advisor. In the honors college, they give you a mentor, someone who is in the same major as you and is an upperclassman. I can always ask her like who was the better professor, and she helped me with the application process. My advisor is really very helpful because she has been in the program for more than 20 years. She knows all the classes I have to take and she takes me through that (108).
One student did have a different experience. She stated, “My family, mainly my husband, he is very supportive physically, mentally, financially, and emotionally, thank God” (118).

**Question 11. Did you ever encounter any discrimination or stereotyping during your college transition? How?**

Some students mentioned that they never encountered any type of stereotyping, while others had different responses and opinions. Some participants mentioned that they encountered discrimination, stereotyping, disrespect, dirty looks, etc. They described their experiences in specifics as follows:

I did encounter it in one of my classes. The teacher was not too . . . he used to say stuff about Muslims. I felt like he was discriminating and stereotyping. He used to make comments here and there that were not necessary. I do not remember, but I felt he was not fair with me . . . in that class (110).

No, honestly. Because I feel like college students are being educated and are so open to new ideas, different things, and beliefs. At high school some students used to mock me because of my beliefs (they used to be atheist) because I believe in God, they used to be very disrespectful. They want to punch me because of my belief, which I did not see at this college (106)

At my previous institution . . . there was one instance where I felt like a cashier didn’t want to serve me because of my religion. I also took a religion class where people butt heads a lot, and I felt like me and one other Muslim in my class were always being attacked whenever Islam was brought up in the class (101).
Because I went to a private school my entire life, I never got used to people staring at me. However, when I first came here during my freshmen year, I used to notice it more and more. Now I have stopped noticing it. I was a little uncomfortable at first coming here . . . but now it is fine. Maybe just freshman year was a bit hard (107).

Another participant described her transition experience as follows:

I have not encountered any discrimination. College is different from high school, so I have not faced any. At high school, the kids are more immature so that they tend to believe the news and Fox news, which holds a lot of propaganda. I watched a video that said Muslims visit Jihadi websites during their free time. People would come up to me and put their jackets on their heads and ask me if I do this during the bus time and say, Oh look at her; she is a terrorist.” Another thing that happened was, I did not know when Osama Bin laden died and someone came up to me and said, “Sorry for your loss.” I was confused and asked around what happened, then found out that they were talking about Osama Bin Laden. I got death threats from a lot of them. One time, some girl said she would beat me and leave me unconscious. In 10th grade, the day before September 11th anniversary, a car stopped and threw leaves and grass in my face and ran away. Right after, an electric company car stopped and asked if I was okay. Then I reported it to the police. In elementary school, my teacher reported me to the police because she thought I was committing terroristic activities because I had a flight simulator and she thought we were training pilots. Even my teacher reported to my counselor that I need psychiatric evaluation or help because of a
sentence I said, while they did not help me when cheese sticks were thrown at me during lunch, spitting gum at me or sticking it to my hijab. I was made a joke of because of my hijab. Some people asked me to ignore it or remove my hijab to avoid such things. It was my decision to put it on, and no one will force me to remove it. You should ask the people bullying me to stop their nonsense behavior. The discrimination goes on and on (116).

No, thankfully, I have not (122).

Another student said, “Just mean stares. Sometimes people look at me with a dirty look. While walking, someone may look at me and give me a dirty look” (115).

Similar to that, another participant mentioned the following:

[During] freshman year. It was not necessarily racism, but they would look at me weird, because I am the only one wearing a scarf in all of my classes, except when I purposely go with my friend. So they might look at me weird. But I am very social and an extrovert, so I always talk to them and open discussion. So people start to see that it’s not like what they see in the media. Most of them, all they know is the media; they do not interact with Muslims in person. And Muslims themselves, they’re kind of in their little communities and their little bubbles so they don’t really attract them. There was an incident, which was flat out racism and Islamophobia. Last semester, I was part of the social sciences track. The advisor, I knew he was going to give me a problem just because he is a Zionist. I knew this because of whatever he published. I mean my advisor is Jewish and she is awesome. It is different, and I feel like Zionists attack Muslims personally. And he wrote books like anti-semitism in Islam. But when I took his class and during
the class the first day, he already was attacking Muslims and talking about how they are horrible people; they’re all anti-Semitic, and all the books he wanted us to read were terrible, based on no facts. It was all evidence taken out of context. I ended up dropping the class and changed my track (108).

Another participant responded as follows:

Coming from high school to college, no. Just the moment during the bake sale. (I am 90% sure I heard one of them saying all Muslims are terrorists). And I always felt that it was weird that this question was asked so much because I have never experienced it up until a few weeks ago (114)

**Category 3. Cultural characteristics.** This theme includes family, family status, family values, value of education, schooling and college preparation, cultural and religious values, and lifestyle. In this study, most of the participants came from families with high educational attainment. Family background affects the students’ life at school or college and influences their education success. Furthermore, Islam considers rearing children as one of the basic rewarding deeds. To understand the cultural characteristics of the Arab/Muslim families, one must identify essential elements of their culture such as religion, family, and traditions. Nevertheless, cultural values shaped the participants’ worldviews, and religion played a major role in influencing their daily lifestyle, social and cultural assimilation.

**Question 12. Within your family, how much emphasis was placed on the value of academic achievement and college preparation? Did this influence your decision to pursue college education? How?**
From their answers, students were able to describe a clear picture of the value of education within their families. By providing their children with all the means, such as helping in doing homework, using incentives to promote education among their children, stressing getting good grades, attending SAT prep classes, sending them to private schools or paying for their tuition, parents are pushing their children to finish their postsecondary education. The demographic questionnaire analysis illustrates that more than 50% of the students were on the honor track during their high school education. Not attending college to acquire a degree was not an option for the participants of this study. Statements from the participants included the following:

Both my parents graduated from school. Even though many parents want their children to become doctors or lawyers or something that makes a lot of money, my parents just stressed the fact that I had to continue my education no matter what. I think it did influence my decision to pursue education. I think school is pointless, but I am better at it than real life (113).

A lot. My father always emphasized the fact that he wanted me to be a doctor. On the other hand, my mother stressed the fact that I got a college education and became successful. During high school, I always envisioned continuing my education so I guess the fact that my parents stressed it a lot on me had some kind of influence (111).

A lot. I went to so many SAT prep classes. My family was always supporting me. . . . we went to a school where you paid for your education. I am not going for free. We are investing money and time to get my education (110).
. . . places a lot of emphasis. Wanted us all to graduate from HS and go to college. He [Dad] did not graduate HS, my mom did, and he sees how difficult it is to live here without a HS diploma. I watched my dad struggle. It was harder to find a job because he was a HS dropout, so I did not want to see myself in the same situation (109).

Within my family I got a lot of emphasis to get a college education, and their courage really influenced me to study hard and pursue a college education (121). Huge. It is taken for granted you have to go to college obviously. And it’s encouraged to go beyond that and get a master’s, PhD . . . my family from both sides, they’re all educated. This definitely influenced it [the decision] because we were always surrounded by it. They are always preparing us for what is going to happen when we go to college (108).

I would say a lot. College is very important. My father is the one who pushes me and my siblings to go to college. He tells us about how important it is to have a degree and establish something of yourself and for yourself. So I’d say it was very important. I think it influenced. Since we moved . . . a few years ago, he would always look at this college and say, this is your school (107).

Very high. My parents. I guess Muslims, or like most Arab parents, if you get a B that is terrible; you have to get strait A’s. If it is 99, why is it not 100? They keep pushing us to do the best we can. Of course it was, without a question, I have to go to college. It was not an option not to go to college and I wanted to go to college. They influenced me so much that education is so important. Not everyone goes to college, and I want to pursue master’s and even higher, InshaAllah [God’s
will]. My parents, especially my father, kept saying you have to go to college; you have to get your bachelor’s degree. In this country you cannot go anywhere without education/college degree (106).

A lot of influence and pressure was put on us to do well academically. To make sure we ended up in college at some point. It was expected throughout my life that I had to go to college . . . . When we were younger, a lot of emphasis was put on getting things done on time and getting things done in the right way; they will check our homework they will help us out. I guess it was expected of me that I would be going to college. It was already part of my plan to go to college, for the rest of my life living here, you can do much with a college degree; you cannot do much without a college degree. My parents somewhat influenced me, but mainly growing up in this country it is evident in seeing how important it is for you to have a college degree in order to become successful. If you want a good life with material comforts, you need a college degree (105).

Well, my parents definitely wanted me to go to college; they wanted me to be financially stable with a good job and well paid, so they did put emphasis on college and learning (104).

Since I was young, it was instilled in me that education is key and without knowledge, there is nowhere to go in life. So, yes, this did influence my decision in pursuing college because it was the only thing I knew. Nothing else was an option (122).

My family had a lot of emphasis on becoming academically successful. They pushed me to become as successful and as educated as possible to achieve
whatever I needed to. The way I grew up influenced me heavily on furthering my education (103). They [my parents] are basically depending on me now and my little sister. My brother dropped from high school to get his GED; he is a manger in NY now. The most pressure was put on me, but they never showed that because I am the only one going to college. My dad always says I am so proud of you; he always encouraged me, so I felt that I have that pressure on me. I have to do well, I want to make him happy, and I do not want to be a failure. In high school, I did not do anything. I was very upset at the fact that my dad moved me from private school to public school my sophomore year. I did not really care. I hated public high school. I rebelled. I did not do anything. I did not care (117).

My parents, from 8th grade they were telling me think of what you want to study as a major. I changed what I want to be four times as a professional. In 12th grade, I came to a conclusion for what I want to be. I was so stressed to find colleges, my parents kept asking me to follow up with colleges and call them to find out my application status. They were very supportive and encouraging when it comes to college education . . . . Actually, I want to go to school and learn more. I don’t want to be closed-minded and once I came to this college I learned a lot. I am not regretting any decision of me going to college since 8th grade (116). A lot, I have an uncle who’s a doctor and another uncle who’s an engineer. My parents wanted me to become like these uncles in order for me to be a college graduate. This influenced my decision; also, my parents told me that it would be better to advance my career and I believed that they were right (102).
Along the same lines, another student said the following:

A whole lot, yes. Even from Syria since I was growing up, my mom always emphasized “doctor” and I never wanted it. When they knew a doctor was not my future, they just stressed good grades. They used incentives to get me where I am. It does influence to a point, but at the same time, we all knew that the bare minimum was a bachelor’s degree, and without it we know we cannot succeed in life (114).

Another participant stated the following:

Definitely a lot; when I finished high school, at first I wasn’t really excited about going to college, didn’t really want to do it. Then I did a medical assistant program for a year and a half to complete and got a certificate to be a medical assistant. Then after two years, I told myself that by the time I’m 30 I don’t want to stay a medical assistant, I want to have a career, I want to have a degree (118).

One member mentioned that within the same family members, individuals may have different opinions, even between the student and her mom. She noted the following:

Well, my parents are very big on getting an education, not only on me but also on my brother as well. The rest of my family, they are not big on education. I may probably name a couple of other family members that pursued their education and went to college and got their degrees; other than that, it is mainly my parents pushing us to continue. I can say my family is putting a huge emphasis on education. Yes, because when I was in the high school, when my mom would push me and tell me I want you to go to college, I did not understand why; I used to look at her, “Why, why do I need to go to college? What is left for me to
learn?” She just said “go, go, go, you know education is important.” She changed my mind set over time, she made me see the importance of continuing my education, and it was not always like that for me (119).

Along the same lines, one participant said her family had different opinions on this topic. When she spoke openly on the issue of family emphasis on education, she stated the following:

As a family, honestly not too much. They thought it was important to go to college and it was important to have a degree, but they believed that getting married was more important at this point. My parents did not help me prepare for college. It means that when I was applying for colleges, my parents wanted me just to go to the local community college. My mother was educated here; however, my father was educated overseas and my mother thought that education for women was unimportant (101).

**Question 13. To what extent do Arab Americans and Muslims value education?**

How much did this influence your thinking about a college education?

Students provided a variety of answers in response to this question. For most of the participants, the Arab Americans and Muslims value education. Some community members pay tuition for their children to attend private schools. They show respect for those with college degrees. They are pleased whenever they see someone going to college and they encourage those going to college. Besides that, students believe that religion emphasizes learning, and they believe knowledge is power and education is a necessity for a good career. In turn, that does have a positive influence on the children of the
community to pursue their postsecondary education. Some of the reactions of the students included the following:

I believe that many Arab Americans and Muslims value education very highly. The general idea of education, however, did not influence my decision; it was mainly my family and myself that made this decision (122).

I feel . . . in our community in NJ they value it a lot. I see that everyone is always liking it when I go to college . . . and you see a lot of them pursuing higher degrees . . . compared to Muslims outside the U.S. It influenced me in the same way my family did. It is a given . . . you just have to go to college. You have to develop a career (108).

I think Arabs, especially Muslims, value education because Allah asks us to get an education. Also, this encourages me to study hard and show a nice image of educated Arab Muslims (121).

In my community, we value education very much. Knowledge is power. It influenced us a lot. I also went to Islamic School. They want their children to be knowledgeable and strive to be the best. So I have always had that drive to academically be on another level (109).

I feel that they value it a lot; most Arab Americans here are second generation. I know many Muslim families who grew up in poverty, and they do not want their children going through the same so they definitely influence their children in pursuing their education. I personally do not want to be in poverty in the future, so I knew that I would have to be educated and go to college . . . . Everyone has it in their mind to go to college and be successful (104).
It is very important, I found it in this society, and I do not like the fact that even if you do not like science or law, your family is telling you to choose from among the three main categories: a doctor, an architect, or a lawyer. To be honest, when I was looking for majors, I became sort of blocked out of what my parents wanted me to be. In definition I just looked at what I like, what I took in high school, what I liked; I liked biology. I do not like chemistry or physics, if they told me to go and study something like that. I like biology so they did not influence my decision, I know my way. They used to emphasize that you must be this or that; it is in the culture (116).

One student mentioned that the family had the greatest influence on her thoughts about college education. Furthermore, culture did not influence thinking about education as much as religion did. According to this participant, cultural values at times underestimate educational values. The participant said the following:

I think they all value it to very high level. But then again I do see a lot of young men not completing college and taking over their father’s business, but at the end of the day it all has to do with stability for Arabs. Because marriage is so important as well within the culture so a man cannot get married unless he can provide for a family. So college is a method to do so; if not, college he needs to have something else to back him up. I was not so influenced by my culture as my religion. Religion does emphasize it, knowledge is very important and reading in Islam itself is a well of knowledge, so much to know about that; but the most influence I got for education was from my parents and my family (106).
Another participant mentioned different thoughts on the value of education for Arab Americans and Muslims. The student spoke about the separation between the first and second generation. At the same time, he pointed out that, in his family, cultural values and religious values were blended, paving the road for his education. He stated the following:

I think there might be a disconnect with that. The older generation may or may not value education as highly as we do because their way of thought is different. Americans put a lot of emphasis on education. The dream is you get out of school and you go to college and you get the dream job, the dream car, the dream life and you get the money; but that is not necessarily the truth because the world is much more complicated than this. Just having the degree and you are entitled for all of this. Maybe our parents or the older generations are more into that fact. They do not necessarily think it would be in their best interest to waste all that time on college, but you need to put the effort into things and do it the right way to see the whole things through to get whatever you need. I think the fact that my mother was raised in this country and my dad was raised overseas, it makes a good blend of the old and the new in my family. It is like you have the strictness of authority from the parents plus some added leeway due to my mother’s way of seeing things. So in a way since both my mother and father finished school here, they saw the importance of education, which influenced me in a positive way about college. Holding to the traditions from back home put more emphasis from the Deen [religion] over knowledge and gaining knowledge paved the road for knowledge (105).
Some think that the community needs to put more emphasis on education. One of the students said the following:

I don’t think it’s to a great extent. I feel like it is not emphasized enough. I know for Muslims, it is emphasized in the Quran. But for Arab Americans, I don’t think it’s emphasized too much. As a Muslim, I know my duties to pursue my education, like if I had the chance (110).

I would say on a scale of 1-10, I would say an 8 or 9. Some families would say education and it would mean college; others would say education and they would mean religion so it differs, but they all want knowledge. College, not much. I mean, it influenced me to get good grades but the emphasis on knowledge, somewhat. As I grew, I wanted to learn more knowledge, I wanted to go from the student to the teacher (114).

I think it maybe depends on which Arabs, like where they come from. For example, we have falahiyya [villagers] that don’t care as much about education, especially if it is small family business that they established themselves, then they don’t care as much about education. They do not want the women’s primary focus to be education, but their primary focus would be the family. But then there are other places that are more madaniya [city dwellers] or Egyptian; their parents cared a lot for them to go to college. It is a primary concern. I do not think the general opinion of Arabs and Muslims in general affected me as much as my own family did (107).

Another participant expressed similar views on this issue:
I think that Arab Americans and Muslims value education to a certain extent. I feel like they value it if it is convenient for a certain age. However, men value it more to continue education because women usually have to get married at an earlier age (101).

It depends from people to people; mostly generally speaking, I believe it is held in a high value. From my surroundings, people respect the person who does have a college degree (102).

I think it is a 50/50 thing. I mean I see people who do not care. To them it is a waste of money, time, and energy. And to some people, it’s a big deal. It influenced me. I have friends who got married around the same time I did, and I saw they did not care for school and became a typical housewife. I always ask myself, in 3-4 years from now I want to look back on the past and say I did something in those years. That there was growth (118).

One participant mentioned that today’s females are paying more attention to education than ever before. “Nowadays, girls definitely value education a lot more than back in the day. It used to be getting married and being a housewife; however, now women want to be just as educated as the husband” (103).

Along the same lines another student said the following:

It depends really. Some value education more than others do; sometime this can be affected by personal experiences within the family and the home life. I would say it depends. In a way, yes, because I did not want to feel like I was like everybody else, I did not want to fit into that norm, the stereotypical Arab woman role, “Oh she’s a Muslim or Arab girl; she never pursued college, she never
finished high school.” I wanted to do something for me. I wanted to continue my education. I wanted to empower myself (119).

Another participant noted the following:

I do not want to make the same mistakes my parents did. I do not want to be just a housewife. I don’t want to go through whatever my parents went through. God forbid if my husband loses his job, and I am just sitting here and I do not know what to do. Basically, this is their way of life; they did make some mistakes by not going to college, and I don’t want to do the same mistakes. I think now they value it a lot; they are starting. Before they did not. Before, a girl is not allowed to go to college. She gets married and that is it. But now, times are changing. It influenced my thinking about college a lot. Now you can say I am Americanized when it comes to that because I know many girls in our culture cannot go to college. You have to get married, that’s it, and take care of your house and your husband. I consider myself Arab American (117).

**Question 14. How does your family feel about you going to college? What was their influence on your decision?**

Participants expressed their views on the family’s feelings about their going to college. The feelings of families regarding their children pursuing postsecondary education are overwhelmingly filled with excitement, pride, honor, and happiness. Some mentioned they encouraged them throughout high school, reminding them that the next level will be college. Some even helped them during the application process or research for their majors. Some of the input of the participants on this topic was as follows:
My family is proud of me because I go to college; also, they were encouraging me to get in a major that I like (123).

Of course good. It has always been set that we are going to college. Not that we would stop at high school or anything. It was not really . . . because I always knew I was going to go, but I guess you can say they had a good influence, encouraging me throughout high school for my grades and reminding me that college is what is next. So I had to think about it (110).

They are excited about the fact that I am almost about to graduate; however, they believe that my time in school is khalas [done], that I should not be going to school anymore. I want to get my Ph.D., but I believe they do not want me to continue my education (101).

My parents are very happy for me; they see their dream for education in me and it makes me happy. It influenced my education in a good way; it persuaded me to become more educated (103).

They’re happy that I went to college. Majority, my mother was very happy, my father did not really care too much I would say. My mom was the one who pushed me (113).

My parents were very proud of me for going to college, but then again they expected nothing less. Their influence was mainly the introduction of gaining knowledge as something important and afterwards I took it upon myself to do it (124).

It was expected. They were expecting me to attend college. The only choice is to go to college (115).
Delighted, happy and honored. They enjoyed my decision to go to college. My family pushed and pulled me in both directions, whether it was college or not; however, in the end I ended up going to college (102). They love it, yes. Every day I go back home, they ask me how was my day at college. Every day... they just wanted me to go to a good college... Degree wise, civil engineering I wanted to try it out... My parents were always about being a doctor or an engineer, not so much engineering until I told them I wanted to try it. Then I moved to economics and accounting, and now I am also minoring in psychology. My mother did not like the accounting because someone in our family had that major and could not find a job so she was always against it (114). They’re happy. It is just for granted... you have to go. You do not have a choice. My mom helped me research for my major, and my dad helped me with the application process and forms (108). They completely encouraged me; they have no problem and they want me to go for higher education. They have a positive opinion on it (117). They are really happy and they want me to get good grades. They will not check my grades but they will ask me about my grades. They ask about the grades, is it A’s or B’s. They influenced me a lot; they really wanted me to go and get educated (104). They’re very supportive. Like I mentioned, my father was always telling us since we were young; he’d tell us you’re going to do this, you’re going to do that (107). They’re happy that I’m doing well in college. Because they understand the value of an education. My mother still wishes she received a higher education (109).
They were excited and happy, especially my mother. Overall positive. They are always being behind your back, a structure of support. A family unit I would say (111).

They are very encouraging about it. They are worried slightly about it because I am taking two buses to get to college and sometimes my classes are late . . . . They have high trust in me, since they instilled the factor since I was young, no smoking or drugs . . . . They did not really influence my decision; they just encouraged me. “MashaAllah [If God wills] that is good she knows her path” (116).

They are 100% for it. Being married and having a baby, they are very supportive. They are all for it. They are the ones actually pushing me for it, them and my husband. They help take care of the baby whenever I have school or work, and that has been a big help. All that influences my decision to finish my college education (118).

Some participants pointed out that their parents were heavily involved in their college choice, to the extent that some had the final say about which college they would attend. They are very proud Alhamdulilah [Thanks to God] especially because I am doing so well in college. I guess if I was not doing well in college, they will try to push me to do better; my GPA is 3.9 for all my semesters. Like I said, they didn’t want me to go far away so they were very much my choices.; my culture was shaded by my parents, what I was allowed to do and what I was not allowed to do (106).

Another student reflected on this issue and said, “It is normal . . . I was
kind of influenced to this college by mom because she graduated from this school and she is an alumni” (105).

Another participant expressed her opinion as follows:

They’re [my parents] so happy for me, my parents tell me they’re proud of me after every year I finish, but other family members don’t feel the same. They say to me, “You wasted a few years of your life? To do what? You have a husband who will take care of you and pay the bills.” Yes, they helped me. It is important. When they tell me you do not need to go, I find a reason to validate why I do need to go (119).

**Question 15. How much has your family encouraged you to maintain cultural values and traditions? Did that influence your college education decision?**

The feedback on this question had two sides. One group felt that their families are more committed to their cultural values (such as social gathering, weddings, marriage traditions, language usage, and dress) than to religious values, while the other group felt that they are more religiously oriented than culturally. Most participants indicated that cultural values and traditions did not influence their college education decision at all.

My family encourages me always to maintain my cultural values and traditions, but that did not influence my college education decision (120).

To a certain extent, it is very important; they believe I should act a certain way culturally because I am Egyptian. They encourage me to go to cultural events like weddings, my mother teaches me how to cook because she believes that it is an important value to have as a woman. I mean, yes to a certain extent; within our culture, they do not value education too much for a woman. However, I want to
break that by getting my Ph.D. in psychology. I hope that one day to become a doctor (110).

Along the same lines, another student expressed her opinion about certain cultural restrictions related to dorming and building relations with the other gender:

I have to maintain it [cultural values and traditions] very much to them. I cannot have any male friends. To them it is normal you are in school, you have colleagues, you have projects, you deal with them, and you have to keep your values. Religious, the scarf, and the way I dress, praying, being home on time, things like that. Yes, as I told you before . . . I could not dorm. I guess when I got married it changed. I got married in my third year and it was different then because I traveled for school and I was married. I do not have a problem; if I was not married, they will not let me travel for school by myself. Religion and cultural values were there in maintaining the cultural values (117).

The response of one participant regarding this issue was strong while she was expressing her opinion and personal experience on this topic. She indicated how she feels about certain cultural values:

Culture is a huge deal, especially for my mother. For example, she prefers that I do not marry a non-Arab simply because of culture. She wants her in-laws to understand the culture; it is very important to her. But to me culture does not mean much . . . growing up in the United States, being born and raised here, I identified more with American culture although I understand the Arab culture and it makes sense to me, but I don’t identify it as much as the American culture. Yes and no, culturally it is not okay; it is not okay, it is very liberal for a girl to dorm
and live on her own. That is why my parents will not let me do that. However, personally in terms of American culture, it does not contradict my religion so I will do it and I will let my children do it; it is not a big deal (106).

Another participant pointed out that her parents maintained their connection to the Arab culture by spending some time overseas to learn cultural values and traditions. Traveling back home helped her and her sibling to create that balance between culture and religion and blend both cultures, the Arab and the American:

Of course, they push us to maintain cultural values and traditions. In my case, my parents always took me back home; we stayed there for two years, we went to school, we adapted to society over there. As a result, now I am married with a child. I understand why my dad did that; now we have the best of both cultures rather just being “Americanized.” I think there is a balance between cultural values and religion. Thank God, they taught us how to pray; they did not take away the American in us and they did not take the Arab in us. We have a mixture of both, which helped us, me, my brothers, and my sisters to adapt to the society, the high school society, and the college society. In a way, it affected my college decision. For example, there are careers out there; for example, a police officer; it would just be difficult because it is a dangerous job. For example, your life is at risk all the time. In addition, being a female, and the fact that you cover and are a Muslim, you do not know who is out there (118).

A response from another student was that his father is extremely strict on maintaining their traditions because their ethnic group is small:
My father is extremely big on cultures and traditions. I am not into culture and
tradition. My dad is very big on the Circassian culture because it is a dying
culture. Like marriage-wise, they only want Circassians marrying Circassians.
They are very big on that culture. Arab culture, they are not big on because there
are so many, and my parents want me to adopt the Circassian culture, but I am
very against doing so [and that did not influence his college choice] No, it did not,
not a single bit (114).

Similar to that, another student noted the following:
I would say it is very important. My mother warns me a lot. Especially because I
have left the private Islamic school, she gets worried that maybe some American
cultures are going to start influencing me, so she reminds me sometimes. I can see
the fine line between American culture and where I need to break off from that.
So I think it’s very important for my family to maintain cultural values, and
Palestinian traditions. This has not really influenced what college I am going to go
to or what I was going to pursue a degree in (107).

Along the same lines, other students noted that their parents are always and
constantly reminding them of their cultures. Some of their responses were as follows:
My mother always reminded me, don’t forget your religion; we are Muslims.
Don’t forget where you came from, don’t forget where you started no matter how
far you get in life; they always encourage me (119).
My family does encourage me to maintain my values and traditions. However, my
traditions and values didn’t affect my college decision. I leave this separate from
college (103).
My family has tried to maintain our cultural values and traditions; however, due to the society we live in, it is foolish to not assimilate and have some traditions change (124).

My family encourages culture to an extent. Some of our cultural traditions do not go along with Islamic teachings. They wanted me to maintain the Arabic language; that was very important. Certain traditions like food and dress did not influence my college decision (109).

My family is sort of almost strict. When it comes to traditions, slightly. When I dress, I have to dress in a certain way; I cannot dress in tight clothes. They like me to wear loose-fitting rather than tight leggings under a dress. They like me to speak the Arabic language in the house; they do not like it when I speak to them in English. Cultural values did not influence my college decision. The only thing, do not go to parties because they tend to have alcohol and a lot of smoking (116).

Others had a different opinion on this topic. Some students felt that they are more religiously oriented. Students provided concrete answers to this question and pointed out that their families have more concerns over their religious values rather than the cultural values. Some of the students’ specific experiences included the following:

Very low, I do not think culture was a big deal unless you consider language as a cultural tradition. In my family, the language is more affiliated with religion and so was the book, and those are the values that I hold dear to me. This did not actually influence my college decision, however. It made it easier (113)

My family doesn’t value culture, at all. They do not see any use of it. Like we are
Palestinian and we love Palestine, I see that as part of my identity. We are more religiously oriented than culturally. It didn’t affect my college decision (108).

My family does not stress the culture as much as mainly the Deen [religion] is what was stressed. I do not really know Egyptian culture. In conversations, I do not know what the culture says about certain things. However, I know in religion how we should behave and act . . . . Tradition did not influence my decision; the values influenced my decision more than traditions (105).

We’re not too much with culture. It is more religion. We do not have too many cultural values. We have always been raised so we always thought it is a natural thing to follow traditions of Arab Americans. No, it didn’t affect my decision (110).

Little emphasis is on maintaining cultural values and traditions. Most emphasis is on the religion; we are called for prayer, and we pray at home as a group. We go to pray with others at the mosque during Ramadan (115).

They do, but they don’t stress it that much. However, they do encourage religious practices more than cultural things. In their eyes, the religion comes before tradition and culture. It really didn’t influence my college decision at all (104).

They encouraged me a good amount. They made sure that I know that no matter what, I am always thinking about my religion before I do anything. However, it did not affect my college education decision (102).

**Question 16. Do you feel that the American way of life is different from yours?**

**How?**
Students noted that the Islamic/Arab way of life is open to other cultures. It is not opposed to diversity and other lifestyles if it is lawful. Many students accept the idea to adopt and accept any lifestyle or even to blend into the American culture if it does not conflict with their Islamic values or their native cultural traditions in general. They are willing to practice sports or be members of clubs, but not all of them. Participants indicated that Islam is a way of life and emphasized that unity among its members guides their way of life. Many students expressed their views regarding maintaining their religious values because it sets their boundaries more than the cultural traditions. Some students expressed their feelings toward this issue by stating that the differences are minimal. Some of the statements referring to their experiences as follows:

Not really. Since I have been living in America, I got used to the way they lived. I do not think it is too much different. The usual things they do, we do. Going to college, the mall, the food we eat, we go out to restaurants, same as theirs.

However, religion sets a boundary for adopting the American way of life. For example, certain times during the day we have to pray, we have restrictions over the food, and the different things they do like the partying, the alcohol, etc. (110). In some ways, yes. Others may have different religions or cultures so they might act in different ways than I do. There are some similarities. At the end of the day, we are all human beings and we are all trying to do what is best. It is just we come from different places, different cultures. The American way of life, it is similar in ways; I do similar things like other people. I go to work, I go to school, and I want education. It is different though because of different values and different religions; for some people, religions is a bigger influence than others. I just feel
religion has a greater influence on my way of life versus the American way of life (119).

In certain ways, yes. However, I consider myself an American. I was born and raised here. Just because I am of Arab descent, it should not affect my American way of life. I think people have a negative connotation of the American way of life in that they do not have morals, values, and religious beliefs. Do not have to be your typical American that drinks, parties, and does those things (109).

Some participants expressed and described how Islamic values and cultural traditions influence their lifestyle and their cultural interaction:

It depends how you define American. I consider myself American. I feel like culture-wise I am American. But there are a lot of things that I see different from the traditional American. They are a lot more petty. Care more about the materialistic aspect of life. They do not care about their education as much. The way they have fun is different. Religious-wise, there are many things they do that I wouldn’t do. Social wise, same thing. They will ask me to go hang out at a bar, and I say I don’t do that. Like drinking. One of the things has not been much of a problem because most of my friends are girls, but some of them have guy friends, and I don’t do the whole mixing thing. I try to keep it professional (108).

Along the same lines, another participant said the following:

Yes, very different. The bad thing is basically they want “anything goes.” They are so carefree. For me I have to do wellness, I have to do this or that when I get home, I have a schedule. They are very carefree; I will just leave this for tomorrow, I have a cigarette, let us go chill in the corner, let us skip this class, let
us go partying this weekend. Social media is the same; it is full of pictures. My parents told me not to put my pictures on social media. Cursing, my family taught me it is unlawful to curse; however, Americans tend to do that. When it comes to movies, all of it is kissing and I don’t like to watch that (116).

Yes, of course [American way of life is different]. A lot of things they do, we do not do. There are things they do for fun that for us is trouble. Like the partying, drinking, the drugs, boyfriend, girlfriend. One example is the dorms. They are having issues, a lot of accounts of sexual assault happening, rape, etc. I know my parents would not let me live out of state and dorm at school or college. I think this is because of culture and religion. If you think of a dorm, you think of boys and girls, mixed, troubles and fights, and my parents want to avoid that (118).

Of course, the Arab way of life is more conservative. The American way of life is do as you please and come as you please. Once you are in college, that is it; you are free, you are emancipated, you are not under your parents, you are more senior. Once you are in college, you do whatever you want to do; go out for parties, have girlfriends, drink, and do all that stuff. At the college, drinking was minimal because it is a private Catholic college and they are not allowed to do that and the instructors kept everything on check. I remember one time one of the girls came with very short shorts; they asked her to go and change. They are very conservative, and cursing also for them; if a nun hears you cursing, you get yelled at. The American way of life is different but in some ways it is not different. For example, Arab women that are working, Arab women are continuing higher education, travelling and now even dorming. I know many girls that can dorm and
can travel, but still you have to keep your values. Still you have to have rules; you
cannot forget them. However, I think things are different now, things have
changed, and things have evolved now (117).
I would say kind of and at the same time no. The American way of life is being
free and being happy and doing whatever you want. However, in my life I have to
follow certain rules due to my religion so I can’t live life the way I want to. I have
to live it the way I’m told by Islam. An example is I can go rock climbing and
enjoying myself is completely allowed and fun for me; however, going to the
party or the bar and having drinks with my friends I cannot do due to my religion.
Also joining some clubs like basketball is allowed, but other clubs I
cannot (104).
Yes and no, so I feel like it is different because there are too many choices. The
American way of life is to be very different and to stand out. I feel like in my
culture I was brought up to just fit in, blend in, and not ruffle anyone’s feathers. I
feel like in the Arab culture, the family opinion and sayings affect everything we
do ranging from marriage to education to our daily lives. You have to listen to the
family’s opinion before you listen to yourself (101).
No, I don’t feel that American way of life is different than mine. I live and I freely
do what I want as American people do (120).
Other participants noted that the American lifestyle is different from their Arab
traditions. One student said the following:
Yes, I do believe so; in the American way they just live for themselves. They just
care about going out and having a good time, but for me I just care about studying and
making sure I do good in school and furthering my education in my major (103).
Expanding on the same idea, other members of the study agreed that there is a difference between the two lifestyles, but they are willing to adapt to any positive American lifestyle.

Yes, I see the American way of life is very materialistic and focused on having more money, more things, better things, newer things. I do not care about those things; I care about doing the things the right way, pleasing Allah, learning, doing things of value, of worth, not being caught up in the chase for money or desires. . . . At the same time the fact is we have a religion and I try to stick to it. I will not let the American way of life and doing things and living at the college life and parties change my religion or replace my religion. I will not give in to certain things people do because how the American students do things, this is how the American life is here. If there is anything good in the American life style, I will not say no to it; if there is any value like hardworking, I will not say no to it; accept what is good and reject what is wrong (105).

I am not really familiar with the American way of life. I do not feel like it has influenced me. I abide by “live and let live.” I just live my life the way I want to and I let people do their own thing. I was not very social when I was younger so I didn’t really go out to different groups and learn anything from the American culture. A difference is that it has transitioned from the familial unit to more of a distanced relationship with my parents. More independence now (111).

Yes, my family would not let me be late. I have to be home at a certain time. Americans’ life style does not have manner or role models; look at their drinking, partying, and drug abuse (115).
Yes, very much so. How? Because I feel like Americans are more reckless, especially college students. You know they really just love to party and drink and that is very typical for American culture, but for me I will even not go to a bar even if I am not going to do any of those things. There is no point of me even being near that environment. I guess I am more strict on myself in terms of American culture. I am strict but I do not see myself strict. Even in terms of the way I dressed, that is a boundary that is a different life style than the American life style. It could be 100 degrees outside, I will still dress from head to toe. . . .
Even talking to the opposite gender, my mom does not like me talking to a boy at any time (it is a big deal), but I do draw the boundaries for myself and know my limits (106).
I believe the American way of life is different because it’s a bit more laid back. But when it comes to education and things like that, I feel Americans care just as much about their children getting a good education (124).
Yes, to a certain point, because the American way of life is having the good stuff, the best of the best. Other places, people have nothing; and for me for example, I do have things here and there, but I try and keep it minimized. For example, I do not have a smart phone . . . so there are certain things I do try and have and others I stay away from, to stay away from being completely American . . . . I keep reminding myself what the ultimate goal is, and if we look at the Quran, the Prophet didn’t have the best things so I strive to be like that, not to be at 0 nor to be at 10. There is a 100% difference between my life in college and American life in college. The American way of life is all about going after materials. I do not go
after materials; like the American way of life, that is it, that is all it is. Muslim way of life is all about religion and the first thing is the afterlife; American life is all about this life. We have seen American way of life in college; it is all about parties, drinking, and doing all that kind of stuff. It is not my life style. There are other people who do it; Americans, non-Americans, some Muslims, but it is not for me (114).

Drastically different . . . It is very different because now it is as you work like a machine, going through one motion. Being less social, more serious, and straight to the point, always looking forward (102).

I do feel like it is different. Well, one example I can give you. I was once working on a project with two other people who were just White; they have been here in America their entire lives, so the way they approach things is different. When they want to start working on a project, they’re like, oh we need to get the booze ready and whatever. They always feel like they need drinking or drugs to tackle a situation. I am not being stereotypical because I have noticed this first-hand. They use them help deal with difficult challenges in front of them. And obviously if I want to tackle a situation, I would be looking at it through my religious beliefs and like that. So I think it’s very different how we approach different challenges (107).

Yes, in terms of beer and weed. Of course, many people do it, but I personally do not. The biggest thing honestly is marriage, the fact that in our culture they try and marry you off very early. How is it expected when you are put in a college situation where there are girls all around you and other things that are considered
bad and you are supposed to somehow stay away from it. All of your friends are American and everyone around you is American; it is hard for you to distance yourself. Also going back to the marriage aspect, the way it is culturally held is kind of baffling, especially at how absurd some amounts of the dowry that people ask for are. Personally, I prefer 90% American lifestyle and 10% Arab lifestyle. The reason being that the American lifestyle is free and is not full of “bullshit” and “gossip.” When someone comes to your house and you do not like them, you are forced to show a front, which I think is not something that is acceptable. The only thing I hold onto from the Arab lifestyle is the religion that came with it because it teaches me morals; everything else I see no point in (112).

Many of the participants mentioned the issue of alcohol consumption at parties, taking drugs, and parties in general as an American way of life at campuses, as it was the dominant activity for college students. As described by one participant, these “events on campus aren’t religion-friendly, as in Islam-friendly, parties and stuff” (108).

Another student stated, “They always feel like they need drinking or drugs to tackle a situation” (107). Another participant said, “A lot of kids blast music through the dorm rooms, a lot of kids do drugs, and I’m always around it and I don’t like it” (104). Another student said, “We have seen American way of life in college; it’s all about parties, drinking, and doing all that kind of stuff” (114). Some participants mentioned that they were invited to attend bar parties or alcohol parties in which some of them felt that they were excluded from college activities and they were pushed to the side because their religion does not allow their presence in such activities. One participant mentioned, “You know they really just love to party and drink and that is very typical for American
culture, but for me I will not even go to a bar. Even if I am not going to do any of those things, there is no point of me even being near that environment” (106). Another student said, “Going to the party or bar and having drinks with my friends, I cannot do due to my religion” (104). These practices were noticeable by other students and a way of identifying Muslim students as not ordinary people because they do not drink or attend parties. Some of the participants mentioned that even when it was brought to their attention that the college is planning to have a bar on campus, they expressed their opinion against having it.

**Research Question 2.** What are the institutional factors that influence the Arab Americans and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition?

**Category 4. Institutional factors.** This theme includes high school preparation, school counselors’ roles, and postsecondary institution policies, including admission and accommodations.

**Question 17. Did high school preparation influence your college choice?**

The demographic questionnaire data demonstrate that more than 50% of the students were on the honor track during their high school education. The views of the participants over their experiences about this topic were mixed. Several students believed that high school preparation did not affect their college choice, but others held different views. Some of them described their thoughts on high school preparation and college choice. Some comments of the participants illustrating their experiences included the following:
Yes, because if I was more prepared, if I took more AP courses, if I took SAT prep, I would have probably been in a higher level-maybe an Ivy league school, if I prepared well, but I didn’t (117).

Yes, they helped us with the application process and had people come in and talk to us about career options. And the teachers would tell us, in college you’ll be dealing with this. And tried to help us with the difficulties we may face (108).

In some ways, yes. In HS, I really liked the sciences, I like biology, and I wanted to do medicine. I wanted to make sure that college [of my choice] had a biology major and pre-med track. As well as in terms of standardized testing and what school I can get into with those scores (109).

In high school I knew what I wanted to do; I was good with computers so I knew I was going to do something with computers. However, high school did not actually prepare me for my major. At this time I am majoring in Computer Science (104).

The only thing ever influenced my choice is my biology class. I like biology and that’s it (116).

Yes, because in high school I always wanted to get that A. I did not want to go to a college that we all knew was not that great. So I did try in high school to do as good as I can (114).

Yes, it does. My high school education made me look to get a high level of education. It also encouraged me to go to college (121).

I guess so. My high school was connected to the university I went to; however, I do not believe it helped me prepare for the college I went to. I don’t think they properly educated me to reach a certain level in college (101).
I guess. I don’t think SAT prep was part of school that much, but it did allow me to be prepared for the challenges to come (105).

Yes. As a person, not too much. But I had in mind it is going to affect my college choice. So I guess you can say at the end of HS, I focused on the last three years. And didn’t prepare too much for college. I took HS as a joke, and college was a bigger step (110).

A few students said, “No, it did not” (103, 115, 118, 120, 122, 123).

No, in high school I went through just to get through. When I was going to college, I just threw my application out there and went to the first school that accepted me (113).

I don’t think the HS preparation influenced my decision (107).

Not really. I chose my college due to what I liked to study and learn (124).

My high school life was different, so I did not feel like prepared. I was not motivated; it did not have much to do with it. I was not prepared (106).

Another student who attended a school overseas said, “Yes, a lot. In Jordan, high school is harder than high school here” (102).

**Question 18. Did your high school counselors help you in your admission to this college? How?**

Many of the students indicated that the role of their counselors was not positive or encouraging. Statements of some participants were very strong when they expressed their frustration and disappointment regarding the role of the counselors in guiding them through their college admission process. Some of the participants even pointed out that the counselor did not know their names. Some other students related a different opinion
on the role of the counselors, stating that they were helpful; they helped them with applications, recommendation letters, and the financial aid application process. Some responses of the students demonstrated their experiences.

One student noted that it reached a level that counselors were de-motivating her, pushing her to give up college enrollment. She responded as follows:

No, they did not. They actually told me it would be difficult for me to get into college because I did not do very well in my freshman and sophomore year. I did much better in my junior and senior years, though, but they said it would be hard for me to go to a college or university. I felt like they were not really trying or willing to assist me. They were discouraging me, but I did not let that stop me. Some schools said my GPA was too low and they will not accept me, but it did not stop me. Then I came here. I told them the truth and that I did not do well in my freshman and sophomore year because I was not motivated. They saw that things changed throughout my high school career by comparing the first two years with the last two years at the high school, when I worked hard. They saw I was serious; they decided to give me the opportunity to study here (119).

Some other responses were as follows:

Absolutely not. My high school counselor didn’t even know my name. The high school I went to was very diverse, and the counselors in the school pretty much didn’t care about the students much (101).

No, not at all, not even a little bit; they did not care. They just made sure that you had a schedule and they do not care. You can take this class, you are allowed to
take this class, that’s it . . . . At the school they did not help or prepare me at all (106).

Not really. We only had one HS counselor. We had many students. And she did not really have time. It was mostly me and my dad (108).

No, my high school counselor was inept, cold, and just did not care. She did not want to care; she just came to her job. There were other counselors that were helpful; however, my specific counselor was of no help to me. With that system, if you cannot switch your counselor, they are putting a wall not to help you (111)

Not really; it was nonexistent (102).

Nope. Not at all. I did all of this on my own (118, 124).

A few students said, “No, they did not” (120, 121, 123).

Guidance counselors weren’t too useful, but they helped me apply. They told us where would be good to apply. I felt like I did more on my own and with my sister (110).

Not really. All they did was send the transcript; I did the rest myself. My specific counselor was just bad, so I had to do everything on my own. He was just awful. If I had a different one, maybe it would have been better (104).

She would ask which college do you want to attend, and she just takes the letters that we fill out and submit them to the colleges of choice (115).

I can’t remember honestly. What I do remember is them giving me options and warning me that college is completely different than high school. But for me, I didn’t know what road I was taking for education (103).
Yes, actually; this college, no. Because I did not originally plan on going to this college. They helped me, telling me what I had to do, what I had to print out, what score to get on the SAT . . . . They definitely helped me out how to fill out forms and they actually sent out my transcripts and letters to the universities (114). I applied last minute to this college. I had already been accepted into two other recognized colleges. And I went to my counselor for advice if I should apply here (109).

Some other students held a different opinion on this topic, stating that their counselors were helpful. They helped them with applications, recommendation letters, and the financial aid application process.

Yes, my counselor helped me get into this college and told me about this college’s instant decision day, which I came to and got my application in one day completed and was accepted same day (105).

Yes, they brought in career fair people to help us understand what was to come in college, and they were also giving us waivers for the application fees so that was a bonus that we didn’t have to pay to apply (113).

Yes, he was very welcoming about the fact that I am going to college. He was so happy. I always go to him to ask questions. He used to advise me, asking me to be on the top of everything; he helped me a lot. He knew me from a young age, because his wife used to be my teacher in the elementary school (116).

Yes, they [counselors] were helpful; they helped with applications and recommendation letters, the applying, and financial aid process (117).
They did help me; they sent my transcripts out and also wrote me nice recommendation letters, which helped me get accepted (122).

Another participant responded as follows:

Our counselor was very helpful. When I wanted to apply to college, she helped me get everything I need. She was just very helpful for all the colleges I wanted to apply to. Whenever I had questions about a college, I would go to her and ask her, and she would tell me what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are, what GPA they prefer. But for this particular college, she didn’t focus on it; she tackled them all at once (107).

**Question 19. Do you openly express your opinions about anything on campus?**

**How?**

Students mentioned different ways of expressing their views, even if it is limited to contacting an advisor, speaking out in a class, writing letters to departments, and sometimes speaking out through the college newspaper.

As much as possible. In every country, in every place, there are limits to what you can and cannot say. There will always be an opposite side so just being careful and mindful for those around you is what matters (113).

Yes, I have taken many courses where difficult topics would come up about religion or culture or current events. Even though sometimes I felt uncomfortable, the professor made it a point to respect others’ opinions even if we did not agree. So although I was uncomfortable at times, I never felt threatened to voice my opinion. I was involved for a year and a half in the Teacher Education Club for
education majors; we used to discuss things that go on in the classroom and get tips from one another (119).

If I have a complaint about something, I may reach out to the director or write a letter; but I usually do not have problems. I feel like I’m entitled to my opinions; and because I am the student, I am considered the customer (101).

In class, yes. For example, if we have one of those cultural diversity classes. Like the class I just came down from is a sociology class. It is a lot about cultural diversity, ethnicity, different cultures and heritages. Everyone pretty much expresses and talks about their own culture and religion. For example, eating pork; they are talking about pork and why people should not eat it, and I explain to them that is why we are not eating it (118).

Yes. For example, interviews are a good way to express your opinions on campus. . . on the school paper. It was about a bar on campus where professors and staff can go, and they asked if I feel like having a bar on campus is an issue; is it good for the university? How does it make us look as a school? (110).

Yes, everything. I am very outspoken . . . And if there is a problem, I usually just say it. And if there’s good, I’ll praise it (108).

Yes, I had a religion course I had to take. I gave my opinion throughout the course about whatever we would talk about. For example, when we’d talk about a story about Jesus from the Bible, I’d include the stories I know (117).

I’m known to speak my mind and be very frank with everything, especially when it comes to my beliefs. I will speak up (106).
I think I do. Because whenever I have an opinion about something, I kind of have to say it aloud. If I am talking about how the college is running, some parts of it that are really well and parts that aren’t. I talk to my advisor and I give him my opinions about everything, even specific professors if I think they should be teaching in different ways . . . to people in my class . . . I am not afraid to just give my opinion to someone (107).

I did openly express my opinion about smoking on campus. I think second hand smoke is gross and that it should be changed to designated smoking areas. I feel comfortable expressing any opinions I have about important issues (104).

Yes, whenever we do things at school like parties and things like that, I always try and say that we shouldn’t have them. I am currently trying to make the campus a smoke-free campus because smoking is bad and should not be done. During the SGA retreat, one of the kids had bought alcohol and offered me to drink . . . they tried to convince me, but I said I could not do it because of my religion (105).

Yes and no, because like I said, before Club presidency, not really. I never said anything. But afterward as president I have to take a role and be a leader. We show our opinion through our action and we voice our opinion (114).

If I have any questions or opinions, I feel free to say whatever I need to say because I know that everyone has the right to just say whatever we would like to say. I have had religious conversations with non-Muslim people, and they have always turned out well and very appropriate (102).

Yes, most of the time. If I’m with my friends, I can just say what I’m feeling about what’s going on. Not openly, just in private with my friends (110).
The only one I speak to is one of my friends, and I tell her about it or my feelings (115).

Yes, to my friends only or to some members of the MSA, even to my friend, which, she is not Muslim. Here we get along with each other, which is different from high school. Here everyone is getting together (116).

One student mentioned that she is not interested in whatever is happening on campus, except for her classes:

Not that much because it doesn’t interest me to know what is going on at campus.

I also don’t interfere with any religious things that come up in campus (103).

**Question 20. Does the college accommodate your religious practices?**

The views of the participants were mixed on this issue. Some students expressed their concerns regarding the safety and privacy of the females during their prayers on campus. Some other students raised the question of the real accommodations concerning their needs, such as providing Halal food (food prepared according to Islamic Law), acknowledging their religious holidays, or giving them a bigger space to pray in. Some other students mentioned that the college is accommodating by providing them with an office to pray in, despite its small capacity. One participant pointed out that the department modified some specification in a model to accommodate her religious requests in one of the courses. Some of their comments demonstrate this variation.

Yes, as I mentioned before when I told them that I could not have a model completely nude, they made a clothed model class for me or anyone else. For religious holidays, I can take off easily; I will let my professors know ahead of
time and it is completely okay. For food, I never worried about that. I do not go to the cafeteria; I do not dorm here (106).

I don’t really spend time at this campus other than class to know, but in the other college there was an area provided for us to pray in (102).

Yes, for example in MSA whenever we want to pray, we just go out in the lobby and no one says anything to us because we are just practicing our religious beliefs. Also, whenever I eat something at the school, I ask them to clean the knives they use because of the fact that the knife touches things like pork, and the ladies working in the cafeteria gladly clean it for me. For religious holidays, the professors also respect my decision to miss class due to my holiday (104).

Yes, we have an MSA room and a prayer room (110).

Yes, if I want to pray, usually I have some time between classes and there is a room set or given to pray (115).

Yes, we had tried to get a prayer room; however, they felt that they could not do that because we are a club and every other club just has assigned office spaces in big office rooms. They wanted to stick our office in the same vicinity as the Christian and Jewish clubs; however, the president convinced them to give us our own separate office so the sisters could pray in it without being watched by anyone else. When we asked for our own room, they said we gave you whatever we did not give to other clubs and if we give you prayer room, we have to give other clubs the same. However, you can use the room reservation system. I do not know about the Halal food in the cafeteria; most of us commute and shy away from cafeteria food. We avoid the meat. In terms of calendar, most of our
professors if we tell them it is off days due to religious holidays, they accepted (105).

Yes, they definitely do. Not every club has a room; and we have a room because they know that we need an area to pray, but this is not a huge room. This office is small because the number of people coming in and out is big. Sometime we pray in the lunch area and that is fine with them. Sometimes we ask them to open a big room for prayers. They try to accommodate our privacy and religious needs (114).

Yes, they do. The MSA, Muslim Student Association, it is very easy to see that the school accommodates our religious beliefs. However, they do not have things like Halal food. Also, religious holidays are given as excused absences, but I personally don’t take these absences. I just go to school (103).

I think it does because we have the MSA, the Muslim Students Association. So if we ever need a Muslim to talk to, we always have someone there. We have like weekly meetings where they bring in speakers. We also have group prayers. They send out like texts to everyone if you want to pray in group. So I think it does (107).

Other participants mentioned that the college is not willing to go out of their way to accommodate the Arab and Muslim population in a few things.

Half-and-half. Like they accept it, but do not go out of their way to accommodate it. Like last semester, we asked them for a prayer room and they refused. So we have to pray in the MSA room or in little corners. Food-wise, we do not have any Halal food. The cafeteria place, the people who work there are nice. They kind of got used to the Muslims because we have a good Muslim population. But like
celebrations like Eid, we don’t have off, so I would have to email my professors. And they were fine with it. I heard some friends who could not miss classes because they had a test or something (108).

No, not really. The only thing is just the MSA and that small prayer room if I have time to go there, which does not help. The common hours help me some times to find an empty room to pray in it (116).

I never really thought of that. Not really. Not as much as my job does. At my job, they have many Muslims. There’s a chapel at the hospital, and there’s a room with prayer rugs, Qurans. On Fridays we have Friday prayer (118).

They never told me to take my scarf off; and if I asked if I could pray somewhere, they would allow me to. There is no specific place provided for prayer (117).

I think the college does as much as they can. I think the problem is with the people on campus; they do not care. If you do not want something and you do not care enough, then nothing will happen for you. Personally, I usually just pray in an empty classroom. I do not know whether or not the school has a designated prayer room for Muslims, but I just do my own thing most of the time. I know during SGA meetings MSA is rarely ever there; and if they are not there in numbers, they would not be able to voice their opinions (113).

On this campus I do not feel like they do because we do not have a prayer room; however, the school before did have a dedicated prayer room. I do not understand why and I know that people usually just go pray in the MSA office, but I do not like going there because there are always people hanging out. For Friday prayer I know there is a room where everyone gets together to pray, but it is not like an
assigned room. I do not think there is any *Halal* food on campus either. The university itself does not recognize the Muslim holidays; however, most professors and supervisors understand (101).

I am not sure honestly, but only because I have never asked. I have never asked to find a prayer room on campus. Food, the cafeteria serves pork; but they also have red meat and chicken, but I am not sure it was necessarily *Halal*. Calendar, nothing of my religion is on the calendar (119).

Two students pointed out that the college does have a large Arab and Muslim population; and despite all the efforts to get a larger space for prayers, they did not give that space yet. The participant commented as follows:

To an extent it does. We do have an MSA office on campus that we can use for prayer. However, we have a large Muslim population, and we pray sometimes in congregation. We have tried to get a room designated for prayer to fit more people, but we have not gotten that yet (109).

We requested a room for prayer; it was rejected. We reserved a room for an activity later; it was cancelled, claiming that there was a conflict of scheduling (108).

**Question 21. Did the admission policies of your college influence your enrollment decision?**

The general sense among the participants was that admission policies did not influence their enrollment decision in any way. Participants mentioned that these policies cannot be changed because of a person or a group, and it is generally similar in most colleges. In Question 7, most participants indicated that financial reasons were the
strongest factors influencing their decisions. Some of their comments on this question were as follows:

No, I applied to five colleges, and I was accepted to all of them (115).

I don’t think it did (101, 120).

No, I don’t think so (102, 123, 107).

No, not really (116).

Almost all colleges have the same policies, so not really (103, 108, 109, 124).

Not really, because the college has a decent acceptance rate. I got in here pretty easily due to the fact that I was an average student (104).

No. I just applied to this university because I got accepted as a freshman, so when I transferred out my acceptance was already there (113).

No. Not really. It did not make any difference (118).

No, it did not. It is the same in most colleges (121).

I don’t think so. You can’t really change these policies (105).

No. I came to this university because I wanted to major in computer science; and by the time I had decided to transfer, it was too late to apply for other colleges (112).

No, it did not. I was not concerned with any specifics in the admissions policies (122).

No, just major, financial aid, scholarship (117).

There was not anything very different about the admission policy that changed the way I believed about coming here. I was not motivated, but my grades, GPA, and SAT scores were good (106).
Another student mentioned the following:
They did. I wanted to know how much the finances were. When I applied, they gave me a scholarship. If I did not receive that scholarship and I had to pay, I could have gone to another community college. In the program here, I take university courses for two years, then I will transfer to the other university for two years (114).

Another student mentioned that her college put her on probation when she enrolled to make sure she will maintain good standards. She responded as follows:
I don’t think so; they gave me a chance. They told me I would have to be on provision to make sure I was maintaining my grades. They gave me a scholarship, they assisted me, they believed in me. Other schools saw my performance as a freshman and sophomore and said no; but here, they looked past that. They saw the drastic improvement between my performances in freshman/sophomore year and junior/senior year and gave me the chance (119).

**Question 22. Did the student accommodations services offered by the college influence your choice?**

In general, the accommodation services did not have any direct influence over the students’ choices. Most participants pointed out that accommodation services offered by their colleges did not influence their choices.

No. I think most colleges have the same (104, 110).

No, not really. I didn’t really get in much contact with them (108).

No, not at all (115, 121).

Not really. I know it didn’t really matter much (105).
I wouldn’t say it did. The only club I looked at before I came was the MSA. And most of the colleges had one anyway. So I wouldn’t say it influenced which college I went to specifically (107).

I did not look at any of these services. I said I am going to apply here (106).

I don’t think so either. There are services; however, I don’t use any of these (102).

The only thing is the program. They have an orientation day; and when I attended an orientation at another college, I decided to come here . . . . The orientation here was convincing, influential, and the environment at the other college was depressing. The people here were very nice and generous; overall, good environment, good people (114).

No. The size of the school was a factor, the smaller the better; I like smaller classes (117).

Other students who said their experiences seemed to be different from the rest presented their experiences as follows:

Yes, absolutely. My co-major is special education; that is my endorsement. I believe that everyone should be given a free equal opportunity to an education.

When a student was confined to a wheelchair, they relocated them to a wheelchair-accessible campus. They incorporated technology. When a student had trouble turning the page of a book, they provided them with an iPad. I loved that. They did not make the students who needed the accommodations feel any different than the rest of us. They still participated in class, activities; they went on trips with us. So yes. I never utilized these accommodations, but they are available for me. They also provide counseling services (119).
Yes, I would say yes. I will say definitely in my progress it did. Since I started here, I have being doing really good. I could see by my grades. We have a free tutoring center throughout the day. I utilize it for math or science classes such as chemistry (118).

I think it did. I like a lot of services they have on this campus that other campuses do not. I have a parking space, and there are always police officers patrolling. The library and tutoring services all helped my decision (101).

Other students said the following:
Tutoring centers do help, and that influenced my decision because the science building has its own science enrichment centers, so that was important (109).

Well, mostly the open house that I went to. When I saw they have a writing center and student enrichment center, I liked that. In the open house they spoke about services, writing center, tutoring, and you get to meet some teachers (116).

**Question 23. Did immigration policies influence your college decision?**

All students indicated that immigration policies did not influence their decision in any way because they are citizens. The majority of them were born and raised in the states. Three students had different experiences; two students came to the country during their early elementary school, the other participant came to the states to attend high school, and all are legal permanent residents.

**Research Question 3.** What types of support structures and barriers at institutions influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition and how are they utilized or coped with?
Category 5. Support structures and barriers encountered in the transition from high school to postsecondary education. This theme includes supporting programs and how the participants utilized them, barriers encountered, and how the students coped with them.

**Question 24. What types of supporting programs or services help you through the college transition; how did you utilize it?**

Most of the students indicated that they joined their desired academic programs. Some of them mentioned that their programs are unique or strong. In addition, the participants in the study provided a variety of answers for this question. Some of the students mentioned different types of support programs or services that helped them in their transitions. The Minority Association for Pre-Med Students (MAPS), Teacher Education Club (TEC), Equestrian, Muslim Students Association club (MSA), Future Healthcare Professionals club (FHP), National Student Speech Hearing Language Association (NSSHLA), Art Association, Student Government Association (SGA), physical activities, leadership program, college recruitment strategies, freshman seminars, equestrian team, online programs, tutoring services, financial assistance, and sports were among these programs and services. Several students mentioned that they are members of the MSA and some of the above-mentioned clubs and associations, and they are appreciative to have the MSA at the college campus.

From the students’ own perspective, some things the school offered, such as leadership programs and freshman seminars, were helpful in the transition process. Two students noted the following:
There was a leadership program. We met other people . . . . I tried to apply to different programs after that specific program/orientation (110).

I had trouble with the PRAXIS, but my professors told me do not let this make you feel like you’re any less. They provided us with a PRAXIS prep course for any students who were having troubles. The professors came after hours to help students that needed help. They are the reason I passed (119).

In terms of services, they did have a freshman seminar that helped with transitioning from HS to college. I learned about college, how to manage our time, how to deal with college life. In terms of online programs, the school also provides programs for raising awareness about alcohol consumption and sexual abuse. I have not had to use those, but I will know what to do if they do arise (109).

I went to the tutoring services a few times more to catch up on some things rather than learning. They are great and helpful though (113).

Similar to that, another member stated as follows:

They had freshman year experience, which was a course which helped transition from high school to college. For example, they would make you write a journal every day, talk about classes, basically how to prepare yourself, manage your time, college preparation. Student orientation, but it was not that important (117).

Several students emphasized the point that they are members of the MSA as well as other clubs and associations. Some of the students’ experiences and responses included the following:
I felt like the MSA and the national student speech hearing language association (NSSHLA) helped . . . like in MSA meetings I can go back, and they’re like my people. They know what I am going through. They are going through the same thing and I can just talk to them about it . . . meetings help me to get back in touch with my spirituality. Student services here cannot really help that much (108).

I may say, only the MSA. I checked different clubs, but I did not have any interest in them. They help me out in finding best courses, professors. They help me in my homework, and I don’t need to go anywhere else (114).

First of all, the MSA; they gave me a place to pray, helped me to link to other Muslims on campus. Another thing that really helped me was the work study program at school. I was a tutor for a foreign language at school and that helped me to be able to work and focus on my studies because it was on campus (106).

Definitely the opportunity to be in MSA. There is a lot of tutoring on campus. I have been to them, but they are not always helpful. They have a gym that is open every day. Also they have a club for sports that you have to pay for, but I don’t do those (104).

Two students had a different experience. Tutoring was very helpful for them in their transition to postsecondary education and they indicated the following:

I know in the beginning of my freshman year my professors were telling me my writing skills weren’t as good as they wanted, and they recommended the writing center for me, which I used to sharpen my writing skills and knowledge (105). I went to tutoring a lot, especially for math; and the writing center also helped me because I was not prepared properly during high school for both of those subjects.
I went to many academic workshops for note taking and test anxiety and they were both very helpful (101).

I have always been very independent. I know about all of the services, but the only thing I have ever used was the computer lab. I used the computer lab for programming; my peers were there, who may have been more knowledgeable than I am so they were able to help me (111).

I did not really use any services. I only got into the science enrichment center for extra points for one of my courses that one of my teachers used to tutor (115).

Honestly, I do not think the orientation was really necessary. I did not think it was useful for me; it does not really help. The only thing helped me in my transition is the writing center. I do not know how to write my papers; they helped me a lot in improving my writing skills and writing my proper thesis. They used to help me even in other subjects, not only writing. I used to go to the same tutor and he used to help me (116).

Some other students pointed out that financial assistance at the college was a definitive element in helping in the transition process. “The financial assistant . . . was the only thing really. No specific programs for my old major.” (107). After joining the college she said, “I’m involved in quite a few clubs. I’m active with the Future Healthcare Professionals club (FHP) . . . as well as the minority association for pre-med students (MAPS)” (107).

The financial aid program helped me out a lot because I did not have enough money to pay for college on my own (102).
Two participants indicated that their experiences with their academic programs were supportive and unique.

The major [biology] I am in has a good program, which is what helped me in my college transition. It has the classes that I need (103).

The other student pointed out that the availability of majors was a factor in her decision to enroll at this college. She said, “The only two colleges in the tri-state area with this 6-year program is at this college and Kean, and the program is very good and well established” (108).

**Question 25. What types of barriers are challenging your college transition experience? How do you cope with them?**

Barriers that provided challenges to the participants in general are considered ordinary situations such as personal, work, marriage, having children while attending college, social lifestyle, financial, commute to college, family and cultural traditions, and living a life without being watched, which is in most cases out of their control. For some participants, financing their education was an issue affecting their transition from high school to postsecondary education, which is challenging. One student illustrated his experience:

Having to go to work every day and registering for many courses each semester is very challenging. I have to work many hours a day and still be a full-time student, which is very hard on me because it is affecting the quality of my schoolwork because I do not have much of my time; I always dance between both . . . . during work if I am free I open a book or laptop and begin some other assignments that I have to do (102).
I work here on campus; I would work from 9-3 and have class during the rest of the day (101).

I usually work at a doctor’s office for a few hours as a receptionist (110).

A few students spoke about commuting distance as a challenge for them,
One of the challenges is the distance and driving [about 50 min]. I have to force myself to drive every day (115).

Transportation, it is a big one; it takes at least two hours to get home. I have to stop in an area where so many people are begging, selling fake bus tickets, people smoking, doing drugs, drinking alcohol everywhere (116).

I guess commuting is the only thing that is a barrier. Dorming wasn’t an option because it is too expensive and I can’t justify that cost, especially because I am living in the comfort of my own home (112).

Maybe two things go back to the food sale and how to cope with that situation.

The last thing, I did not hear it clear, because of the playing music, but I am 90% sure I heard one of them saying all Muslims are terrorists. I have to keep it in the back of my mind. I did not act violent. The second challenge is changing the majors so many times is really a challenge (114).

Other students criticized some Arab cultural trends that could affect their personal well-being. They pointed out that family and cultural traditions were a barrier preventing them from going far from home to attend the college of their choice because Arab culture has reservations about a female living on her own, or dorming. One of the students noted the following:
I feel I could have gotten more college experience if I was dorming because I feel that it is completely another life, living alone without constant supervision from your parents . . . culturally it is not okay; it is very liberal for a girl to dorm and live on her own without being married. That is why my parents will not let me do that . . . I think it is necessary and at that point you are an adult and you can take care of yourself. Even talking to the opposite gender, my mom does not like me talking to a boy at any time (106).

Another participant mentioned that her family was a challenge for her to continue and proceed with her higher education:

If there were any barriers for college, it was my family, because they always say that family comes first. I do not really handle it. I just give them full control and do whatever my family needs me to do . . . They thought it was important to go to college. It is important to have a degree, but they believed that getting married was more important at this point (101).

Some other participants were looking for the sense of not being watched. The NYPD activities on several colleges and universities’ campuses left the students to live with the fear and the pressure that they have been watched and they are under surveillance, even while they are going to classes, making new friends, and attending or preparing for different activities on campus. One student gave specific example about her experience:

. . . because of the thing that happened with the NYPD and how we found out they were infiltrating MSAs in different universities during my freshmen year, which is morally wrong. And when I found out, I was in the MSA, and I actually became
the VP the year after. I started getting worried and double-checking everything we do. Non-Muslims even attended our meetings. I did not want to get charged with something like terrorism or something (108).

Another student mentioned another specific case:

I remember two years ago when the Arab/Muslim students were suspecting one of the students spying on them for one semester, then they did not see that person after that time. We are not doing anything wrong to hide or be afraid of (109).

. . . in the beginning it was a little challenging because trying to find someone who you can trust because you just met them (110).

Several students commented on the social life of other students as a barrier preventing them from blending in with the student body’s social life or social gathering activities. Consuming alcohol as a source of entertainment or the unlawful dating relations on college campuses that occurs during these social activities, which are forbidden according to Islam. Islam mandates no “dating,” in the American sense, between men and women prior to marriage; in addition, not to sit at a table when alcohol is being served. These conditions may create a social barrier and prevent students from being part of college activities or blend in with the college social life.

It is evident from their statements that temptations, attractiveness, or trials happening around the colleges’ grounds are creating another challenge for Arab and Muslim students because most of it is unlawful and they cannot be part of it for religious reasons, making them feel socially isolated from their peers.

Many feel that sex plays a very large role (109).

Sometimes the events on campus aren’t religion-friendly, as in Islam-friendly.
Parties and stuff (108).

The way we conduct partying at college, things like that I stay away from them (105).

I would say the only barriers are all the fitna [temptation] that goes on around the campus. A lot of kids blast music through the dorm rooms, a lot of kids do drugs, and I'm always around it and I don't like it. The way I cope with it is by turning a blind eye and ignoring it (104).

A few students mentioned that the barriers are limited or do not exist. “I don’t think there are any barriers. Here at this college they are very accepting of what culture or background you are; it is a very diverse university” (107).

I don’t really see any massive barriers for me in the college. I can do anything I want to do if it is within the restrictions of the religion. It was very difficult to find the best friend. And replace my previous friends (105).

Two female students, unlike other participants, while attending college were worrying about grades and taking care of their children. In addition, both participants were working. They mentioned that they have to create a balance between taking care of their children, college, and their jobs at the same time. They stated that their mothers or mothers-in-law were a great support in helping them take care of the babies while attending college or working. Childcare pressure forced one of them to move back to live with her parents and the other one to live with her mother-in-law. In addition, both students were enrolled in a private college and paying high tuition, which added more debt to their financial obligation. One participant stated that at times, she takes courses at
night because her husband will be home and he will help take care of the child. One of them mentioned the following:

From day one until my junior year, there were no barriers because I was only engaged. After I got married, there were still no barriers until I gave birth to my son. I have to limit my studying time. Study at college. Traveling was harder; I needed to spend less time studying and more time with my family. I had to move back in with my mom my last year because it was difficult, studies and taking care of the child. My mom is helping with watching the child. The commute was about an hour long. The class was 9-5 and when I got home after class around 5:45, I would have to study so I can pass. It is difficult (117).

For the other participant, having a baby motivated her to do better at school:

Having a baby does affect my daily life. For some people it is the whole thing of stress and it can get stressful, but in a way for me it is motivation because now you are going to school and doing all success for someone which is your child and that is a big thing. Last semester I took five courses and finished with 5 A’s, I did make the Dean’s list, and that was with the baby. But the commute, I commute pretty far (118).

Some students provided some advice to their fellow students, recommending to them whatever they liked while reminding them that college is not necessarily meant to be pleasant:

Choose your college wisely, make sure you know everything about it, definitely don’t be in a relationship while still in school, take high school seriously,
especially last 2 years, concentrate on AP courses and SAT prep. Don’t be afraid to be who you are. If you need to pray, go and pray (117).

For college students, you are going to have good days and bad days. Sometimes you are going to want to give up, but keep going because at the end, it is worth it. For married women: do not take on more than what you can handle. Start slow; see what you are comfortable with and what you can do. Start with a couple courses. If you can handle it, increase the course load so that you do not feel overwhelmed (119).

Currently I have not faced any major barriers and hope that it continues this way (122).

I cannot say I have any barriers. Everything has been smooth sailing, so to speak. The usual way to cope is stress and pulling out your hair (lol). If you organize your time and manage your work, everything you want to accomplish is manageable. The stress is something that will always come, but there are ways to alleviate (111).

Some people go to college because of partying, friends, or being cool. Just go to college and do what you should do and get the best out of it (118).

Every day is a new learning experience. Anything can happen. With regard to barriers, I’m sure by the time I’m done with my college years I would have experienced many things that challenge my beliefs or my gender (109).

It helps you grow as a person because I went to a small school. You’ll be on your own later, so going to college helps prepare for that (110).
My experience in the equestrian team was a very interesting one because I was the first Muslim girl to ever join the equestrian team and be good at it, and became the VP of the club after working my way up. My coach was very strict. When we met for the first time, I felt she did not like me; but after years, we are best friends because I showed her that Muslims are like anyone else. My hijab itself is dawah [invitation to Islam] (106).

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented in detail the findings of the research questions from the interview questionnaire and the demographic survey. The interview questionnaire was constructed to answer the three research questions. The interviews provided the primary source of data for this study, presenting a rich description of the stories and valuable insights into the lives and personal experiences of the participants, which reflect the Arab American and Muslim second-generation views. The participants provided their perception of their transition experience from high school to postsecondary education and how it could have been improved.

This chapter documented the voices and individual experiences of 24 Arab American and Muslim students, representing a diverse group from different socioeconomic levels and different backgrounds from northern New Jersey of their journey to postsecondary education. Their ages ranged from 18 to 24 years old, their parents were from different countries, and the majority of them (88%) were born and reared in the United States. Their families’ socioeconomic status ranged from lower to upper middle class. The two institutions were UNJ and NJU. This section included a
description of the patterns and themes that emerged from the responses of the participants for the research interview questions.

For Research Question 1, in their responses to the first five (1-5) questions in the interview, it was found that the primary religious factors that influenced the students’ transition was (a) the level of commitment toward their religion and its practices and (b) knowledge of the Quran, which affected their daily lives in all aspects, such as making decisions, their conduct, keeping them away from being involved in anything unlawful according to their religion, and creating for them opportunities to grow. Most students expressed deep understanding of Islam and to an extent on different levels.

In the following six questions (6-11) in the interview, the main social factor that affected most of the participants’ transition to attend their college of choice was financial issues and the amount of scholarship they received. Some students paid for their education, but others were helped to cover their tuition and expenses by their parents and by financial loans. Some students reflected on the ongoing stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims in the media and the NYPD surveillance scandal dealing with Arab American and Muslim students on several campuses and how it affected their social activities.

The cultural factors involved questions 12-16, which spoke about the transition to postsecondary education. This included topics such as family values, value of education, school and college preparation, cultural and religious values, and lifestyle. All participants had support and help from their family members. The pressure from families on their children to pursue postsecondary education was noticeable in many of the participant’s statements. In respect to cultural traditions and religious tradition, many of the participants pointed out that the primary reference is the religious aspect.
For Research Question 2, questions 17-23 covered the institutional factors that were associated with the college transition to the pursuit of postsecondary education. This included high school preparation, counselors’ role, freedom of expression, and colleges’ policies including admission, accommodation services, and accommodation of religious practices. For several participants, counselor help and support was not evident.

Research Question 3, questions 24-25 highlighted the effect of the support structures and barriers encountered and how to cope with them throughout the transition from high school to college. These factors included personal, social life style, financial, family and cultural traditions, and enjoyment of life without the fear of surveillance. Participants developed their own strategies to deal with challenges. Some students pointed out that they were dealing with family and community pressure to maintain high academic performance. Some students described some strategies to cope with the barriers, such as working to cover the financial shortage, understanding that education is the key for future success, and noting that family support is essential for postsecondary education.

Chapter IV highlighted the findings from the study. Chapter V contains the research summary, conclusions, recommendations, suggestions for future research, and implications for policy and practice.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since 2001, there has been a growing identification with the label of “Muslim” over any other single ethnic group (Maira, 2004). Of the Arab American population currently enrolled in school, 12% are in preschool, 56% are in elementary or high school, and 32% are enrolled in postsecondary or graduate school (AAI, n.d.). This study was conducted to explore in depth the influence of social, religious, cultural, and institutional factors on the transition of Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey from high school to college. To achieve this goal, a historical perspective of the Arab American and Muslim community, including students in postsecondary education, was presented. The research illustrated the status, conditions, discrimination, and stereotyping of the Arab American and Muslim community.

For many years, scholars have been working to dissolve the cycle of inequality that exists in our society. The issues of inequality in education, stereotyping, and discrimination against the Arab American minority have not received the proper attention in contrast with other communities such as African Americans and Native Americans. This lack of attention may cause students of this growing community to encounter more barriers while seeking higher education and becoming successful in society (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Blumenfield, 2006; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Speck, 1997). Current studies and literature are not significantly sufficient to either highlight the needs of the Arab American and Muslim minority or improve its educational conditions. Using common educational theories such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), which was discussed
in the first chapter of this study, the present study is an attempt to explore some of these issues through the interpretation of Arab American and Muslim students themselves, utilizing CRT and guided by the core research question of this study: How do religious, social, cultural, and institutional factors influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition in northern New Jersey?

The significant efforts to improve the educational conditions of minorities using educational and political theories have been documented. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2005, 2012, 2013) and Ogbuagu (2013), Critical Race Theory, in using counter-storytelling, involves mainly reducing societal inequities that are the result of race and racism, primarily those regularly performed, sustained, and reproduced by Whites and their institutions. With respect to the Critical Race Theory, while unfolding the conditions of education in the United States, Landson-Billing and Tate IV (1995) argue that “(a) race continues to be significant, (b) society is based on property rights rather than human rights, and (c) the intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool for understanding inequity” (p. 1).

The experiences and cultures of minority students as creators and holders of knowledge are continuously misinterpreted within the formal educational environment (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Therefore, using the interview as the primary instrument, data were collected from 24 Arab American and Muslim college students to recognize the experiences of these students. The interview questionnaire was developed to explore the influence of social, religious, cultural, and institutional factors on the postsecondary education transition of Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey and to elicit a comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences. The findings of this
study illustrate the reflections, perceptions, and lived experiences of a small group of Arab American and Muslim second-generation students as narrated by them. The findings of the study revealed that the needs of Arab American and Muslim students must be addressed for their condition to be improved. It seems that little effort is put forth for new programs or strategies to relieve Arab American and Muslim students from misrepresentation, discrimination, and stereotyping in the educational system at all levels.

The outcomes of this study relate directly to the research questions and the results indicate that change is needed in several educational areas to understand and meet the needs of Arab American and Muslim students as a minority. In addition, the results suggest that social, religious, cultural, and institutional factors are influencing the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition in northern New Jersey. The study also alluded to some challenges participants experienced during their transition to postsecondary education, such as financial matters, security, and cultural traditions.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the influence of religious, social, cultural, and institutional factors on the postsecondary education transition lived experiences as told by a small group of Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey. I sought to find out how Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey describe how religious, social, cultural, and institutional factors influence their postsecondary education transition experiences.

Based on the analysis of the collected data, several patterns emerged, such as commitment to religion, family relations, guidance counselors’ help, and Islamophobia.
Participants’ responses to the research questions answered how social, religious, cultural, and institutional factors influence the transition of Arab American and Muslim students from high school to postsecondary education in northern New Jersey. The study confirmed that these factors are distinctive identifiers among the Arab American and Muslim students’ perceptions of how these factors influence their postsecondary transition. The following were the primary questions that guided this study:

1. How do religious beliefs and practices, social factors, and cultural characteristics influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition?

2. What are the institutional factors that influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition?

3. What types of support structures and barriers at institutions influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition and how are they utilized or coped with?

Twenty-four second-generation Arab American and Muslim college students participated in this study. The primary instrument used to collect the data was the face-to-face interview using the guiding questions (Appendix D) to motivate students to share their stories about their experiences. The interview guiding questions were designed to gather stories from the students to help answer the research questions for this study. The thoughts of the students were presented throughout the research in order to give the reader the ability to hear the experiences of the participants as they expressed them.

**Key Findings**

This section of the study includes a discussion of the factors affecting the
participants’ transition from high school to college. The analysis of the responses of the students helped answer the research question to better understand the factors influencing the transition of the members of this study from high school to college. The research showed that participants recognized the importance of the investigation and commitment to religious and cultural values. The students were fully aware of the historical perceptions of Arabs and Muslims by non-Muslims, especially after the events that took place on September 11. In addition, the responses of the participants indicated a high level of consistency among the students rather than differences when it came to their reflections on their religious, cultural, and social practices. Furthermore, the responses of the participants indicated that their cultural, social, and religious traditions are intertwined and cannot be understood in isolation. The interviews drew outlines that provided me with the opportunity to identify common patterns and themes that were most often repeated across students’ responses. The data of the study revealed five important major themes, as shown in Figure 1, that surfaced through the face-to-face interviews and related to their transition experiences: (1) religious beliefs and practices, (2) social factors, (3) cultural characteristics, (4) institutional factors, and (5) coping with barriers encountered and supporting programs.

The five main themes and the subthemes provided the framework for the presentation of the data. In the participants’ own voices, I presented some quotations to elaborate on the major themes of their transition experiences. It was essential to comment beyond what the individuals said. Therefore, the remarks represent shared meaning among the students. However, to provide context for their responses, it was necessary at times to present the individuals’ responses.
**Figure 1.** Major themes affecting Arab American and Muslim students.

**Research Question 1.** How do religious beliefs and practices, social factors and cultural characteristics influence the Arab Americans and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition?
Category 1. Religious beliefs and practices.

Religious practices.

“Indeed this, your religion, is one religion, and I am your Lord, so worship Me” (Quran 21:92). A further explanation of this would be that while the participants’ countries of origin are different, they share the same religion and perform the same religious practices, which are defined by their ideology of unity. The students discussed their understanding of their religious beliefs and practices. The responses of the students in the study revealed insightful evidence regarding their level of religious affiliation. In addition, religion plays an essential role in their lives more than instructors and administrators recognize, which was conveyed clearly throughout this study. It was evident from the contributions of the participants that very few resources were available for them. Many of the students expressed their frustration and concern regarding a suitable prayer space, availability of Halal food, and accommodations for observing an Islamic holidays. The students openly described in detail their experiences that expressed the importance of religious and cultural values in their lives and the influence on their postsecondary education, while drawing attention to their limits in acquiescing to the American life style.

Almost all students showed a strong affiliation with their religion, many of whom perform their daily prayers, sometimes in groups, indicating their high level of commitment toward their religion, as in the following examples: “I pray at home, work, or sometimes in the car” (102). “On campus, I usually find a small room or a little closed area where nobody is there. Sometimes I try to pray with others . . . [congregational prayer]” (110). “I usually pray in the MSA room. If it is a long class, I just go to an
empty room and pray there, then return to class” (107). Though some participants were grateful to have the MSA office, which is considered the daily congregational prayer room, it was evident from the discussion with the students that the space provided is very small and barely fits a group of three or four. One student said, “If it is prayer time I head to the MSA room . . . pray by myself there. The room is not that big over there” (103). Another commented, “. . . last semester we asked for a prayer room and they refused. So we have to pray in the MSA room or in little corners” (108). The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Mays (2003), who stated that the prayer places dedicated for the Muslim students at the postsecondary institutions are not suitable for prayers or the population attending. Furthermore, he noted that the participants of his study indicated that other faith groups have designated lounges. His findings echo the results of Speck (1997), indicating that Muslim students encounter religious prejudice. The issue of providing assigned rooms for religious services may vary from one college to another. In general, state colleges avoid providing students practicing their faith on campus with dedicated rooms. According to one student, “Friday prayer [congregational prayer Muslims perform every Friday] I know there is a room where everyone gets together to pray, but it’s not like an assigned room” (101). Another said, “When we asked for our own room, they said . . . if we give you a prayer room, we have to give other clubs [Christian and Jewish] the same” (105).

Students indicated that prayer is one of the pillars of Islam. It is obligatory to pray; it distinguishes Muslims from non-Muslims. Prayers prevent them from performing any acts that contradict the teachings of Islam and relieve them from their stress. One participant said, “It is one of the pillars of Islam” (106). Others said, “. . . it
distinguishes Muslim from non-Muslim . . . if you pray five times a day, it will hold you back from doing something bad; you will think twice about doing it” (117). “To me, prayer is everything; it gets you through your day, it teaches you right and wrong. You feel closer to God, and it makes you feel safe and protected” (118).

The statements of the students are a reflection of their practical implementations of their beliefs. “Surely in Allah's remembrance hearts find comfort” (Quran 13:28). It is [prayers] a place where your stress is relieved” (116). This is a clear application of the Prophet Mohammed’s directions. When a person gets worried or anxious, he or she should say some supplications even during the prayers. “O Allah, I seek refuge with You from worry, sorrow, incapacity, laziness . . .” (Sahih al-Bukhari, 6363). The findings of this study are similar to the results of Bryant (2006) that Muslim students were classified as very spiritual and strongly affiliated with their religion, relative to other non-majority religious groups.

Although most participants are religiously devoted to their religion, as well as to their studies and daily life, that did not prevent them from being involved in different clubs or students activities such as MAPS, TEC, Equestrian, MSA, FHP, NSSHLA, Art Association, SGA, and physical activities responding to the calls of the Prophet Mohammed. From an Islamic perspective, this involvement is part of the faith and practice of the Muslim’s daily life in applying the practical meaning of the statements of the Prophet Mohammed. The Prophet Mohammed said, “A strong believer is better and is more beloved to Allah than a weak believer, and there is good in both” (Sahih Muslim, 2664). In addition, he said, “The Muslim who mixes with people and endures their harm is better than the Muslim who does not mix with people nor endures their
harm” (at-Tirmidhi). Participants’ involvement in different college activities and their exposure to a diverse student population may influence their college environment and personal development. One of the students shared her story. “When we met for the first time, I felt she [my coach] did not like me; but after years we are best friends because I showed her that Muslims are like anyone else . . . I noticed that if I am among a group of people and they are talking and if someone starts using “profile” language, they immediately apologize to me . . . even without [my] saying anything . . . because . . . I put [on] my head covering . . . . As an art student one of the required classes is . . . to paint a model and the model is usually nude. I made a request for the model to be clothed and the school . . . made a special class for me where the model was clothed” (106).

Knowledge of the Quran’s effect on daily life.

The stability and confidence of the participants in their beliefs was apparent throughout the study analysis. Their knowledge of the Quran is considered to be the reference for their values and motivates them to correct American society’s misunderstandings of the Arab American and Muslim community. In addition, their knowledge of the Quran influences their daily life activities, including conduct, making decisions, diet, and attire. This type of commitment helped the students to develop and create a strong supportive network among Arab American and Muslim students through their affiliation with clubs, such as the MSA. Many participants’ engagement in MSA provided them with the opportunity to create strong bonds with other students and help them in performing their religious practices in groups. Many students indicated that
attending weekly lectures discussing different religious topics enriched their knowledge of Islam.

My knowledge of the Quran makes me unique in avoiding many of the bad things that many of the students my age do, such as drinking alcohol or going to nightclubs. Instead, the Quran saves me from these bad things by asking me to pray, spend time with my family and get an education (121).

Participants indicated that their religion provides them with guidance in their daily interactions (Afridi, 2001). These interactions are associated with the teachings of the Quran, which serve as a filter monitoring their everyday life experiences. This strong affiliation with their religion helped them maintain their religious and cultural identity while managing the challenges they faced throughout their time at college. The Prophet said, “Be mindful of Allah (God) and Allah will protect you” (Al-Nawawi, 19).

I think of the Quran during difficult times. If I get angry, I think of different hadiths [sayings of the Prophet Mohammed] or verses [from the Quran] to help me. I think there is a hadith that says when you are angry, you should make Wudu [Ablution] [“... so when one of you becomes angry, he should perform ablution” (Sunan Abi Dawud, 4784)], so I do that to make me calmer (101).

This tendency of devotion is apparent in the way participants perceived themselves religiously. Their fervent belief in God and compulsion for Islamic teachings and practices is evidence of their high level of religious affiliation, linking it with the life purpose.

Most of the participants indicated that religious beliefs and practices did influence their transition from high school to college in different ways, and created opportunities
for them to grow. One student said, “Quran explains how everyone should better himself or herself, and in the Quran it emphasizes the importance of furthering your education . . . I think this helped me to get into college” (102). Another student shared, “College is very different from high school . . . . You have to be conscious of religious beliefs in the back of your mind, like what friends you make and what decisions you take” (109). The responses of the students were reflections of what Islamic teachings expect from its followers in which beliefs and actions must be consistent. This is associated with what the Prophet Mohammed said, “Faith is not by embellishment or wishful thinking, but it is what settles in the heart and is verified through your actions” (Al-Bayhaqi). The findings in this study mirror the findings of Bryant (2006) that Muslim students are deeply affiliated with their religion comparing them to their peers from other non-majority faith groups.

**Religious beliefs and college choice.**

It appears that religious beliefs and practices have minimal influence on Arab American and Muslim students’ college choices. Choosing college was purely dependent upon academic and career desire, as illustrated by the following responses: “I chose my college based on my future career” (124). “When I chose where I wanted to study, I never really associated it with religion” (119). “I felt like college is your choice for what you want to do; it is your passion. I do not see how religion would stop me from becoming a teacher or a nurse” (118).

The results of the study are similar to the findings of the Mayhew (2004) study in which Muslim students have a close relationship with God and tend to attribute their religious understanding to their family and remain heavily connected to parents and other
role models. Confirming these observations in her study on first year college students, Bryant (2006) found that “Muslim students are the most religiously devout in both belief and behavior compared to other religious minority groups. This trend is apparent in how they perceive themselves religiously and spiritually relative to peers, their fervent belief in God, their commitment to prayer and religious service attendance, and the evident link between faith and the central aspects of their identity and life purpose” (p. 21). Many students realized the differences between cultural and religious values and the expectation of each one. Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) found that Muslim students were able to grow with confidence on campuses that accept Muslim students and support their practices.

Besides the qualitative studies of Bryant (2006), Cole and Ahmadi (2003), Mayhew (2004), Mays (2003) and Mir (2006), very few empirical investigations focused on exploring the perspective and lived experiences of Muslim women on campus as a non-majority religious group, creating a noticeable gap between research and practice.

**Category 2. Social factors.**

The students’ responses show their understanding of their socioeconomic status, gender, racial issues, lifestyle, and of Muslims as a marginalized minority group on campuses.

**Socioeconomic status.**

It was consistent that social and financial issues were important for the students in this study in their decision to attain their postsecondary education degree. The Arab American Institute reported that 79% of Arab Americans work in the private sector with a median income of $59,000. A look into the families’ income and educational attainment
shows that a majority of the students came from the middle class group. In general, the income of about 50% of the participants’ families was more than $75,000 a year, of 30% it was more than $50,000 a year, and of 20% it was above $25,000. More than 50% of the students indicated that they had received scholarships for their education. Three participants mentioned that they must work to pay for their tuition, five students took out loans, and the rest indicated that they had received scholarships or financial support from their parents. The findings of the study were similar to the findings of Perez (2009) in which college students felt that dropping out of college would not be helpful for them.

The findings of the study are an indication of the socioeconomic status of the Arab American and Muslim community’s financial health and parents’ level of education, which influences the academic attainment and needs of the members of the Arab and Muslim community financially and emotionally. Participants believed that social class and financial issues played a major role in their decision to attend their college of choice. In addition to financial support from their families, many of the students received financial assistance or scholarships from their colleges. “My parents always paid for my education” (119). “Financial reasons affected a lot [my decision] . . . I got a full scholarship, which is why I chose to come here” (101). From the students’ responses, some students are working or taking out loans to cover their tuition. “I have to work many hours a day and still be a fulltime student, which is very hard on me” (102). “Financial aid and loans currently take care of my college tuition” (103). “This college offered me some scholarships, besides financial aid and some student loans” (117). Some other students left college because of financial challenges. “I do see a lot of young men not completing college and taking over their fathers businesses” (106). The findings of
the study are consistent with Rowan-Kenyon’s (2007) study, which indicates that students’ socioeconomic status affects their access to postsecondary education. Those with lower socioeconomic status have limited access to college throughout their lifespan.

Participants were seeking postsecondary education for many reasons; these included cultural pressure, growth, better opportunities, having a stable career, and being more independent. “I attended college because I want to have a nice career” (101). “I am studying accounting and it is a career desire” (102). “As an Arab person, society puts more pressure on males to be better in their life” (122).

The findings of the study are parallel with the results of Fry (2004), who indicated that financial status affects Latino college enrollment. In addition, the results are consistent with those of Constantine et al. (2007). These findings showed that Blacks and Latino students’ socioeconomic status may affect their future and their academic attainment. Furthermore, the findings of the study are consistent with Verba et al. (1993) where the results in their study about Latinos and African Americans discovered that socioeconomic status is a strong predictor of civic involvement and exercising of political power.

All students believed that their ethnicity had no influence on their transition, college choice, or college enrollment. The participants indicated that their identity provided them with the opportunity to create strong bonds and a network of support through their friendships, especially through the MSA. Although race or ethnicity did not affect their decision, it was clear from their answers that their presence on campus may bring some change. “My experience in the Equestrian team was a very interesting one because I was the first Muslim girl to ever join the equestrian team and be good at it, and
I became the VP of the club after working my way up. My coach . . . when we met for the first time I felt she did not like me, but after years, we became best friends because I showed her that Muslims are like anyone else” (106).

**Gender.**

From the answers of the students, gender did not influence their college enrollment decisions. For the participants, it was not an option not to attended college. There was no question about education; it was a priority for all participants and their families, regardless of the college or major. “I always had in mind that I was going to go to college” (110). “I do not feel like I attended college primarily because I am a girl. I attended college because I want to have a nice career” (101). All participants indicated that their families provided them with all the support they needed to enroll in college.

According to the answers of some females, some parents had reservations regarding their girls taking up a dorm room due to religious and cultural reasons. A few students shared the information that their families were even hesitant to let male siblings attend a school away from home. “My brother fights to dorm at his university. My parents were against it” (106). Some female students indicated that their parents were not supportive of their desire to live away from home. “The only thing I knew is that I could not dorm . . . and my parents will not let me” (115). “I know my parents wouldn’t let me live out of state and dorm at school or college” (118). In addition, some females indicated that some parents put pressure on them so that they will not choose a university far away from home. Yet, other youth were not able to make it to postsecondary education. Living away from home is considered a challenge amongst the Arab American and Muslim community, in particular the females. This is consistent with Fry’s (2009) and Perez’s
(2009) findings regarding the Hispanic community’s concern over their females enrolling in a college far away from home.

**Islamophobia and images of Arabs and Muslims.**

When it comes to safety on campuses, the answers of most of the students showed that being an Arab or Muslim did not affect their feeling of being safe due to tolerance among students, emergency assistant stations, and college security. Although participants have that feeling of safety, the societal understanding of Islam and its practices remains very little. In addition, that understanding has been influenced by the misrepresentation of the media. Few participants described their experiences with the NYPD’s activities on campuses, indicating that they feel safe physically but not mentally because of the NYPD’s previous surveillance activities against Arab American and Muslim students on different campuses.

Participants expressed their thoughts and readily identified what they believed in. Many students mentioned that they were afraid of being associated with negative aspects of Islam, Arabs, or Muslims. Some of the participants were amazed and disappointed at the level of ignorance people display. In general, the ignorance towards the culture and religion of Arabs and Muslims is due to the way they are misrepresented by the media. It was evident that the more identifiable that the participant was a Muslim, the more likely he or she would experience the effects of Islamophobia.

Colleges and universities are places for hot debates concerning religion and politics, which makes discussions on these topics in different sessions a problematic experience for Muslim students. The findings of this study parallel the results of Speck (1997), showing that Muslim students are reluctant to protest or reject their instructors’
opinions because they have the upper hand on their scores and course results. One of the participants mentioned that she and her sister experienced hostility and unfairness from the professor, and they used to avoid him. She said, “The instructor . . . he used to say stuff about Muslims. I felt like he was discriminating and stereotyping. He used to make comments here and there that were not necessary. I felt he was not fair with me and my sister in that class” (110). Another student shared her experience and mentioned that, because of the negative behavior of her professor and the discrimination she faced, she was forced to drop the course.

There was an incident which was flat out racism and Islamophobia . . . . During the class the first day he [the professor] already was attacking Muslims and talking about how they are horrible people and all anti-Semitic and all the books he wanted us to read were terrible, based on no facts. It was all evidence taken out of context. I ended up dropping the class and changing my track (108).

Just as in the findings of Cainkar (2009), this study showed that discrimination and prejudice not only reached professors and classrooms but also the curricula and the textbooks.

One student mentioned the following incident at her high school:

People would . . . put their jackets on their heads and ask me if I do this during the bus time and say, Oh look at her; she is a terrorist . . . . I got death threats from a lot of them. One time some girl said she would beat me . . . and leave me unconscious . . . . Before the September 11th anniversary, a car stopped and someone threw leaves and grass in my face and drove away (116).

Another related the following experiences:
At high school some students used to mock me because of my beliefs. Because I believe in God, they used to be very disrespectful; they want to hit me because of my belief (106).

The stories of the students showed that these participants were targeted because of their ethnicity and dress. The experiences of these students are not extraordinary for Muslim students. Jandali (2012) indicated that Muslim students are labeled as terrorists, “towelheads,” and “son of Bin Ladin,” creating an environment that led the students to feel unsafe and marginalized. This is similar to the findings of Ali and Bagheri (2009) and Nasir and Al-Amin (2006), indicating that victims of hate crimes from among the Muslim youth suffer from physical and emotional consequences. Identical to the observations of this study, other researchers (Gloria & Ho, 2003; Gloria et al., 2005; Castellanos et al., 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997) studying Latino students discovered that Latino students have encountered similar challenges on college campuses; they faced direct insults and felt unwelcomed, which affected their enrollment rates and academic progress.

Another participant said after joining one club, she was marginalized and experienced some hostility. She felt that her coach in the beginning used to hate her because she is a Muslim; but after some years, her experience changed and she was respected for her work. She stated, “My coach is very strict. When we first met, I felt she did not like me, but after years we are best friends because I showed her that Muslims are like anyone else” (106).

Some students spoke about the police activities against the Muslim students and blamed the media for being biased in presenting Islam and Muslims as the evil to society.
Sharing their experiences, one participant, when she was asked about safety, posited the following:

I feel safe in the sense that I do not see any physical danger. But law-wise, not really because . . . we found out they [the NYPD] were infiltrating MSAs in colleges like . . . I started getting worried and double-checking everything we do. . . . I didn’t want to get charged with something like terrorism (108).

The experience of another student shows the level of media influence and at times the negative effect on the public.

I went to the [town] board of education to apply for a substitute certification and the woman who worked there looked at me as if I was asking a very strange question . . . and the woman asked me are your transcripts in English? Then she said, do you go to university here? . . . As if I am visiting and I do not speak English at all (106).

The findings of the study are consistent with Bradford’s (2009) that since 9/11, a clear increase in anti-Islamic prejudice acts was observed.

The results of the research mirror in many respects the findings of Mays (2003), which indicated that students felt strongly that they could not speak and express their opinion on campuses regarding understanding Muslims. Similarly, they felt that their religion is being distorted by the media. Furthermore, Mir (2006) noted in her study that Muslim religious practices and visible Muslim identity resulted in more marginalization practices by college officials, faculty, and students against Muslim students. Similar to Mir (2006), Bryant (2006) noted that, post 9/11, Americans’ attitudes and tensions certainly persisted and became visibly pronounced against people of other faiths. During
writing the final pieces of this study, the recent murder of three Arab American Muslim students—Deah Barkat, his wife, Yusor Abu Salha, and her sister, Razan Abu Salha, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina—is widely believed to be the result of Islamophobia and the media’s misrepresentation of the Arab and Muslim community. However, the media is still considering it simply a dispute over a parking spot (Ahmed & Shoichet, 2015).

While several students in this study have not experienced discrimination in this study, a clear increase was marked in anti-Islamic prejudice and discrimination incidents since 9/11 (Bradford, 2009). Despite these incidents and many other reports on stereotyping and discrimination against Arabs and Muslims, the participants in this study shared positive thoughts about their campuses’ cultures. They consider themselves Americans regardless of the media’s misrepresentation of their culture and religion. The participants believe and hope that through proper presentation in the media and the educating of society, this negative image of Arabs and Muslims will change.

**Category 3. Cultural characteristics.**

**Family and cultural values.**

In Islam, as it was discussed in the literature review, family is considered the foundation unit of the society (Harik & Marston, 1996; Moss & Wilson; 1993; Nydell, 2006; Quran 4:36, 17:23-24; Al-Nawawi, 1983, # 317). According to participants, family and cultural values overwhelmingly influence all aspects of their life, and religion functions as their thermostat to regulate their behavior and what they are allowed to do or not.

Throughout the interviews, students shared the belief that Arab American and Muslim families consider the family as the most important social and economic
institution, and in general, they value education. There was a consensus among the students that families provide their children with emotional, financial, and moral support during their K-12 school and postsecondary education, even though they pressured them at times by demanding straight A’s. One participant said, “My parents definitely wanted me to go to college; they wanted me to be financially stable with a good job and well paid” (104). Another commented, “I have an uncle who is a doctor and another uncle who is an engineer. My parents wanted me to become like these uncles . . . to be a college graduate” (102). Many of the students indicated that they received help in applying for college, scholarships, or financial aid from their parents, siblings, and their counselors.

The results of the study are consistent with the findings of Constantine, Kindaichi, and Miville (2007), who indicated that cultural values and family pressure might force Black and Latino children to adhere to their parents’ expectations to aim for a college degree.

Close family ties define Arab American and Muslim family relationships; their families maintain a strong association with immediate family members and organizations. The evidence from the students’ responses show that the role of family is critical in advancing participants’ learning and influencing their educational choice. Families’ opinion is significant in the postsecondary education decisions; many students indicated that their parents positively influenced their college education decisions. Students agreed that family engagement provided them with many types of support; some participants indicated that, besides their counselors, their families guided them in applying for financial aid. Three of the students mentioned that their siblings provided them with ample advice about colleges, applications, and majors. According to the participants, all
received support from their family members or friends whenever they had questions related to academic or non-academic matters.

Some female students raised the issue of living away from their residence (dorming). Some of them mentioned that they drive 45 minutes or more to their colleges because their parents did not allow them to dorm due to religious or cultural reasons. “Culturally, it is harder for a female to dorm. My brother fights to dorm at his university. My parents were against it” (106). “The only thing that I knew I could not do is to dorm . . . and my parents will not let me; that’s why I drive to college” (115). “I know my parents would not let me live out of state and dorm at school or college” (118).

Three female participants indicated that they are married. One of them is expecting after her graduation date, and her family is taking care of all her college financial obligations. The other two are student parents and their husbands and families from both sides are supporting them financially and taking care of their babies. All of them indicated that they are commuting to college for more than 45 minutes one way, and they are obligated to attend to the house responsibilities in addition to their jobs and children. Three of them noted that their families are inspiring them to finish their college education and helping or will be assisting in babysitting their children during their absence.

It appears from the data gathered from the demographic questionnaire that 21 participants in this study were born and reared in the United States, and 23 participants indicated that they had been reared by both parents, which created a strong bond among family members. Two participants indicated that the English language level of their
Most of the parents of the participants in the study received some education at the high school level; many of them received a college education, and others attained graduate education. Only one student did not indicate the education of his father; 19 of the participants indicated that their fathers had attained a college degree, five among them had received a master’s degree, and four parents had achieved only high school graduation. Twelve of the mothers had achieved high school graduation, and the rest had attained college degrees. Two of them managed to complete their graduate studies. Almost 50% of the participants’ mothers are homemakers.

Consistent with the study results, De le Rosa (2006) in her research indicated that parents’ level of education, financial status, and their involvement in their children’s education affect their children’s college process and choice. Furthermore, the findings of the study are comparable to Chen’s (2005) study, which illustrates that a strong relationship exists between the children’s academic achievement and their parents’ educational attainment level. Moreover, the findings of the study are consistent with previous researches of Williams (1998) and Mayhew (2004), which noted the role of family bonds in transmitting religious values and beliefs among Muslims. Furthermore, in her study of non-majority religious groups on campus, Bryant (2006) noted, “Coinciding with their high levels of religiousness, Muslim students’ faith is rooted in strong familial bonds” (p. 21).

_The American lifestyle._

Throughout the interviews, the participants saw no conflict between Islamic
principles and American ethical values. According to students’ answers, there were many positive things about the American lifestyle. All of them considered themselves Americans because they were born and/or reared in the United States. Many of them adopted the American lifestyle except whatever conflicts with their culture or religion. One student compared the Arab and the American lifestyles:

The American way of life is different, but in some ways it is not different . . . Arab women are working, Arab women are continuing higher education, travelling . . . but still you have to keep your values . . . you have rules you cannot forget them. The Arab way of life is more conservative. The American way of life is do as you please and come as you please. Once you are in college that is it; you are free, you are emancipated, you are not under your parents’ supervision . . . you do whatever you want, go out for parties, have girlfriends and drink, and do all that stuff (117).

The answers of the students revealed that even people of the same country differ in the way they behave toward and interpret their cultural and religious values. Participants indicated that they are trying to maintain their religious values and modify the American lifestyle to meet the requirements of their religion and cultural standards. Some members reported that the American lifestyle is similar to theirs in some ways and different in other ways. They highlighted the great level of influence of religion over their way of life. One student commented as follows:

The American way of life is similar in ways. I do similar things like other people; I go to work, I go to school, and I want education. It is different though because of different values and different religions. Some people’s religion is a
bigger influence than others. I just feel religion has a greater influence on my way of life versus the American way of life. (119)

On the other hand, some participants indicated that the American lifestyle is different. “I believe the American way of life is different because it’s a bit more laid back. But when it comes to education . . . I feel Americans care . . . about their children getting a good education” (124). The findings of the study parallel Delgado’s (2002) findings, in which Chicana students expressed their commitment towards their Mexican culture.

**Alcohol consumption.**

Many of the participants mentioned the issue of alcohol consumption, drugs, smoking, and parties on campus, and as described by one participant, “They always feel like they need drinking or drugs to tackle a situation” (107). Another participant said, “. . . a lot of kids do drugs . . .” (104). One participant mentioned, “I feel like Americans are more reckless especially college students. You know they really just love to party and drink and that is very typical for American culture” (106).

One of the participants described his experience with his peers during social events. He noted that his peers put pressure on him at times to participate in drinking during these social activities. “. . . during the SGA retreat, one of the kids had bought alcohol and offered me to drink. I said no, and they tried to convince me; but I said I could not do it because of my religion” (105). Some participants felt that they were excluded from college activities and departmental social functions because their religion does not allow them to be present where alcohol is served. One student said, “Going to the party or bar and having drinks with my friends I cannot do due to my religion”
(104). The Prophet Mohammad said, “... And whoever believes in Allah [God] and the Last Day, then he is not to sit at a spread in which wine is circulated” (at-Tirmidhi). Another student mentioned, “There’s things they do for fun, which for us is trouble. Like the partying, drinking, the drugs, boyfriend, girlfriend” (118). This manner indicates the high level of relationship between the beliefs of the participants and their daily practices. This study agrees with Mir (2006) and Zine’s (2001), which illustrates that Arab and Muslim students avoid alcohol, drugs, and dating. In addition, the findings of this study mirror the findings of Speck (1997) in which some students and faculty used to put pressure on one of his participants to be part of their social events where alcohol was served.

The consumption of alcohol and use of drugs by college students has not been adequately addressed by postsecondary institutions. However, some students mentioned that some colleges are even planning to have a bar on campus, disregarding the negative impact of such a place on the life of college students financially, emotionally, and academically. More than 50,000 college students from 120 different colleges took part in a Harvard School of Public Health study regarding consumption of alcohol at binge level (Wechsler & Nelson, 2008). The study reported that alcohol consumption among college students aged 18 to 24 has a significant impact on students and their surroundings. The report showed that it affects their academic performance, social relationships, and health. Furthermore, according to the National Institute of Alcohol and Abuse and Alcoholism, 1,700 college students die because of alcohol-related injuries (Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005). Although the results of this study are essential, some other colleges invite students to parties and concerts. In
addition to that, after providing them with all the means to be intoxicated, they ask them not to engage in any activities that could create problems or disturb others.

*Cultural traditions vs. religious values.*

From the answers of the students, it was evident that even people of the same country, language, and religion differ in the way they look at their cultural values or practice of religion. Many participants noted that religious values were stressed more than the cultural ones, as in the following examples: “We are not too much [affiliated] with culture. It is more religion . . . . We have always been raised . . . to follow traditions of Arab Americans” (110). “They [parents] do encourage religious practices more than cultural things. In their eyes the religion comes before tradition and culture” (104). “My family doesn’t value culture at all. They don’t see any use of it . . . . We are more religiously oriented than culturally” (108). “Little emphasis is on maintaining cultural values and traditions. Most emphasis is on the religion” (115).

On the other hand, other students expressed a different opinion; they indicated that their families put more emphasis on the cultural values than the religious ones. One of the students stated, “[parents] stressed . . . cultural values first and then afterwards Islamic values” (111). Another said, “Some of our cultural traditions don’t go along with Islamic teachings. They wanted me to maintain the Arabic language . . . certain traditions like food and dress” (109).

A married participant had a different type of experience. She indicated that her parents would not let her dorm or travel for long distance to attend college while she was unmarried. After her marriage, her experience was very different. She compared her experience before and after marriage:
I have to maintain it [cultural values] very much . . . I cannot have any guy friends. To them [parents] it is normal you are in school, you have colleagues . . . you have to keep your values. Religion, the scarf, the way I dress, praying, being home on time, things like that . . . . Before with the other college, I could not dorm at it . . . when I got married it changed . . . . I traveled for school and I was married. I do not have a problem. If I was not married, they would not let me travel for school by myself. Religion and cultural values were there in maintaining the cultural values. (119)

The findings of the study mirror Fry’s (2009) and Perez’s (2009) findings with regard to Latinas going to college far away from home. They indicated that the general feeling within the Hispanic community is a repercussion of females going to college because it jeopardizes marriage and having children.

Another group of the students noted that it depends on the situation and the tradition itself. They feel that they are more connected to American culture than Arab culture. Some students shared their beliefs indicating that they are trying to adopt the American culture. “Culture is a huge deal, especially for my mother. But to . . . me growing up in United States . . . although I understand the Arab culture and it makes sense to me, but I don’t identify it as much as the American culture” (106). “My family has tried to maintain our cultural values and traditions; however, due to the society we live in, it is foolish to not assimilate and have some traditions change” (122). “Time is changing. It influenced my thinking about college a lot. Now you can say I am Americanized . . . because I know many girls in our culture who cannot go to college. You have to get married . . . take care of your house and your husband” (117).
Participants were able to understand the differences between the three values: the Islamic, the Arabic, and the American one. It was clearly expressed that religious and cultural traditions are tightly intertwined, and it will be very challenging to understand them in isolation. “Because religion and culture are so intertwined, sometimes it is hard to differentiate between the two” (106). Therefore, some participants pointed out the importance of having that balance between Arab or American culture and religion:

They [parents] push us to maintain these [cultural] things. In my case, my parents always took me back home. We stayed there for two years, we went to school, we adapted to society over there . . . . Now I am married with a child, I understand why my dad did that; now we have the best of both cultures rather just being “Americanized.” I think there is a balance between cultural values and religion. Thank God, they taught us how to pray; they did not take away the American in us and they did not take away the Arab in us We have a mixture of both (118).

Another student expressed similar feelings regarding maintaining a balance between culture and religion. “My mother always reminds me don’t forget your religion. We are Muslims; do not forget where you came from [culture]” (119).

The study recognizes that the religious and cultural influence on the Arab American and Muslim students is not a new phenomenon. Previous studies have confirmed that learning patterns are a function of both nature and culture. Myers (1995) stated, “Type development starts at a very early age . . . but the successful development of type can be greatly helped or hindered by environment from the beginning” (p. 176).
The influence of the religious environment and the lifestyle of the Arab American and Muslim students can be observed clearly. The Prophet Mohammed in one of his *hadiths* discussed the importance of the environment in the development of individuals. He said, “Every child born with a true nature (i.e., to worship none but Allah alone). It is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian.” Then he quoted a verse from the Quran. “The nature made by Allah (God) in which He has created men. There is no altering of God's creation” (30:30).

**Research Question 2.** What are the institutional factors that influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition?

**Category 4. Institutional factors.**

This theme covers academic high school preparation, guidance counseling, public school policies, and postsecondary institution policies. It discusses the institutional factors that were associated with the students’ transition from high school to college.

**K-12 schooling.**

The data collected from the demographic questionnaire showed that 21 (87%) participants were born and reared in the U.S. One student was born in the U.S. but spent some years living overseas, and three students migrated to the U.S. very young. All students finished their high school in New Jersey. Furthermore, the data gathered illustrate that nine students (38%) were attending a college prep track. Ten students (42%) were enrolled in the honor track at their high school, five students (20%) were registered in the honor and college prep tracks. Three students (13%) indicated that they attended private Islamic schools and 21 students (87%) attended public schools. Students attending honor track schools had a greater opportunity to take Advanced Placement (AP)
courses, which provided them with a greater chance to attend selective colleges. The results of the study are parallel to previous work conducted by Teranishi et al. (2004), indicating that students taking AP courses are most likely to attend selective colleges.

The experience of the participants covers a wide-scale set of data. From the responses of the students, guidance in high school is very crucial to be enrolled at their desired college. Guidance counselors are considered the source of information when it comes to providing students with needed accurate information about postsecondary education. Many students in the study indicated that there is a lack of attention paid to them while applying to colleges and universities. When the participants were asked about the help provided by their counselors, they responded, “My high school counselor was inept, cold, and just didn’t care. She didn’t want to care; she just came to her job” (111). “Absolutely not, my high school counselor didn’t even know my name” (101). “No, not at all, not even a little bit; they did not care” (106). One student indicated that her experience with her counselor was not pleasant because she was discouraged to apply to a college or university. When she responded to the same question, she described her story:

   No, they did not. They actually told me it would be difficult for me to get into college because I did not do very well in my freshman and sophomore year . . . but they said it would be hard for me to go to a college or university. I felt like they were not really trying or willing to assist me. They were discouraging me, but I did not let that stop me. (119)

The findings of the study illustrate that 12 (50%) of the participants indicated that they did not receive the proper help from their guidance counselors. The participants mentioned that they had to follow up with their college applications on their own or seek
help from their parents, siblings, or friends. Four (16%) participants noted that the role of the counselors in following up with their college applications was insignificant. Eight (34%) students described their experiences with their counselors, indicating that they were very helpful in walking them through the college enrollment process.

Some students in the study reported that the college counselors provided them with valuable information about their courses and track of study and spent some time with them to help them understand the college system and courses. They mentioned that their schools conducted college nights to expose them to different colleges.

The answers of this small sample suggest that there is a missing link and a real phenomenon underlying the responses of the participants of this research. Furthermore, this sample represented a small population from among those who were able to complete their transition to college, but those that did not make it to postsecondary institutions is a question to be studied.

The findings of the study are consistent with extensive evidence from previous studies on minority students, Jarsky, McDonough and Nunez (2009), McDonough and Calderone (2006), Perez (2009), and Perez and McDonough (2008) found that the majority of Latino and African American students receive minimal assistance from their guidance counselors. Their studies suggest that the education system is far from helping postsecondary minority students prepare for college because of the lack of training and because the structure of the counseling departments does not provide them with the opportunities to be effective in performing their role. This is a major concern for minority students, including Arab American and Muslim students because it creates a source of inequality at the postsecondary education level that schools should address.
Postsecondary admission policies.

Some students indicated that they attended college orientations at different campuses before their enrollment at the present college. Some students indicated that the admission policies did not influence their enrollment decision at all. “I was not concerned with any specifics in the admissions policies” (124). Some other participants mentioned that they were enrolled at their colleges because of certain programs offered at them. “The college had a program that if you meet a certain SAT score, then you are automatically accepted” (111).

Some participants described their counselors as being helpful. They indicated that their high schools held college fairs to expose them to different colleges and to explain to them the admission process, share information, and respond to their questions or concerns. On the other hand, about 50% of the participants indicated that they finished the admission process on their own or through the help of their parents, friends, or siblings. The rest of the students mentioned that they received a valuable amount of help from their counselors.

A good number of the participants indicated that they were granted a good amount of scholarships that attracted them to join their chosen college. “They gave me a scholarship, they assisted me, they believed in me” (119). “When I applied, they gave me a scholarship. If I did not receive that scholarship and I had to pay, I could have gone to another college” (114). This is an indication that financial matters were having a clear influence on the enrollment decision of the students.

Concerning the admission policies themselves, all participants indicated that they were well-established for everyone and cannot be changed to meet the needs of a group
of people. On the contrary, as it is noticeable in the college policies and discussed in the literature review, colleges are promoting diversity; yet the level of accommodation for the Muslim students’ essentials is lacking, as was clearly indicated in the answers of the participants. Many students specified that they were looking for a larger space to perform their prayers, better accommodations for the Islamic diet, peace, and security, Friday prayer accommodations and official excuses for observing Islamic holidays. The findings of this study correlate with the findings of Mays (2003) and Nasir and Al-Amin (2006), indicating that more accommodations for Muslim students’ needs are required.

**Research Question 3.** What types of support structures and barriers at institutions influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ postsecondary education transition and how are they utilized or coped with?

**Category 5. Coping with barriers encountered and supporting programs.**

This theme focuses on encountered barriers and how the participants coped with them, and supporting programs and how the participants utilized them. Students in the study reported various challenges, such as financial hardship, family and cultural tradition, and safety. Students managed to develop different tactics to cope with a variety of challenges.

**Barriers and challenges identified.**

Among the barriers participants identified were support of guidance counselors, financial issues, commuting to college, parenting, prayer accommodations, diet, racist instructors, safety, and Islamophobia.

One of the challenges students faced, as it was mentioned earlier, was the lack of support from the guidance counselors that affected their postsecondary educational
attainment (Gloria et al., 2005; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). About 50% of the participants raised their concerns about this challenge. Indeed, these conditions forced students to seek help from their parents, siblings, and friends to complete their college applications; and in most cases, they did not have the same level of information related to scholarship, college applications, or resources available as the counselors. At times, this situation created another challenge, which is frustration and losing financial scholarships. The findings of this study match the results of Romo and Salas’ (2003) research, which demonstrated that parents’ lack of information related to college enrollment created challenges for Latino students while seeking postsecondary education.

College enrollment is a challenge for every student. For Arab Americans, it is more challenging because the majority are considered to be among the middle class population, according to the data collected from the demographic questionnaire. The experiences of many participants demonstrated that financial issues were of great concern for the students in this study. In addition, according to several participants, the financial conditions get worse when students have other siblings going to college at the same time, due to the financial burden increasing on the families and their obligation to readjust their priorities. In general, this economic status means that students are obligated to pay their tuition because they are not entitled to subsidies. The data collected showed that 50% of the participants’ families’ income was more than $75,000 a year, and thus they received very little support from financial aid, forcing them to leave college with a large amount of debt. Some students pointed out that they work on-campus or off-campus to pay for tuition or help their families. Three participants mentioned that they must work to pay for their tuition, five students took out loans, and some others indicated that they received
scholarships or financial support from their parents or husbands. “Having to go to work every day and registering for many courses each semester is very challenging. I have to work many hours a day and still be a fulltime student, which is very hard on me” (102).

The results of this study are comparable to the findings of Romo and Salas (2003) and Perez (2009), which illustrated that the lack of scholarships and financial aid Latino students receive may be a barrier in seeking college education.

The number of youth requiring financial loans to cover their college education is increasing. Therefore, colleges are creating financial crises, students are graduating with large amounts of debt that will affect their future ability to start their own business or borrow for a mortgage (Javine, 2013; Laucius, 2011). As a result, for students not to be buried in college loans, thoughtful measures and efforts need to be taken to reduce the climbing cost of college education.

Commuting to colleges, according to some participants, was one of the barriers. Many students were driving from far distances to reach their colleges or taking public transportation to attend their classes versus dorming because of religious, cultural, or financial reasons. Students indicated that it was not an option for them to dorm. Only two students mentioned that they lived on campus. A commuter said, “The commute is about an hour long. I have class from 9:00 to 5:00; and when I get home after class around 5:45, I would have to study so I can pass. It is difficult” (117). A participant indicated, “One of the challenges is the distance and driving. I have to force myself to drive every day back home about 50 min” (115). Furthermore, taking public transportation is creating some safety concerns, according to one student. “Transportation, it is a big one; it takes at least two hours to get home. I have to stop in an area where so many people are begging,
selling fake bus tickets, people smoking, doing drugs, drinking alcohol everywhere” (116).

Two students mentioned that being a mother with children created a new challenge for them, forcing them to relocate or drop out of college for some time. One of them shared her story; she stated that she had to move back in with her mother to help her in babysitting the child while she was at school which made her commute even longer. “. . . no barriers because I was only engaged . . . [I] got married; there were still no barriers, until I gave birth to my son. I had to limit my studying time . . . . I had to move back in with my mom . . . because it was difficult, studying and taking care of the child. Traveling was harder; the commute is about an hour, I needed to spend less time studying and more time with my family” (117). The other participant indicated that she had to take off some time from college because of her baby. When she went back to school, she had to take courses at night so that her husband and in-laws could help her in taking care of her child. The third married participant indicated that she would finish her school before having her first baby, but being pregnant and a student in her last year created a great challenge for her to maintain her health in good condition and her standards at the school. The other married student gave advice to her fellow female students saying, “Definitely do not be in a relationship while still in school” (117).

From their experiences, some students feel that some instructors were not objective and that they were not treated equally with others due to their physical appearance or religion. Some instances where these inequalities were found include making racist slanders, forcing them to read prejudiced literature about Islam or Muslims, and presenting media that promotes the misunderstanding of Arabs and Muslims. This
created another barrier for some students, driving them to drop the courses. Just as Cho (2009) stated in his results that some instructors are not supportive in helping Muslim students and were also found to be discriminatory towards them, three participants indicated that lecturers were involved in clear racist remarks and practices, forcing them to drop their courses. As a result, they indicated that they had to register for other courses or lose the credit for that semester and at times to lose the tuition for that course.

Instructors’ misunderstandings of Muslim practices may lead to the misrepresentation of them in the classroom through using prejudiced media or lack of consideration of religious obligations and practices. The participants generally look for professors to accommodate their religious practices, when possible. “I wish they will let me go pray Friday prayer without being marked late . . . I have to go and pray while he is teaching the class” (116). The findings of this study are identical to the results of Speck’s (1997) research investigating the students’ perceptions of their professors; he identified similar problems encountered by Muslim students.

Lee and Rice (2007) in their study indicated that non-White students from Asia, India, the Middle East, and Latin America encountered considerable discrimination. Tehranian (2010) indicated that Americans of Middle Eastern descent faced systematic racial prejudice in American society. “Middle Easterners are infrequently treated as White people in their daily lives, certainly not when they deal with the Transportation Security Administration . . . at an airport . . . a border check, or . . . a routine traffic stop” (p. 38).

A female student encountered a few incidents of discrimination; she felt that some of the staff were against her. She described her experience with teachers, indicating that
she was not treated well and she was discriminated against, including an incident where a teacher reported her to the police.

This participant felt that she was stereotyped and discriminated against because of her physical appearance and religious identity. In addition, she felt that there was no justification for the aggressive behavior of teachers against her, including reporting her to the school counselor. Speck (1997) found that misrepresentation of cultural and religious practices negatively affect the educational experiences of the Muslim students.

It was noticeable from the participants’ responses that Muslim women deal with more challenges because of their clear identity, especially with increased media attention on Muslims. Because it is not a common practice in the United States in general, female participants who wear the Islamic jilbab (garments) or the hijab (Muslim traditional headscarf) for religious reasons frequently experience more discrimination and deal with curious glances, more than those whose appearance is similar to the general population. The results of the study are consistent with the findings of Cainkar (2004) that post 9/11 Muslim females were faced with more hate crimes due to their headscarves.

Some students described another challenge for them, indicating that people know everything from the media, which does not reflect an honest representation of Muslims but rather disparages the image of Arabs and Muslims. Therefore, they are confronted by stereotypes in numerous forms and on various levels whether it be on campus or off campus. These stereotypes made them uncomfortable, such as negative comments and weird stares because of their Islamic dress. A female student said, “. . . but they would look at me weird, because I am the only one wearing a scarf in all of my classes . . . . Most of them, all they know is the media; they do not interact with Muslims in person”
Due to ignorance and Islamophobia, many participants feel that the general population act negatively with those who adhere to the Islamic dress code. One of the students shared her experience:

I went to . . . apply for a substitute certification and the woman who worked there looked at me as if I was asking a very strange question . . . and . . . asked me are your transcripts in English? Then she said do you go to university here? As if I am visiting and I do not speak English at all . . . . I guess it seems to me obvious that I was born and raised here but not for her because of my religious head covering.

The findings of the study are aligned with Haddad, Smith, and Moore’s (2006) argument indicating that Muslim females who wear the Islamic headscarf often face increased discrimination.

Some active members of the MSA mentioned that they face many obstacles in attending some public social activities for a large number of students because of restrictions on using the suitable rooms. It was evident from their responses that finding a place to perform their congregational prayer is a challenge because the office (prayer room) does not fit more than four at most. In addition, participants indicated that it is a challenge for them to break their fast on campus due to Islamic diet restrictions. Some other students noted that the college calendar is another challenge for them because it does not acknowledge their holidays. A participant commented, “They [college] do not have things like Halal food. Also, religious holidays are not accepted as excused absences.”
One other challenge participants mentioned was the level of consumption of alcohol and drugs on campus, in addition to relationships with the other gender. According to the Quran (2:219 and 5:90-91) and the authentic sayings of the Prophet Mohammed, intoxication is forbidden, including wine, beer, and intoxicating drugs. One of the participants described his experience. “The only thing [parents’ command], do not go to parties because they tend to have alcohol and a lot of smoking” (116). The findings of the study are similar to the findings of Mir (2006) and Zine (2001) regarding the consumption of alcohol on campus and the resistance of Muslim students in adopting such manners.

Some participants described another challenge related to their safety and having peace and tranquility on campus. They indicated that the NYPD activities on colleges and campuses made them worry about everything they do, creating an uncomfortable zone for them in their best home [MSA]. This forced many of them to avoid MSA campus activities because of fear of being connected wrongly to any illegal matters. One of the students indicated the following:

Because of the thing that happened with the NYPD and how we found out they were infiltrating MSAs . . . during my freshmen year . . . when I found out, I was in the MSA . . . I became the VP the year after. I started getting worried and double-checked everything we do. I did not want to get charged with something like terrorism or something (108).

Many students were disturbed when they learned about the NYPD spying on the Muslim students in New Jersey (121).
I remember two years ago when [we] were suspecting one of the students was spying on . . . [us] for one semester, then students did not see that person after that time. We are not doing anything wrong to hide or be afraid of (109).

Some participants expressed their feelings of inferiority based on media representations or direct insult. One of the students mentioned that propaganda about Muslims is widespread and was hoping that the college would make some changes to accommodate her diet or religious practices. She indicated that she would be marked late if she leaves the class to attend to the compulsory congregational prayers. She stated, “I was fasting one day. I wish they will let me go pray Friday prayer without being marked late because I was afraid he will mark me late . . . . Media propaganda is brainwashing the minds of the students against Muslims” (116).

The findings of the study mirror the findings of Ayish (2003) that U.S. society lacks an understanding of Islam and the Arab culture. Speck (1997) found similar suggestions in his respective study when he noted that Muslim students are requesting the American society to understand Islam and Muslims. “What we ask for . . . . Just learn about us” (p. 45). This was very much similar to the finding of Nasir and Al-Amin (2006). One student said, “We have come to realize that the practice of Islam in the college setting is at once intensely personal and painfully public. We always feel at risk of being judged or misunderstood” (p. 22).

Supporting programs.

Participants mentioned a variety of resources such as the availability of a long list of clubs, especially the Muslim Student Association (MSA), college advisors, academic
programs, academic support or tutoring centers, college experience courses, and leadership programs, in addition to the academic scholarships.

Just as Cerbo (2010) observed in his study, many participants of this research expressed how beneficial the MSA was; for the students, it helped in developing their knowledge about Islam and assisted them in being part of the Muslim community at campus. Some of the students indicated that it was instrumental for them to have the MSA; it provided them with a place to pray. “The MSA gave me a place to pray, helped me to link to other Muslims on campus” (106). The MSA gave the participants the sense of being part of the college community and the Muslim community at large. “I wanted to make sure it [my college] had a decent MSA. Why is that important to me? Because . . . I want to feel part of the [Muslim] community” (101).

Several students indicated that accommodation services such as computer labs, scholarships, or tutoring centers for different subjects encouraged them to enroll at their present colleges. “We have a free tutoring center throughout the day” (118). Another student described her experience. She said, “They had freshman year experience . . . a course which helped transition from high school to college . . . basically how to prepare yourself, manage your time, college preparation” (117). Another participant said, “[I] learned about college, how to manage time, how to deal with college life” (109). Another student stated that he utilized the services of the writing center during his freshman year. “In the beginning of my freshman year my professors . . . recommended the writing center for me, which I used to sharpen my writing skills” (105).

The response of another student indicated that his enrollment was mainly influenced by financial issues, stating that “financial reasons affected my decision a lot,
considering I got a full scholarship, which is why I chose to come here” (101). To an extent, the findings of this study are similar to the findings of Perez (2009) in reference to the type of supporting resources affecting the college enrollment of Latino students. The response of another student shows that her enrollment was purely academic. “The only two colleges in the tri-state area with this 6-year program are this college and NANU. And their program is very good and established” (108). One of the participants indicated that she joined her program because she wanted to give back to her community. She said, “When I chose the field that I want to go into, I did relate that to being Muslim because I knew I always want to help people, give back to the community, and work with students who are at a disadvantage” (119). The findings of the study match the results of Romo and Salas (2003), indicating that implementations of programs connecting students to their communities at the postsecondary level may attract Latino students. Another student praised her college advisor; she commented on her experience. “My advisor is very helpful; she is awesome because she has been in this program for many years” (120).

Coping with barriers encountered.

This theme covers strategies and resources participants used or developed to overcome the complications they confronted or encountered while seeking postsecondary education. Coping strategies were developed among the participants to cope with different environments to help them in their transition from high school to postsecondary education. Many of the developed strategies to cope with different challenges were discussed in-depth previously under barriers and challenges identified.

Many students consider it a religious and family obligation to educate themselves and are determined to accelerate in their education. More than 50% of the participants in
this study have a 3.5 GPA or above, and only one participant’s GPA was less than 3.0. Some students talked about being part of the student government, sports clubs and many other clubs or associations such as the Future Healthcare Professionals Club, Equestrian, Minority Association for Pre-med students (MAPS), Art Club, and the National Student Speech Hearing Language Association (NSSHLA). One student noted, “I am the club president’s representative at the SGA, which meets every other week” (105). One participant mentioned, “I’m involved in quite a few clubs” (109).

Several students spoke about their positive experiences and involvement in the activities of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) on campus. They shared the idea that the MSA activities provided them with a strong feeling of being connected to their religion and Muslim community. Participants consider the MSA as a place for them to find friends and connect with other Muslims, provide them with a space in a small office to perform their prayers as individuals or in small groups of 3-4, break their fasting together, and develop their knowledge about their religion through the weekly classes that are held by MSA on campus. Some other students choose not to be members of the MSA and cope with the college culture by praying at home or as individuals.

Many students spoke about how they dealt with the financial issues. As it was noted previously, in addition to financial aid or scholarships, some participants took out loans, other students were working to pay for their tuition, and some students mentioned that their families were supporting them.

Regarding the lack of support of the guidance counselors, it was noted that several participants used different strategies to overcome this issue. Some students approached
their parents, siblings, or friends to help them in facing this challenge so that they would be able to complete their college application process.

Three students noted that they are married. One of them is expecting in a few months and two of them have children, which prevents them from staying away from home and forcing them to drive long distances every day to attend their classes or jobs. In addition, to be able to cope with college responsibilities, their family members, including husbands, take care of their children while they are at college or work to encourage them to complete their education. One of the participants said, “I had to move back in with my mom my last year because it was difficult, studying and taking care of the child. My mom is helping with watching the child” (117). One of them mentioned that sometimes to cope with college requirements, she takes classes at night so that her husband will help her in babysitting the child.

Some students reported that some instructors were not objective or supportive of them; they felt that they are discriminated against because of their physical appearance or religion. A few students explained their strategies as to how they handled such situations. A few reported that they dropped the courses, but many others had to stay silent and tolerate the professors until the end of the semester due to financial reasons, finishing graduation requirements, and/or time restraints.

One of the challenges students faced was the negative representation of Islam, Muslims, and Arabs in the media. Participants indicated that they were involved in many clubs so that they would have the opportunity to interact with other students to present the right image of Islam and Muslims and remove some of the misconceptions spread because of Islamophobia.
Several participants indicated that they coped with the restriction of not living away from home by driving even if it was for two hours or using public transportation.

As it was mentioned earlier, because alcohol is forbidden in Islam, several participants noted that they avoided any parties or social activities when alcohol was consumed. Some other students indicated that through the college newspaper they expressed their opinion against opening a bar on the college campus.

The data collected from this study suggest that this small group of participants may have developed different strategies to cope with and overcome these challenges or barriers. Nevertheless, some of these barriers required more attention from the academic institutions to improve these conditions and more research to investigate this group’s needs.

**Recommendations**

The participants of this study represented a diverse group of Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey. Throughout the study, the students shared their experiences and spoke out about issues and strategies to overcome them. During their interviews, participants told their stories regarding their postsecondary transition from their own perspective and the students’ responses were analyzed. Based on the results of the study, this section will provide some recommendations for those involved directly or indirectly in educating Arab American and Muslim future generations.

The population of our society in the 21st century is dramatically changing racially, ethnically, socially, economically, and in terms of age and family situation. It is evident that a one-size system does not fit all students, and it will not help us as a nation. “So the
higher education system must be retooled and redesigned to meet the needs of all types of students because we need these 21st century students to succeed” (Matthews, 2012, p. 3).

As the Arab American and Muslim population continues to grow in the United States, especially in the tri-state area, and in order to ensure that our state will meet that demand and immediate challenge, “Our K-12 school districts must do a better job educating our students and preparing them for college-level work” (New Jersey Task Force, 2010, p. 12). Our educational system is required to find ways to understand and accommodate minority students, including the Arab Americans and Muslims, to meet their needs. The Task Force indicated three fundamentals for college readiness; students are academically prepared and equipped with academic tenacity, college awareness, and knowledge. Drawing from the participants’ responses, our students are not prepared for college life and expectations. John Reh (2012), a senior business executive with broad management experience, expressed his concerns about the preparation and readiness of our students for the job market. He stated, “If you still believe that our schools provide adequate training to make students labor-ready, you are living in a dream world. Yes, job seekers make the effort to learn on their own the skills needed for a new job, but most get that training on the job” (para. 10). Most recently, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) analysis of the data acquired from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows a disconnect exists between high school and college readiness. The data show that less than 40% of 12th graders have the math and reading skills needed to be ready for college entry courses (Heitin, 2014; Paulson, 2014). David Conley, the director of the Center for Educational Policy Research at the University of
Oregon said, “A lot of times we’re getting kids to graduate by asking less of them, not more of them” (Paulson, 2014, para. 9).

Arab American and Muslim students struggle more than any other minority students because of media stereotyping and police surveillance (Goldman & Apuzzo, 2012a; Sullivan 2011), which are barriers to continuing their higher education. The researcher observed no specific new programs or strategies to accommodate the educational needs of the growing diverse student population, including Arab American and Muslim students. As a result, it is incumbent upon colleges and universities to provide a variety of programs to deal with some of these challenges facing all minorities. Furthermore, the study enhances the request of Matthews (2012) that New Jersey must improve college attainment among the fast-growing groups that account for the growth of the state’s population. In addition, the higher education institutions of New Jersey require extensive efforts to examine the quality of its education (New Jersey Task Force, 2010).

From the collected data, it is evident that religion plays a significant role in the life of postsecondary Arab and Muslim students, more than college administrators recognize. Drawing from the students’ answers on how the Quran influences their lives and experiences at college, this study suggests that more accommodations for Arab and Muslim students should take place on campuses, such as the curriculum, adding more space for prayer areas, diet, and adding Muslim holidays to the college calendar. Furthermore, colleges should take into consideration their social needs and accommodate them during their social activities so that they can blend in with the student body and not feel isolated and marginalized. In addition, professors need to understand the importance and the values of religion and its influence on the students’ attire and life. The college
educational system needs to be redesigned to meet and accommodate the needs of our diverse population. One of the participants in this study who covered her head mentioned that she had to drop one of her courses because of the attitude of the professor toward her. On this note, the study supports the voice and request of the president of Lumina Foundation, Jamie Merisotis, stating, “Without question, higher education must change. For one thing, it must become responsive to the needs of a much wider range of students than ever before” (Matthews, 2012, p. 3). Similar to this observation, Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) indicated that Muslim students’ experiences of prejudice or lack of understanding on the part of their professors affected their academic performance. Speck (1997), in his conclusion of his study of Muslim students, asked professors to perform their duties without discriminating against any student or religion and change their way of teaching in classrooms to accommodate our diverse students’ population. He said, “We need to recognize the diversity in our classrooms and seek to ensure that whatever biases we have about religion or a religion do not become barriers to our responsibility to teach students” (p. 46).

The participants’ responses suggest that because of family, cultural, and religious inspiration, students are graduating in four years or less according to their plans despite the lack of preparation at the high school level. Aldeman (2010) pointed out that about half of college students graduate in six years because high schools failed to prepare them for college work. He stated, “Although nearly two-thirds of high school graduates go on to college immediately after completing high school, many of these students are unprepared for college level work. That’s one of the major reasons that only about half of all entering college students are able to graduate in six years” (p. 2). Aldeman’s claim is
supported by the Transformation Task Force (TTF) report (College and Career, 2012), which raised the same concerns about the work level of the high school graduates and their preparations for college level work. The report stated, “While New Jersey boasts one of the nation’s highest graduation rates, we should also be deeply concerned that a high percentage of our graduates require significant additional remediation before being able to pursue higher education” (p. 3). Unfortunately, New Jersey’s education system falls far too short to provide all children regardless of background or economic circumstances with the required skills and knowledge to be successful in life (College and Career, 2012).

Therefore, by finding ways to accommodate and meet the needs of our students, we will contribute to the improvement of the educational system and the education status of the Arab American and Muslim students in the state of New Jersey. Furthermore, this study may mark one of the first qualitative efforts to examine Arab American and Muslim minority religious group experiences in postsecondary education in the Northeast and highlight the need to accommodate the diverse student population.

As indicated in previous chapters, Arab American and Muslim students’ experiences were ignored in previous research. The current study is an attempt to bridge a gap that exists in the literature. It is my hope that the results of this study will add a valuable piece to the available literature on Arab American and Muslim students and contributes to postsecondary institutions’ planning and management to promote religious, educational, and cultural diversity and tolerance at college campuses. I hope that the findings and recommendations’ results will encourage other educators to work with one another to promote the diversity of our society to achieve our common goals.
The evidence from the findings of this study underscores that more studies, including qualitative studies, are needed to understand the experiences and day-to-day life of the Arab American and Muslim students at the postsecondary educational level. Conducting more studies, like this study, is essential and required to study the invisible Arab American and Muslim community, to add depth and further explanation and verify the findings presented in the current study, and to explore alternatives to address the educational needs of the Arab American and Muslim students in the United States.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

After spending hours with the 24 participants and listening to their stories for many other hours, I have learned that not seeking postsecondary education is not an option for the members of the Arab American and Muslim community. Their extraordinary motivation comes from their religious and cultural values. The participants in the current study presented the diverse landscape of the Arab and Muslim community in the United States. I hope that this study will draw attention to and emphasize my research participants’ lived experiences and perceptions toward the improvement of the postsecondary education conditions to accommodate the needs of our community’s students. To improve the condition and accommodate this invisible group of people, it is necessary to understand their needs and facilitate meeting these needs. Therefore, this study has the following recommendations.

First, by its use of the Critical Race Theory as a means to promote the voices and needs of Arab American and Muslim students, policymakers and postsecondary institution administrators should recognize and pay more attention to the special needs of
Arab American and Muslim students. Therefore, it is apparent that measures need to be taken to address their religious practices, diet, and holidays.

Second, as the Muslim students’ population continues to grow, schools need to find the appropriate educational tools to explore the needs of the Arab American and Muslim students. This will contribute to the improvement of their educational status and conditions in the state of New Jersey. Therefore, through structured professional development, specific to the needs of Arab American and Muslim students, cultural awareness should be reinforced amongst school staff and administrators to recognize the importance of diversity in the educational setting and society. In addition, administrators should recognize that to meet the needs of this diverse population, more diverse recruiting practices should be implemented.

Third, ignorance and prejudice regarding Arabs and Muslims exists on campuses. This may contribute to the silencing of the Arab and Muslim students. The study suggests that college and university practitioners should strengthen their knowledge about Arab American and Muslim culture and religion through trusted resources. It was suggested by Cho (2009) and Lee and Rice (2007) that postsecondary institutions reject stereotyping and establish an environment that fosters diversity and multicultural acceptance. Educators should build bridges with the Arab American and Muslim community, interact with its members, and avoid the media stereotyping; they should acknowledge the fact that diversity will add value to our society. The results of the study suggest that institutions should integrate non-biased curricula into their courses to educate our society about the Arab Americans’ religion and culture and remove any negatively stereotyped materials in order to promote the voiced opinions of the students of this minority on
campus. Furthermore, administrators and professors should not impose their personal views on cultural or religious issues related to their students and should encourage open dialogue. This will be in the best interest of our society to promote diversity and understanding among our diverse communities and eliminate hate crimes and discrimination against minority students on campus.

Fourth, educational achievement of second-generation students with children will have long-term benefits on the students and their families in addition to the immediate economic returns. The results of the study suggest that parenting in postsecondary education needs more focus and attention from postsecondary education institutions to improve college access and attainment for students having children. In addition, colleges and universities should give greater attention and take steps to support students with children while completing their postsecondary education to prevent them from dropping out of college.

Fifth, the findings of the study suggest that high school experience has a major impact on students’ aspirations and on their postsecondary choices. The evidence from this study suggests that most of the participants received minimal attention from their assigned guidance counselors. Furthermore, the results of this study correspond to the generally recognized need for school districts and school administrations to pay more attention to the guidance counseling system at their schools to support the school’s graduates and increase the involvement of the counselors in preparing students for college life (Perez, 2009). Such attention will improve the high school student’s college preparation experiences, access, and planning for their future career. The findings of the study also highlight the importance of creating partnerships between high schools and
colleges. Participants indicated that schools affiliated with colleges affected their smooth postsecondary education transition.

Sixth, as the number of Muslim students in postsecondary education increases, the findings from this study show that it is important to create a welcoming environment on campuses, which will influence the achievement of the students. Therefore, colleges and universities should provide additional competency training for faculty and staff on the characteristics of the Arab American and Muslim students to accommodate their holidays, diet, safety, and space for prayers and activities. Based on the results of the study, the disease of Islamophobia exists and remains on campuses; therefore, the continued need for policies and practices that protect the rights of the Arab American and Muslim students at campuses and provide them with peace of mind from any surveillance or spying activities is required. Institutions of postsecondary education should be mindful that they are responsible for the safety and the creation of a welcoming climate for the students, including Arab American and Muslim students, to give them the ability to recruit and increase their enrollment across the state.

Seventh, the evidence of the study suggests that, because education is an obligation, there is a need for parents to continue to support and make sacrifices in educating their children and provide them with the best opportunities to continue their postsecondary education in order to build the future generations of this community. The results of the study show the great level of the commitment of the participants toward their religion and cultural values and its influence on their decisions to attain a college degree regardless of their financial status. The study suggests that this is because of the serious inspiration and the constant positive support and encouragement of their families.
Finally, Arab American and Muslim organizations and community leaders should increase their public relations efforts and involvement to strengthen their relationship with all postsecondary educational institutions and build bridges with them to be able to discuss the needs and concerns of the enrolled students from this community. It is critical for the Arab American and Muslim community, as members of American society, to consider cautiously the lessons of our unprecedented experiences of tolerance, acceptance, and success.

I hope that our community will be able to establish working committees and create partnerships with other postsecondary stakeholders to investigate the conditions and needs of the Arab American and Muslim students at all educational levels, including postsecondary education, and provide districts and colleges with competency training for their faculty and staff. With the sustained commitment that we experience with our community and collaboration with other civic and non-profit organizations and religious groups, all challenges across various educational levels are manageable; and it can be used as the basis for the bright future of our new generations. I hope that the findings and recommendations of this study will emphasize the potential and the importance of working together as a team toward accomplishing our diverse educational system’s common goals to achieve equality and successful cultural change.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

I chose the phenomenological method because it describes the true meaning of the lived experiences of the students and refrains from importing other external frameworks and sets aside pre-judgments about the phenomenon. This study focused on exploring and
attaining a better understanding of the lived experiences of Arab American and Muslim students in terms of factors influencing their postsecondary education transition.

Because the Arab American and Muslim minority has not received the proper attention in previous studies concerning their education, the findings of this study will add to the limited body of knowledge available and bridge a gap that is present in the literature on Arab American and Muslim students at the postsecondary education level. This study answered a question about the lived experience of Arab American and Muslim students’ transition from high school to college, but many questions await answers. Therefore, I come away from my study strongly believing that more research is needed to discuss the status of educational achievement and experience of the Arab American and Muslim students. Moreover, this research represents a pioneering work in examining this minority in the Northeast of the United States, but further research is needed.

Future research, including qualitative studies that provide a voice for Arab American and Muslim students, should continue to explore this group and its needs. As indicated in previous chapters, the growth of the Muslim students’ population on campuses is very rapid, which in turn needs comprehensive planning. This requires many studies to be developed to investigate their conditions and status that could contribute to a better understanding of Arab and Muslim population and culture.

Future research should further explore the factors influencing the postsecondary transition of Arab American and Muslim students through qualitative research methods, including case studies. This type of research will give researchers the opportunity to interview postsecondary students and explore more factors affecting their transition, including schools from which they graduated and colleges in which they enrolled.
This study examined students who enrolled at four-year colleges. The life at community colleges most probably is different. Future research should study more groups of undergraduates and community colleges.

This study revealed that few participants transferred from community colleges to universities. Therefore, more studies are required to investigate the transition from community colleges to universities among minorities, including Arab American and Muslim students.

The study shows that Muslim students are facing many challenges at campuses concerning curricula, diet, prayers, holidays, having children, etc. This suggests that studies need to be developed to explore and study these challenges, in particular diet (Halal food), prayers on campus, Muslim holidays, calendar, and childcare, which could contribute to modification of educational policies and a better understanding of the Muslim community at large and Muslim students’ conditions and needs.

This study suggests more future research needs to be conducted on female Muslim students on campuses, which should have a high priority because many Muslim women, for self-preservation or reluctance, avoid complaining about stereotyping, discrimination, childcare, and other issues facing them on campuses. In addition, studies should be conducted on married female students and how to accommodate them on campus. Such research will highlight additional approaches to promote religion and cultural diversity awareness among college students. In addition, these types of studies are likely to promote college education and awareness among Arab American and Muslim community members.
Finally, the participants of this study were able to make it to college through intrinsic or extrinsic motivation or family inspiration, but this excludes those students who were not able to enroll in college. It is likely that more studies are needed to investigate this group of individuals.

Future research should focus on conditions that may contribute to a better understanding of Arab American and Muslim students and their culture. It should explore more factors influencing students’ transition, including schools and colleges they attended, and examine challenges facing Arab American and Muslim students on campuses such as curricula, diet, prayers, holidays, calendar, and childcare. It should investigate the condition of female Muslim students on campuses. These studies are likely to provide a more comprehensive understanding and promote college education among society members, including the Arab American and Muslim community. Furthermore, it is imperative for postsecondary educational institutions and policy makers to implement the recommendations of this and related studies to change the condition of Arab American and Muslim students at educational institutions.

**Conclusion and Summary**

Apart from the wide-scale media focus on Arabs and Muslims since 9/11, the target population of this study has been largely uninvestigated. Exploring the factors influencing the postsecondary education transition to understand the lived experiences of Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey or the United States in general is not only a challenge for the participants, but it is a real challenge for all non-Arabs or non-Muslims. One of the students indicated, “What most non-Muslims know about them [Muslims] is from the media since they do not interact with Muslims in
person” (108). Therefore, the question is whether our society will strive to gain a better understanding of our diverse culture and its challenges and the available opportunities that were addressed in this study. Is our country ready to construct and take serious steps toward resolving the problems of the next generation’s minority children?

Universities and colleges are promoting diversity through minority recruiting and offering minorities scholarships. However, Arab Americans are not officially recognized by the federal government as a minority; they are considered White. Therefore, they are not qualified for these scholarships; and at the same time, they are not receiving the same privileges as White students, especially those who came from North Africa. Consequently, they are doubly discriminated against and their status as a minority is relatively uncertain. Unless our society, policy makers, and school educators build communication networks among our diverse community, distance will increase, communities will become more isolated, and mistrust will continue among all groups.

The results of the study shed light on the status of some conditions of Arab American and Muslim college students in northern New Jersey, including students’ life styles, religious life, diversity, discrimination, and Islamophobia on college campuses. Although social, cultural, and institutional factors influence the Arab American and Muslim students’ transition, this study revealed that religion plays a central role in the life of Arab American and Muslim students. On the other hand, the findings from the present study and the previous literature (Bradford, 2009; Leonard, 2003; Maira, 2004; Mays, 2003; Mir, 2007; Shammas, 2009; Tamer, 2010) provide evidence that the Arab American and Muslim population is under-researched. In addition, the students’ population in specific religious, social, cultural, and institutional factors is in need of
more exploration. Furthermore, the findings of this study are consistent with previous work conducted in this field. This study revealed that the presence of social, cultural, and institutional barriers will continue to have a negative influence on the future of these students seeking postsecondary education. Moreover, the findings of this study and its important implications may potentially aid the postsecondary institutions to better recruit and serve the students from the Arab American and Muslim minority. Moreover, I hope that the findings of this study foster a better understanding of the Arab American and Muslim students in the educational system and in society.
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Appendix A

Intent and Solicitation Flyer

We Need Students,
We Need Volunteers,
We Need You,
Arab American and Muslim Students Age of 18-24.

My name is Ismael Khalil. I am completing a doctoral dissertation in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services.

I am conducting a study to investigate how religious, social, cultural, and institutional factors influence the transition experience from high school to college for Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey. This study will be part of my dissertation project which aims to understand the transition experience from high school to college of Arab American and Muslim students.

Your participation will require completing a short demographic questionnaire and a face to face interview. If you volunteer to participate, I will ask you some questions about your transition experience from high school to college. This interview will last approximately 60 minutes. I will record your interview at a time and location that is convenient for you.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

All participants and their interview responses will remain confidential. No names or identifiable responses will appear in any research report or be shared with your college or university. Your responses cannot be traced back to you. The data from your audiotape and written transcripts will be coded and stored on a USB memory card. It will be kept in locked cabinet. I will be the only one with access to your data. All data will be destroyed after three years.

This research has been approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Services. You may contact the IRB at (973) 313-6314 or by Email: irb@shu.edu. It has also been reviewed and approved by the Felician College IRB. You may contact the IRB at (201) 559-6143 or Email BurnorR@felician.edu with any questions or concerns that you may have. IRB Number: 13-XP-003

IF YOU CONSIDER MY INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE PLEASE EMAIL ME AT

ismael.khalil@student.shu.edu
Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1. **Researcher’s Affiliation**
   
The researcher is completing a doctoral dissertation in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services.

2. **Purpose of the Study**
   
The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of social, religious, institutional, and cultural factors on the postsecondary education transition experience of Arab Americans and Muslim students in northern New Jersey. The interview itself will take approximately 50 minutes.

3. **Procedures**
   
Subjects will be interviewed by the researcher. The interview will be audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of the interview information. The researcher will also take notes of responses. No names will be used during the discussion or in the transcripts.

4. **Instruments**
   
Data will be collected from the interview discussion. The researcher will ask the participants predetermined open-ended questions in an attempt to gain a perspective about how the social, religious, institutional, and cultural factors affected their transition experience.

5. **Voluntary Nature of the Project**
   
Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants are free to end their participation in this study at any time. Discontinuing participation at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subjects would otherwise be entitled.

6. **Anonymity/Confidentiality**
   
In addition to the special coding used to protect the identity of the individuals, all information gathered through the interview will be kept completely confidential.

7. **Security of Stored Data**
Only the researcher will have access to the stored data. All stored data on a USB memory card will remain in the researcher’s personal locked cabinet, and it will be destroyed after three years.

8. **Confidential Records**

All responses and information will be kept confidential. No one other than the researcher will have access to the collected data. To maintain confidentiality, each subject will be assigned a different code. The information may be shared with the researcher’s advisor and dissertation committee members only when necessary.

9. **Risks**

There are no foreseeable risks involved in this study.

10. **Benefits**

There are no direct benefits. The anticipated benefits for participating in this study include becoming more aware of barriers that affect the transition experience to postsecondary education and how it is dealt with.

11. **Remuneration**

Subjects will not receive any monetary benefits or remuneration for participating in this study.

12. **Compensation for Minimal Risk**

The research does not involve any risk to the participants; therefore, no compensation will be offered.

13. **Alternatives to Research Study**

There are no alternative means of participating in this study.

14. **Contact Information**

Ismael Khalil, the researcher and student at Seton Hall University, may be reached for answers to pertinent questions about the research and the research subject’s rights at the following:

Ismael Khalil, Researcher
Seton Hall University, Department of Education, 400 South Orange Ave
South Orange, NJ 07079
Phone: (973) 275-2728
Email: Ismael.Khalil@student.shu.edu
Dr. Gerard Babo, Researcher’s Advisor  
Seton Hall University, Department of Education, 400 South Orange Ave  
South Orange, NJ 07079  
Phone: (973) 761-9399  
Email: gerard.babo@shu.edu  
Dr. Mary Ruzicka, Director of the Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
Seton Hall University, Department of Education, 400 South Orange Ave  
South Orange, NJ 07079  
Phone: (973) 313-6314  
Email: irb@shu.edu  

15. Permission To Use Audio Tape Recorder  

To facilitate data collection, audio tape recording will be utilized to record the interview to preserve the accuracy of the conversation. The participant has the right to review all or any portion of the taped recordings and request that it be destroyed. All collected data will be kept confidential. Participants’ names will not be used. Each tape recorded interview will be assigned a number code. All data will be analyzed and transcribed by the researcher. All data will remain in the researcher’s personal secured cabinet. The data will be included in the dissertation, and it will be destroyed three years after its completion.

16. Acknowledgment of Informed Consent Forms  

Consent to participate in this study is indicated by returning this Consent Form signed and dated below to Ismael Khalil. You will be given a copy of the signed and dated Informed Consent Form as required by the IRB at Seton Hall University.

_________________________________________  
Signature of Subject  
_________________________________________  
Date
Appendix C

Student Demographic Questionnaire

THANK YOU for completing this general background survey, which includes 20 questions. This questionnaire is projected to collect demographic information. The data gathered will be used to select participants to be part of an interview for a dissertation project. Specifically, this study is being conducted to better understand how religious, social, cultural, and institutional barriers affect transition experience to postsecondary education of Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey.

The ID# at the end of the questionnaire is used only for the research purpose and it intended to help us to link response of the individuals to the focus interview session.

1. School that you attend: ____________

2. Your academic classification:
   a. Freshman  
   b. Sophomore  
   c. Junior  
   d. Senior  
   e. ______

3. Your gender:
   a. Male  
   b. Female

4. Your Age:_________

5. Your GPA:_________

6. How many years have you lived in the United States? ____________________

7. Your father's primary occupation in the U.S.________________________

8. Your mother's primary occupation in the U.S._______________________

9. In which country each family member was born
   Mother ___________  
   Father ___________  
   You ____________

10. Your religious affiliation:
    a. Muslim  
    b. Christian  
    c. Jewish  
    d. Other ____

11. Your primary sources for paying for college:
    a. Parents  
    b. Scholarships  
    c. Student Loans  
    d. Work
12. Which category represents your family income?
   a. $10,000- $25,000
   b. $25,000- $35,000
   c. $35,000- $50,000
   d. 50,000- $ 75,000
   e. More than $75,000

13. Your ethnicity background:
   a. Arab or Middle Eastern
   b. South Asian
   c. African American
   d. Hispanic
   e. White
   f. Other ______________

14. If you responded to “Arab or Middle Eastern” in the question above, please check the
country below with which you identify yourself the most:
   a. 1. Algeria                          2. Lebanon                        3. Tunisia
   f. 16. Yemen                          17. Iran                         18. Turkey
   g. 19. Afghanistan                    20. Pakistan                     21. Other________

15. Parents' highest degree received:

   Father                                      Mother
   a. Some High School                        a. Some High School
   b. High school graduate                    b. High school graduate
   c. Some college or training                c. Some college or training
   d. Associate Degree                        d. Associate Degree
   e. Bachelor’s Degree                       e. Bachelor’s Degree
   f. Master's Degree                         f. Master's Degree or Higher
   g. Doctorate                               g. Doctorate

16. Had primarily raised you?
   a. Both parents/guardians
   b. Mother
   c. Father
   d. Grandparents
   e. Stepfather and Mother
   f. Stepmother and Father
   g. Others__________________
17. Your father's level of English proficiency:
   a. Poor    b. Average    c. Good    d. Excellent

18. Your mother's level of English Proficiency:
   a. Poor    b. Average    c. Good    d. Excellent

19. Your level of English Proficiency:
   a. Poor    b. Average    c. Good    d. Excellent

20. Your primary academic track experience during high school:
   a. Honors    b. College Prep.    c. Vocational    d. Special Education

Please provide the following information.

Participant’s Code ID ______________________

Email (please PRINT very clearly) ________________________________

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION
Appendix D

Interview Guide Questions

This focus interview is anticipated to answer the following question:

**How do the social, religious, institutional and cultural factors influence the postsecondary education transitions of Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey?**

1. Do you pray? Where? Do you pray on campus with others?
2. Do you think prayer is important? Why?
3. Does your knowledge of the Quran/Bible affect your daily life? How?
4. Did religious beliefs and day-to-day practices of religion influence your transition from high school to college? How?
5. Did religious beliefs and practices of religion influence your college choice? Why?
6. Can you take me through a typical day on and off campus?
7. Why did you decide to attend this college? How much did financial issues affect your decision?
8. Do you feel that being a male/female influenced your college enrollment decision? How?
9. Do you feel safe at campus as an Arab/Muslim student? How?
10. Who is the most helpful to you when you have a question about a problem at college? Why?
11. Did you ever encounter any discrimination or stereotyping during your college transition? How?
12. Within your family, how much emphasis was placed on the value of academic achievement and college preparation? Did this influence your decision to pursue college education? How?
13. To what extent do Arab Americans and Muslims value education? How much did this influence your thinking about college education?
14. How does your family feel about you going to college? What was their influence on your decision?
15. How much has your family encouraged you to maintain cultural values and traditions? Did that influence your college education decision?
16. Do you feel that the American way of life is different from yours? How?
17. Did high school preparation influence your college choice?
18. Did your high school counselors help you in your admission to this college? How?
19. Do you openly express your opinions about anything on campus? How?
20. Does the college accommodate your religious practices?
21. Did the admission policies of your college influence your enrollment decision?
22. Did the student accommodations services offered by the college influence your choice?
23. Did immigration policies influence your college decision?
24. What types of supporting programs or services helped you through the college transition? How did you utilize it?
25. What types of barriers are challenging your college experience? How do you cope with them?

Is there anything else you would like to say?

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS INTERVIEW
THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND ASSISTANCE
Appendix E

Interview Guide Questions

The guide questions are organized according to the research questions they are designed to answer. This focus interview is anticipated to answer the following question:

**How do the social, religious, institutional and cultural factors influence postsecondary education transitions of Arab American and Muslim students in northern New Jersey?**

1. **Religious factors**
   1. Do you pray? Where? Do you pray on campus with others?
   2. Do you think prayer is important? Why?
   3. Does your knowledge of the Quran/Bible affect your daily life? How?
   4. Did religious beliefs and day-to-day practices of religion influence your transition from high school to college? How?
   5. Did religious beliefs and practices of religion influence your college choice? Why?

2. **Social factors**
   3. Can you take me through a typical day on and off campus?
   4. Why did you decide to attend this college? How much did financial issues affect your decision?
   5. Do you feel that being a male/female influenced your college enrollment decision? How?
   6. Do you feel safe at campus as an Arab/Muslim student? How?
   7. Who is the most helpful to you when you have a question about a problem at college? Why?
   8. Did you ever encounter any discrimination or stereotyping during your college transition? How?

3. **Cultural factors**
   9. Within your family, how much emphasis was placed on the value of academic achievement and college preparation? Did this influence your decision to pursue college education? How?
   10. To what extent do Arab Americans and Muslims value education? How much did this influence your thinking about college education?
11. How does your family feel about you going to college? What was their influence on your decision?

12. How much has your family encouraged you to maintain cultural values and traditions? Did that influence your college education decision?

13. Do you feel that the American way of life is different from yours? How?

4. **Institutional factors**

14. Did high school preparation influence your college choice?

15. Did your high school counselors help you in your admission to this college? How?

16. Do you openly express your opinions about anything on campus? How?

17. Does the college accommodate your religious practices?

18. Did the admission policies of your college influence your enrollment decision?

19. Did the student accommodations services offered by the college influence your choice?

20. Did immigration policies influence your college decision?

5. **Support structures and barriers**

21. What types of supporting programs or services help you through the college transition, how did you utilize it?

22. What types of barriers are challenging your college experience? How do you cope with them?

   Is there anything else you would like to say?

   **THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS INTERVIEW**
   **THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND ASSISTANCE**