The Lived Experiences and Perceived Challenges of Young Arab Muslim Females with the Hijab in Southern California in the Contemporary Era

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The Lived Experiences and Perceived Challenges of Young Arab Muslim Females with the Hijab in Southern California in the Contemporary Era

A Dissertation by

Sepideh Baniani

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Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

April 2019

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April 2019
The Lived Experiences and Perceived Challenges of Young Arab Muslim Females with the Hijab in Southern California in the Contemporary Era

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Obtaining a doctorate degree and writing a doctorate-level dissertation is not the result of one individual’s work but a whole team of people. This is simply an acknowledgment of some of the people on my team because words cannot express my feelings and level of gratitude to these individuals. I would like to thank my parents who planted the seeds of pursuing higher education in me ever since I was a little girl. I truly appreciate every single word and act of encouragement, support, and prayers I was blessed with because of them and throughout this journey. I am truly sorry for all the time they needed me, and I was not there for them. I would also like to thank my husband for all his unconditional and loving support in every aspect of my education since I started going to college until I was honored to be hooded as a doctorate graduate. He has not only been the best partner to have as a caring husband, but also a great intellect and mentor as a student. This dissertation is dedicated to them whom I hold the dearest.

Furthermore, my chair and committee members were the driving force behind this dissertation. Thanks to their wisdom and continuous guidance, my work has become much richer and stronger. My cohort and friends’ presence, specifically Dr. Diana Cabori and soon to be Dr. Bonnie Stockberger, during times of despair and confusion made the world of difference in my personal and educational life. I was blessed to have the great support and help of so many people such as Dr. Franziska Bieri and Dr. Tiffany D. Ware.

Last, but definitely not the least, I am forever grateful to all the ladies who were brave and strong enough to show interest or participate in this study. This study was only
made possible with their kind support and dedication. Thank you for trusting and embracing me, sharing a snippet of your life story, and being open and truthful. I will never forget your bravery and thoughtfulness.
ABSTRACT

The Lived Experiences and Perceived Challenges of Young Arab Muslim Females with the Hijab in Southern California in the Contemporary Era

by Sepideh Baniani

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old) in the contemporary era.

Methodology: A phenomenological approach was utilized to capture the essence of the participants’ lived experiences while identifying the researcher as the instrument. Data collection was through in-depth, phenomenological, semistructured, and face-to-face interviews with 12 participants who were Arab, Muslim, female, wear the hijab, between 18 and 40 years old, and lived in Southern California.

Findings: This study revealed Arab hijabi women generally feel safe and comfortable living in Southern California because of its multiculturalism and large population of Arabs and Muslims. However, they still experience Islamophobia on a daily basis mostly through microaggressions and have a generally higher level of alertness to their surroundings. They are seen as the other, assumed oppressed, and are underestimated. They are often targets of backlashes and are constantly being judged and criticized from inside and outside of their community because of their visibility. Thus, they are always under pressure and highly conscious of their behaviors. They are highly likely to be harassed and discriminated against based on their identity relating to work and education and were concerned about their professional lives. They have a high degree of anxiety
traveling by air and are subjected to more security at the airports under the guise of random selections. The majority of the discriminations went unreported.

**Recommendations:** Valid and reliable education as well as periodic and relevant cultural competency training are key to reducing discrimination and Islamophobia. Education must start early at schools. Muslim-rights activist groups and leaders must work closely with the local law enforcement agencies and schools to break barriers and educate them about the Muslim community and its needs. They must also work together to educate the Muslim community about their rights and resources available to them, encouraging them to report discrimination and hateful acts.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Prejudice, discrimination, and racism have always been part of American history, and scholars such as Paula Rothenberg have extensively addressed this issue in the literature. In the eighth edition of her book, *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*, Rothenberg (2010) painted a picture of the American history and culture of systematic inequality and discrimination throughout the years and into the 21st century. In this image, inequality and oppression in America is not only tied to race and ethnicity, but it also includes other factors such as class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Discrimination is not only part of American history, but also a living part of its today’s society (Rothenberg, 2010). In the same book, Omi and Winant (2010), “employed the term *racialization* to signify the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group” (p. 18); in their view, racialization is an ideological process.

When first settlers conquered the American land, they also formed an identity for themselves as White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (Parrillo, 1999). Soon, as other Northern and European newcomers such as Irish and Germans came to the U.S., they found themselves in an odd and hostile environment where White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture was the norm. Ethnocentrism has since become one of the strongest factors in shaping the way people in America treat those who do not fit their own identity and way of life. Ethnocentrism happens when people view and compare others in reference to their own group. This association is partly to fulfill the sense of belonging and security but keeping one’s group in the center and in highest regard might become problematic.
when facing others. Every new group of newcomers (strangers) to the U.S. has more or less gone through the sphere of otherness and faced some challenges.

Though Arabs and Muslim Americans were not an exception to such concept and have had their fair share of ingroup and outgroup conflicts when settling in, unlike most of their counterparts from Europe, they have always been seen through the sphere of otherness throughout these years, and their condition has not changed for the better. Muslims in America feel the intensity and rise of anti-Muslim sentiment, and this is highlighted in the survey conducted by Pew Research Center in 2017; three-quarters of Muslim adults in U.S. believe the Muslim community faces “a lot” (Kishi, 2017, para. 6) of discrimination. Moreover, being Muslim has become more difficult for many, 50% in America, and this is mainly a result of the presence and rise of “discrimination, racism, and prejudice” (Kishi, 2017, para. 7) in recent years. About 58% of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) 2016 hate crime report was racially motivated and about 21% religiously (FBI, 2017a). Hate groups such as the White supremacist Ku Klux Klan broadened their activities a few months prior to the 2016 election; with increased membership (Newton, 2017), they continued to hold rallies around the U.S. in 2017 (Mathias, 2017). Many human activists such as Corey Saylor, who is a spokesperson for the Council on American-Islamic Relations and focuses on Islamophobia, argued the rise of such hatful activities are mostly attributed to “the irresponsible rhetoric used by some politicians on the campaign trail” (Newton, 2017, para. 7). U.S. President Donald J. Trump “ran on a nativist and anti-immigration platform” (Newton, 2017, para. 8). Saylor believed what is important is not to “focus solely on the number of [anti-Islamic] attacks” (as cited in Newton, 2017, para. 14), but since the numbers have increased nationwide, all
Americans across the country must respond to this problem and hold politicians accountable.

The FBI (n.d.) recognizes the importance of fighting hate crime, which is why it has categorized hate crime as “the number one priority of” (para. 1) its civil rights programs believing it does not only “have a devastating impact on families and communities” (para. 1), but it is also a threat to the national security as “hatred and intolerance” (para. 1) plant the seeds of terrorism in the country. Hate crime investigations in America started during World War I, and their “role increased following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964” (para. 2). America has a long history of prejudice against varied groups of immigrants, ethnicities, racial backgrounds, languages, and religions (Shively, 2005). Thus, it is imperative to identify the elements of prejudice and hate toward different minority groups when they exist and ensure the safety of all Americans.

**Background**

On February 2, 2016, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, 2016) released a report encouraging all political leaders to denounce publicly intolerant speeches, as it believed they can “fuel racist and prejudice attitudes” (para. 3) that could potentially lead to hate crimes. Hate crimes in Europe have been on the rise as a result of the migrant crisis and subsequent terrorist attacks in France and later in some other countries such as Britain and Germany. Migrants and refugees in Europe have been targets for hate crimes all along their journey from their migrant route to their destination country (OSCE, 2016). Many incidents of violence and hate against refugees and migrants were recorded in 2015. For instance, a group of masked and armed offenders
attacked refugees’ boats in the Aegean Sea; in Greece, some have been “robbed and injured by criminal groups in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (OSCE, 2016, para. 4); and in Germany, “850 attacks against refugee shelters” (para. 4) have been recorded. Reports of similar attacks in Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden have also been recorded (OSCE, 2016).

Hate crime has been a concerning issue in Europe, and the number of incidents have increased recently. For instance, there was an 18% increase in hate crime incidents in 2014–2015 compared to the period of 2013–2014 in the UK (Corcoran, Lader, & Smith, 2015). Of the 52,528 hate crime incidents reported to the UK police in 2014–2015, 42,930 (82%) were race hate crimes, and 3,254 (6%) were religion hate crimes (Corcoran et al., 2015). Specifically, hate crimes against Muslims have been on the rise since the terrorist attacks of November 2015 in France (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC] News, 2015a; Blake, 2015; Gopalakrishnan, 2015). Reports suggested that hate crime against Muslims has tripled in the UK after the attacks in France (BBC News, 2015a; Blake, 2015). Because of the rise of hate crime against Muslims, the government of France has increased security around mosques (Euro News, 2015).

OSCE (2012) defined hate crimes as “criminal acts committed with a bias motive” (p. 6), which “may include any criminal offence targeted at a person or group because of ethnicity, ‘race,’ religion, or other status” (p. 6). However, the definitions of hate crime differ from one country to another (OSCE, 2012). The FBI (n.d.) defined hate crime as a “criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity” (para. 2). The FBI emphasizes on the fact that hate by itself is not a
crime since freedom of speech and other civil liberties are protected. The act of crime is established when “a traditional offense like murder, arson, or vandalism” (para. 2) is committed “with an added element of bias” (para. 2). Though the definition of hate crime has been controversial, and it varies from state to state (Shively, 2005).

Although the rise of hate crime and its related incidents against Muslims and Middle Eastern people is a concern in Europe, the Muslim community in America has also been experiencing a rise in hate crime after the attacks in Paris, France and the shootings in San Bernardino, California (Campbell, 2015; Stack, 2016a; Suter, 2015). In 2014, a total of 5,479 criminal incidents and 6,418 hate offenses were submitted to the FBI by law enforcement agencies around the U.S. (FBI, 2015a). The California 2014 report on hate crime indicated a decrease in incidents in the state (California Department of Justice, 2015). According to the California Department of Justice (2015), “hate crime events decreased 12.2% from 863 in 2013 to 758 in 2014” (p. 1). However, even though hate crimes in the U.S. were generally decreasing (California Department of Justice, 2014, 2015), it has been the opposite for Muslims (California Department of Justice, 2014, 2015, 2017; Kishi, 2017; Middlebrook, 2017). Furthermore, America as a nation has been experiencing a new menacing trend of hate crimes in last couple of years, and this trend is reflected on the newest data released. California witnessed an increase of 11.2% in hate crime events in 2016 compared to 2015 (California Department of Justice, 2017).

Moreover, there has been a spike in the hate crime against Muslims after the San Bernardino attack (Campbell, 2015; Sahagun, 2015; Suter, 2015). On December 2, 2015, a married couple, allegedly inspired by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), killed 14
people in a shooting rampage at a holiday party in San Bernardino, California (Ortiz, 2015; Yourish, Watkins, & Giratikanon, 2016). Officers eventually killed the couple during the police chase (Ortiz, 2015). According to Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, who spoke on December 13, 2015, 21 incidents of hate crimes against Muslims were reported in his city in less than two weeks after the San Bernardino attack (Suter, 2015). Garcetti, along with Carey Davis, the mayor of San Bernardino, Muslim community leaders, and other local leaders such as the Los Angeles Police Department’s Chief gathered together to honor the victims of the shooting and as a symbol of solidarity, condemned any hateful acts against Muslims (Suter, 2015).

However, incidents of hate crimes in America continued to rise in 2015 and throughout 2016; African Americans, Jews, and Muslims particularly witnessed a jump of approximately 5% since 2015 and 10% since 2014 in hate crimes (FBI, 2017b). In 2016, anti-Jewish- and anti-Muslim-biased crimes respectively comprised 54.4% and 24.5% of religious motivated hate crimes of the 1,584 victims (FBI, 2017b). This does not include anti-Arab biased crimes, which could have also been religiously motivated. It is worth noting that hate crime is usually underreported for a variety of reasons (Singh & Singh, 2012). For instance, only an approximate number of 15,000 law enforcement agencies voluntarily share their data with the FBI (FBI, 2017a). In addition, many times law enforcement fails to identify hate crimes or victims fail to report to the authorities (Singh & Singh, 2012), which is why it is very likely that many incidents of hate have not been included (Kishi, 2017). Furthermore, five states do not have hate crime legislation (Burch, 2017), which makes it even more difficult to identify and address the issue as hate crime on a state level (Lou, 2017).
Though reports demonstrated hate crimes against Jews were twice what they were against Muslims, there was a 19% increase of anti-Muslim crimes from 2015 to 2016 (Kishi, 2017). According to the Pew Research analysis of FBI reports, anti-Muslim assaults in 2016 (127) were much higher than the year 2001 (93) after the 9/11 attacks (Kishi, 2017). Furthermore, “The most common [hate crime] is intimidation, which is defined as reasonable fear of bodily harm” (Kishi, 2017, para. 2), and Muslims experienced that in a greater degree in 2016 (144) than in 2015 (120) but not compared to 2001 (296). Muslims also had an increased victimization in 2016 when it came to crimes against property such as vandalism; 92 in 2016 compared to 70 in 2015. There was a 67% increase in hate crimes against Muslims from 2014 (154) to 2015 (257), yet this number was even higher in 2016 (307).

**Migrant Crisis**

To understand better what is happening in the U.S. and the increased level of Islamophobia, a larger geopolitical lens should be utilized to view relevant current world migratory events. The Migrant Crisis is an umbrella phrase that refers to the major wave of movements of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers to Europe (Bajekal, 2015). Approximately, 90% of refugees and migrants in 2015 arrived in Europe by crossing the Mediterranean Sea in which the majority were from Syria (48%), Afghanistan (21%), and Iraq (9%; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], n.d.). According to the UNHCR (n.d.), 1,015,078 individuals (migrants and refugees) arrived in Europe by sea in 2015; the sea arrivals already surpassed 74,000 individuals by the beginning of February 2016. Unfortunately, 3,771 dead or missing have also been reported by the UNHCR (n.d.) in 2015. These were the migrants and refugees who tried to reach Europe
by crossing the Mediterranean Sea. As shown in Table 1, an overwhelming increase is observed in the number of deceased and missing migrants and refugees trying to reach Europe through the Mediterranean since 2010 (20) to 2017 (3,139), even when considering the spike in 2011 (1,500) and the decrease in 2017 (UNHCR, n.d.).

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Many political, economic, geographical, cultural, racial, social, national, and international factors have played roles in creating the complex issue of the current migrant crisis and turmoil in the Mideast and European regions. Thus, only a brief overview of some of these factors is described to grasp a better understanding of the current state. The Arab Spring and the birth and growth of ISIS have been two of the most important contributing factors in the migrant crisis.

Arab Spring

One of the most important factors leading up to the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East is the Arab Spring. It started in Tunisia where a hopeless young street vender, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire on December 17, 2010 (Cornell University
His fruit cart had been confiscated, and he had been humiliated by the local police (National Public Radio, 2012). Bouazizi’s government protest sparked and ignited the Tunisia’s Jasmine Revolution as well as subsequently many other revolutions in the region (Cornell University Library, 2015a). After the Iranian revolution of 1979, the Jasmine Revolution was the first uprising in the Middle East and North Africa that aimed to overthrow an established government. When furious Tunisians started protesting against the government to demonstrate their grief and anger, they were faced with a brutal security suppression as well as social media restrictions. Furthermore, the government acted even more violently when people protested in the capital. By the time President Zine el-Abedin Ben Ali “shuffled his cabinet and promised to create 300,000 jobs” (Cornell University Library, 2015a, para. 1), it was already too late; protesters “wanted the regime to fall and its President stripped of any power” (para. 1). The President and his family found themselves with no choice other than fleeing to Saudi Arabia as a refugee on January 14, 2011. This was an important victory for the people of Tunisia, even though the country has yet to find stability.

**Egyptian protests.** Following the Tunisian’s victory, inspired “Egyptians gathered to protest on January 25 [2011], the national holiday Police Day, calling for an end to corruption, injustice, poor economic conditions, and the 30-year-old regime of President Hosni Mubarak” (Cornell University Library, 2015b, para. 1). The national revolution, which began as street demonstrations, grew quickly despite the security force’s brutality the demonstrators experienced. Furthermore, to counter the people’s uprising, the government shut off the Internet and mobile services. In a span of 18 days, Egyptians succeeded in removing President Mubarak and his National Democratic Party.
Despite the changes and promises made by Mubarak, he was forced to resign from his 30-year position on February 11, 2011.

**Libyan protests.** A few days later, on February 15, 2011, a series of protests that soon turned into violent confrontations with the military started to take place in Libya (Cornell University Library, 2015c). The arrest of a human rights attorney instigated peaceful protests in front of Benghazi’s police headquarters. The human rights attorney had represented the “relatives of more than 1,000 prisoners allegedly massacred by security forces in Tripoli’s Abu Salim jail in 1996” (Cornell University Library, 2015c, para.1). Despite being targeted by live ammunition and militant forces, protesters overwhelmed the security forces and forced a withdrawal from Benghazi on February 18. By that time, anti-government protesters were joined by some security forces as well. In August 2011, after escaping rebels, Gaddafi went into hiding, as his family members fled to neighboring countries. Gaddafi was soon captured and killed on October 20, 2011 by the rebels; three days later, Libya officially declared its liberation (BBC News, 2016a).

**Yemeni protests.** Meanwhile, on January 27, 2011, the Yemeni people started protesting against President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been ruling the country for more than 30 years, asking him to step down (Al Jazeera, 2011; Cornell University Library, 2015d). A major protest in Sanaa brought 16,000 protesters together (Al Jazeera, 2011). In an act of peace, on February 2, President Saleh announced neither himself nor his son would be running for presidency and power in 2013. However, a group of more than 20,000 anti-government protesters “gathered in Sanaa for a ‘day of rage’ demanding President Saleh’s resignation” (Al Jazeera, 2011, para. 3). After a series of violent protests and confrontations with the security forces, “President Saleh fired his
entire cabinet” (Al Jazeera, 2011, para. 8), and yet the “Yemen ambassador to the UN quit in protest over the use of force against protesters on March 20th” (para. 8). On March 21, more officials and top military commanders joined the protesters and directed troops and tanks to Sanaa to protect them. On November 2011, deputy president Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi was handed power by President Saleh’s agreement (BBC News, 2015b).

**Syrian protests.** On January 26, 2011, one day prior to the Yemeni protests, Syrian people had also started to participate in small and peaceful protests (Cornell University Library, 2015e). However, in mid-March, everything changed for the Syrians and the Syrian government “when residents of the small southern town of Dara’a took to the streets to protest the torture of students who had put up anti-government graffiti” (Cornell University, 2015e, para. 1). A rise of protests around the country demanded “reforms, and the ouster of President Bashar al-Assad, allowing political parties, equal rights for Kurds, and broad political freedoms, such as freedom of the press, speech, and assembly” (Cornell University Library, 2015e, para. 1). Their protests and demands were countered by the suspension of constitutional rights, a series of investigations, the deployment of tanks, gunfire, and shutting off water and electricity as well as confiscating flour and food. By October 2011, more than 2,900 people were dead. After eight years of conflict, the turmoil in Syria continues and has become increasingly complex.

**Bahraini protests.** The Arab Spring also impacted Bahrain, a majority Shia populated country. In February and March 2011, peaceful protesters seeking democracy, equality, and justice for the Shias were brutally repressed by the ruling Sunni government
of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the ruler since 1999 (Cornell University Library, 2015f). The protests left 30 civilians dead, many injured, and thousands of people imprisoned and without work (BBC News, 2013; Cornell University Library, 2015f). On March 14, the King of Bahrain announced a state of national security and asked neighboring Sunni countries to help restore lost order in the country (Cornell University Library, 2015f). Nonetheless, suppression and discrimination continue to be part of the government’s ruling strategy (BBC News, 2013).

A series of small and large protests have also taken place in other Arabian countries such as Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan, Oman, Kuwait, and Algeria since the Arab Spring of 2011 (BBC News, 2013). Protesters have demanded increased democracy, jobs, and economic stability. They seek not only equality, but also a reduction in royal power, and an end to corruption and discrimination.

**ISIS**

The mismanaged and chaotic situation created in the aftermath of the Arab Spring as well as the American war in Iraq and Afghanistan has helped radical groups such as ISIS to grow and spread quickly (A. S. Ahmed, 2015; Botelho, 2015). ISIS is a militant terrorist group with the goal of establishing an independent Islamic State (Thompson, Greene, & Mankarious, 2015). This radical and anti-Western group has been able to seize parts of Iraq and Syria by terrorizing the region and recruiting members from different continents. Though it first started operations in 2004 as part of Al Qaeda in Iraq, it has proved to be far “more brutal and more effective at controlling” (Thompson et al., 2015, para. 2) seized territories.
ISIS has been able to seize successfully large areas in Syria and Iraq (BBC News, 2014a; Thompson et al., 2015). In March 2013, ISIS “took over the Syrian city of Raqqa—the first provincial capital to fall under rebel control” (BBC News, 2014a, para. 11). By taking advantage of the tension between the Sunni minority and Shia-led government, it also took control over the city of Fallujah in Iraq in January 2014. In addition, ISIS was able to seize a “large section of the provincial capital, Ramadi” (para. 13) and establish a strong “presence in a number of towns near the Turkish and Syrian borders” (para. 13). However, the occupation of Mosul, one of the largest cities in Iraq, in June 2014, particularly shocked the world and received global attention.

**Caliphate.** Furthermore, ISIS has “announced the establishment of a ‘caliphate’—an Islamic state—stretching from Aleppo in Syria to the province of Diyala in Iraq” (BBC News, 2016b, para. 3). Even though ISIS has been able to gain some impressive swaths of territory in 2015, it has “lost several key towns in Iraq, as well as part of Syria’s northern border with Turkey” (BBC News, 2016b, para. 1) as a result of airstrikes performed by several countries, including Russia, the U.S., and the UK. More than 10,000 airstrikes have been carried out in Iraq and Syria by the US-led collation, neighboring countries, and Russia since 2014, and the fight is still not finished.

Along with the many non-Muslim countries such as America, Russia, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and Denmark that have been fighting against ISIS, many key Muslim countries such as Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Bahrain have also played crucial roles in fighting ISIS in the Middle East (BBC News, 2015c; BBC News, 2016b; McClam & Williams, 2014). Despite all the efforts that such key Muslim countries have made, many Western
politicians have questioned the intentions of Muslims around the world and have made controversial comments that might have led to increased bigotry among the general public. For instance, Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez, in an interview, stated that between 5% and 20% of Muslims want to have Caliphate and would do anything including terrorism to accomplish their desire (Willon, 2015). Her comment generated much criticism, and the American Muslim community condemned her baseless and without-merit statement. Even though Sanchez first fully defended her position, her spokesperson, Emily Morris, later said that the numbers might not be accurate, as there are variety of sources stating differing numbers. In addition, Sanchez released a statement expressing her strong support for American Muslims, believing that the majority of American Muslims do not support terrorism or ISIS.

**Rule of ISIS.** The brutal rule of ISIS, the intense war and conflict between this organization and those of the opposing countries and freedom fighter groups (e.g., Kurdish fighters), as well as the ongoing civil war in Syria have left thousands of people homeless, leaving them with no choice but to migrate to other places, especially toward Europe (BBC News, 2014a; Garavoglia, 2015; Mead, 2015). ISIS has since used the Arab Spring turbulence and the migrant crisis as an opportunity to grow and spread. ISIS fighters have officially announced their presence in several countries and have terrorized those regions. In March 2015, they killed 137 people in two suicide attacks targeting Shia mosques in Sanaa, Yeman (BBC News, 2015b). In Derna, Libya, 21 Egyptian Christians were beheaded in February 2015 (BBC News, 2016a). Besides Yemen and Libya, ISIS has also carried out many terrorist attacks in the region as well as in other countries such as Lebanon, Tunisia, Egypt, and Turkey (Yourish et al., 2016). However,
two attacks have particularly received global attention: the attacks in Paris as well as the shootings in San Bernardino, California.

**Paris.** On November 13, 2015, more than 100 people were killed in a coordinated attack in Paris, France. ISIS immediately took responsibility for the attacks while people around the world grieved with the residents of Paris. Subsequently, the authorities were able to find some of the alleged killers (Martinez, 2015).

**San Bernardino, CA.** Less than three weeks after the terrorist attacks in Paris, 14 people were killed in San Bernardino, California in a mass shooting on December 2, 2015 (Ortiz, 2015). A husband and wife, inspired by ISIS, opened fire on a holiday party (Yourish et al., 2016). Both shooters were killed by law enforcement during a police chase following the incident (Ortiz, 2015). More attacks of terrorism allegedly linked to ISIS have taken place since then in different countries around the world; however, media paid particular attention to those incidents that occurred in Great Britain, Germany, and France.

**The Backlash in America**

American Muslims have reported concerns about the backlash of the recent events, specifically those in San Bernardino, and the potential impact on them (Frumin, 2015; Sahagun, 2015; Wang, 2015). Immediately after the attack in San Bernardino, leaders within the Muslim and local community gathered to condemn the terrorist act and remind non-Muslim community members to stay calm and respectful of each other (Atkinson, 2015; Frumin, 2015; Wang, 2015). However, despite their pleas, there has been a spike of hate crimes against Muslims throughout the U.S. (Dorell, 2015; Stack, 2016a; Suter, 2015).
By mid-December 2015, approximately 38 incidents of hate crimes against American Muslims were reported following the terrorist attacks in Paris and the shootings in San Bernardino (Campbell, 2015; Stack, 2016a). For example, two mosques in Hawthorne, CA, were vandalized with graffiti and an Islamic Society in Coachella, CA, was set on fire before a prayer service on December 11, 2015 (Stack, 2016a). In addition, a Somali restaurant experienced an arson attack, causing $90,000 in damages, only a few days after having its walls spray painted with hateful words.

**Young Arab Muslim males.** Although anti-Arab and anti-Muslim crimes have impacted most members of Muslim communities, young Arab males and females who wear a hijab have been impacted the most (Aziz, 2012; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2007; A. Moore, 2010). Arab males experienced increased economic, political, and social discrimination after the September 11, 2001, attacks (Aziz, 2012; Davila & Mora, 2005; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2007; A. Moore, 2010; Rabby & Rodgers, 2009). Middle Eastern males, especially those who fit the attackers’ descriptions, also faced some economic challenges, including decline in employment ratio and work hours (Davila & Mora, 2005; Rabby & Rodgers, 2009). Furthermore, young Arab males have been negatively impacted by discriminatory political legislations such as the U.S. Patriot Act (Iyer, 2015; Senzai, 2004).

**Muslim women with hijab.** Although young Arab Muslim males have been targeted for social, political, legal, and economical discrimination in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, Muslim females who wear the hijab have been also targeted for hate, social abuse, and work discrimination (Aziz, 2012). Summarized by Aziz (2012), “Muslim women of all races and levels of religiosity face unique forms of discrimination
at the intersection of religion, race, and gender because the September 11th terrorist attacks transformed the meaning of the Muslim headscarf” (p. 2). Muslim women who wear the hijab are easily distinguished and identified as Muslims, thereby making them vulnerable to discrimination and violence (Ernst, 2013). Once viewed in the U.S. as a sign of oppression and means of controlling women by their male counterparts, some say the hijab “‘marks’ women as representatives of the suspicious, inherently violent, and forever foreign ‘Terrorist other’ in” (Aziz, 2012, p. 2) their midst. Muslim women with the hijab have been repeatedly and increasingly targeted with discriminatory remarks and hate crimes (Aziz, 2012; Campbell, 2015; Ernst, 2013; Human Rights First, 2008; Stack, 2016a).

Europe and the Middle East have experienced a unique tension that has resulted from many important factors such as racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural clashes as well as the ethical, economic, political, and legal disputes. In 2015, the tensions increased as migrants and refugees started to travel to Europe seeking asylum. The resulting chaos in the Middle East war, Arab Spring, regional and local conflicts, and the uprising of ISIS left many in despair and effectively displaced from their dwellings. In addition to the migrant crisis, terrorist attacks in Paris and the San Bernardino shootings have increased incidents against the migrants and refugees as well as Arabs and Muslims. Young Arab Muslim males and Muslim females who wear the hijab have been historically targets of prejudice and hate crimes in the U.S.

Many countries and organizations have long been strong opponents of the Islamic head covering. However, within the last two decades, the anti-Islamic hijab sentiment has developed into policies based on differing grounds (Jailani, 2016; Piatti-Crocker, &
In 2004, the French government made it illegal to have “any conspicuous religious” (Jailani, 2016, p. 51) symbol displayed at French schools. In 2011, the French government passed another law banning any attire that covers the face in the public places; targeting mostly those Muslim women who cover their faces (Jailani, 2016; Piatti-Crocker & Tasch, 2015). These policies have been largely supported by French people and legislators in favor of a French foundation that separates religion and state: “laicite” (Jailani, 2016, p. 51). However, these laws have also raised controversy, as they are largely viewed as a means to target the Muslim population. Kenneth Roth, the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, has been strongly opposed to such laws, and his voice has been echoed over and over in many arguments. Roth criticized the France ban in 2004 by identifying the proposed law as “an unwarranted infringement on the right to religious practice” (as cited in Jailani, 2016, p. 52). He further distinguished and emphasized that, “for many Muslims, wearing a headscarf is not only about religious expression, it is about religious obligation” (as cited in Jailani, 2016, p. 52). Belgium, Italy, and the Netherlands have also banned full-face veils in public and considered the Islamic veil ban in schools when they witnessed France’s success (Piatti-Crocker, & Tasch, 2015).

As recently as summer 2016, France led another controversial ban on Muslim swimwear called Burkinis (Bittermann, McKenzie, & Shoichet, 2016; Breeden & Blaise, 2016; L. Said-Moorhouse, 2016). Burkinis are two-piece swimwear like bikinis, but they are designed for Muslim women and cover the full body except face, hands, and feet; some are very similar to wetsuits. More than 30 cities in France banned wearing Burkinis at the beaches (Bittermann et al., 2016; L. Said-Moorhouse, 2016). However, the French
highest administrative court suspended the ban in the town of Villeneuve-Loubet (Bittermann et al., 2016). Many human activists have challenged this ban, and the French judges found it illegal for the mayors to pass such laws without having sufficient grounds (Bittermann et al., 2016; Breeden, & Blaise, 2016; L. Said-Moorhouse, 2016). This ban started to affect after a series of terrorism attacks took place in France (Bittermann et al., 2016; Breeden, & Blaise, 2016; L. Said-Moorhouse, 2016). However, the majority of French people, 64% (Robins-Early, 2016), and many key French politicians such as French Prime Minister Manuel Valls (Bittermann et al., 2016), Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, and the leader of France’s National Front Party and the 2017 Presidential candidate Marin Le Pen strongly support the ban on Burkinis (Bittermann et al., 2016; Jailani, 2016).

Although veiled Muslim woman in America are more privileged in legally practicing their religious beliefs and obligations such as wearing the hijab in public compared to some other Western countries such as France, they have been repeatedly targets of prejudice and hate crimes. Muslim women who wear the hijab in America experienced a rash of incidents of prejudice and hate crimes in the aftermath of 9/11 (Aziz, 2012; Campbell, 2015; Ernst, 2013; Human Rights First, 2008). Similarly, they have been suffering increased bigotry and hate acts after the incidents of San Bernardino and the Paris attacks as well as the negative effects of the new political climate. These hateful incidents vary from denying services to customers and displaying prejudiced behavior at work and organizations, to verbal abuse, harassment, and even physical harm in public.
Though there are fundamental differences in policies and political standpoints between Western countries based on their level of secularism, what happens in one country directly or indirectly also affects other countries, specifically those that share many commonalities. Dismissal of minorities and voices and identities of women of color is a shared theme among White Western countries. Crenshaw (1991) believed “intersectional identities” (p. 1242) of women of color are often overlooked. Williams (1987), who is a prominent scholar and activist in Critical Race Feminism and introduced important phenomena such as spirit injury and spirit murder, believed oppressing women, specifically women of color, is displayed in many ways. Another prominent Critical Race Feminism activist, Wing (2000), in confirming the phenomena of spirit injury and spirit murder, argued women of color often struggle with psychological, spiritual, and cultural oppression in society. Such incidents of oppression lead to spirit injury and spirit murder and ultimately reduce these individuals to shattered and broken people mentally and emotionally. According to Wing, spirit injury is not only damaging to its victims but also to society. In this view, since these shattered individuals are part of society, a group of them would greatly impact the social psyche, intellect, and economics. Thus, a ban on hijabs among school girls in France, which also bled into several other European countries in different forms, is not just a battle against those girls but all Muslim women (Wing & Smith, 2006). As a human rights violation and oppression in many human activists’ view, the ban does not only affect those directly involved, but also the rest of the country.

Considering this narrative, Muslim women are under attack and multidimensional oppression by the very same groups that claim democracy and freedom for women. To
reduce the likelihood of victimization of minorities and those already marginalized in society, such as veiled Muslim women, and eventually preventing a country from cultural and moral loss, it is important for legislators, scholars, and social activists to recognize these individuals’ needs by listening to their voices and stories despite any cultural or religious differences. Bigotry in the West against Muslims is institutionalized (Bradford, 1999; E. W. Said, 1977); they are demonized and dehumanized in the West and its media (Bradford, 1999; Hussain, 2010; Perry, 2015; E. W. Said, 1977; Shaheen, 2003), thus their voices are often unheard or dismissed. Though prejudice and hate crimes are inevitable factors because of human nature, they could be reduced by recognizing the importance of this issue, identifying the problems, and taking appropriate action.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

American Muslims are from various racial, ethnic, social, economic, and education backgrounds. In addition, they originate from multiple countries and speak different languages and dialects. They practice different sects of Islam with different levels of religiousness and tend to have varied political points of view. However, American Arabs and Muslims, as well as those perceived to be of the same background, have experienced increased discrimination and hate crimes since September 11 (Daraiseh, 2012; Davila & Mora, 2005; Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2002; Rabby & Rodgers, 2009). Though these communities experienced challenges long before the 2001 terrorist attacks, life among the Arab and Muslim community in America has changed tremendously since (Aziz, 2012; Campbell, 2015; Daraiseh, 2012; HRW, 2002; A. Moore, 2010; Muqtedar Khan, 2004).
The September 11 attacks had a large impact on all Americans but even more so on the American Muslim community (A. Moore, 2010). In addition to grieving the loss of community members as well as more than 200 people of their own community, they also experienced economic and political penalties and comprehensive retaliation (Muqtedar Khan, 2004). Further, the American Arab and Muslim community report being under attack and criticized by other Americans and viewed “with varying degrees of suspicion” (Muqtedar Khan, 2004, p. 117); the media and government were thought to be exacerbating the climate for abuses and even more institutional, social, and economical discrimination (Muqtedar Khan, 2004; A. Moore, 2010). They have also further suffered when the country began comprehensive retaliation, among other methods, toward suspected targets across the globe (Muqtedar Khan, 2004).

The Arab and Muslim community contribute to an important part of American society, history, and its cultural foundations and concepts such as freedom of speech, religion, and economic activity. Approximately four to 12 million Muslims currently live in America, yet there exists a substantial and increasing amount of anti-Islamic sentiment and hate offenses toward Muslims (Sullivan, Izadi, & Bailey, 2015). The inflammatory increase of anti-Muslim sentiment in America has instigated uncontrollable social, professional, and institutional suffering for American Muslims, and it has greatly endangered their civil rights (Muqtedar Khan, 2004). Crimes against Arabs and Muslims have nearly tripled in a span of a few months since the incidents of Paris, France and San Bernardino, California (Campbell, 2015; Gopalakrishnan, 2015).

Misunderstandings about Islam and its followers could potentially result in prejudice (A. Moore, 2010). Therefore, it is the responsibility of scholars and legislators
not only to educate themselves about this issue concerning the Arab and Muslim community, but also to educate society at large. The American Arab and Muslim community play a crucial role in fighting extremist terrorism (S. R. Khan, 2014). Since Muslim females with hijabs have been specifically targets for discrimination and hateful acts, it is imperative to learn about their perspectives and life experiences in the aftermath of the Paris attacks and the San Bernardino shootings.

Since September 11, a large body of literature has discussed the issue of post-September 11 discrimination and the resulting social and economic impact on Muslims (Aziz, 2012). Others have explored the impact of legislation and policies. Though, the overwhelming majority has explored the lived experiences of Muslim men; little is known about Muslim women and their experiences (Aziz, 2012; Perry, 2013). However, Muslim women are visible and vulnerable targets for anti-Muslim hate crimes as a result of their unique religious attire (Aziz, 2012; Perry, 2013). The perceptions and behaviors of non-Muslim Americans toward American Muslims and the psychological consequences have also largely been ignored (M. Khan & Ecklund, 2012). Discrimination and its impact on the Muslim community has been explored post-September 11; however, to date, scholars have yet to explore the American Muslim experience after the Paris and San Bernardino incidents. Further, as anti-Muslim hate crimes in America increase, an understanding of the phenomenon is needed. Hence, this study has attempted to focus on the impacts of the recent attacks on Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab in Southern California where the San Bernardino shootings occurred.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old) in the contemporary era.

Research Questions

This study was guided by one central research question and two subquestions designed to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges experienced by Southern California female Arab Muslims (18–40 years old). Research questions were as follows.

Central Question

What are the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old)?

Subquestions

1. What work or education challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) experience?
2. What social or public challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) experience?

Significance of the Problem

Prejudice and hate crimes have been an ongoing problem in American history. Examples of such are slavery and issues related to discrimination against immigrants as well as retaliation against minority groups (e.g., Japanese Americans). In response to this ever-growing trend, much research and studies have attempted to address these issues. Considering the increasingly hostile anti-Islam atmosphere that has been cultivated,
especially post-9/11, this study is yet another attempt to add to the existing volumes of studies regarding xenophobia, hate crimes, and prejudice in the U.S. Despite the surge in interest and research about Muslims, in general, and males, in particular, such as those after 9/11, there has been a paucity of such studies geared toward Muslim women. This trend did not improve despite even more recent contemporary negative events such as the San Bernardino shootings in California and a spike in hate crimes, particularly against Muslim women. This study attempts to add to this small but growing body of literature, since there is little known about the lived experiences of Arab Muslim women who wear Islamic head coverings in the contemporary era in the U.S.

According to the FBI’s hate crime reports, bigotry and hate crime against Arabs and Muslims, including those who mistakenly may be perceived as part of this population, have increased since 2013. There was also a 50% increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes from 2009 to 2010 (Singh & Singh, 2012). Hate crime incidents against Muslims in America have tripled since the attacks in Paris and the San Bernardino shootings (Campbell, 2015; Stack, 2016a), and later in the wake of 2016 presidential election (Johnson, 2018). Based on the 2014 FBI hate crime report, hate crimes in the U.S. decreased for all groups (e.g., Blacks, Jews) except for Muslims (FBI, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). Even though hate crimes against Jews had the largest percentage in the religion category, it was only anti-Muslim hate crimes that increased in 2014. This issue becomes even more vital when considering that FBI records are allegedly lower than the actual numbers for a variety of reasons such as underreporting, nonreporting, failure to identify hate crimes, incorrect categorization, as well as lack of proper data collection and methodology (Human Rights First, 2008; Singh & Singh, 2012). For instance, according
to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2017), “more than half (54 percent) of violent hate crime victimizations were not reported to police during 2011-15” (para. 6).

In addition, public perception polls in recent years have found many Americans believe Islam is a religion that encourages violence (Lipka; 2015; A. Moore, 2010), and more than 50% of Americans have an unfavorable view of Islam (Kaleem, 2015). Misrepresentations of Islam and biased images of Muslims (showing them as mere terrorists or barbaric individuals) in American education and media have caused or aggravated Islamophobia as well as creating generally negative views among non-Muslim Americans (Daraiseh, 2012). Many politicians have also added to this negative phenomenon by publicly stating biased or negative comments that target the Arab and Muslim community in America (Aziz, 2012; Johnson, 2018; Perry, 2013). Some legislation and practices that the American government has initiated post-9/11 may be characterized as violating human rights and have specifically targeted Arabs as well as many non-Arab Muslims (Daraiseh, 2012; Human Rights First, 2008; S. R. Khan, 2014; A. Moore, 2010) and thereby threatening America’s cultural foundation. More important, demonization of Muslims by politicians can eventually lead to “policies and practices that further stigmatize[s] the group” (Perry, 2015, p. 8).

Moreover, prejudice and hate crimes have negative physical, mental, psychological, sociological, and economical effects on the victims and society (HRW, 2002; OSCE, 2012). Equally important, it can be a matter of safety and national security (FBI, n.d.). Findings of this qualitative study could benefit social and mental health professionals by educating them about the experiences of the victims and perhaps the depth and severity of the issue of hate crime and prejudice against Arab and Muslim
communities in America. Furthermore, the findings could assist law enforcement strategies to protect the vulnerable and potentially prevent injustices. In addition, it would provide them with a better understanding of this community’s experiences and how they could more effectively manage prejudice and hate crimes if and when committed. It is important that educators familiarize themselves with the consequences of providing inaccurate cultural and religious information about Islam to the public and how to take necessary measures to counteract such misinformation. Finally, in exploring the experience, the government legislators and the criminal justice system could take concrete steps to minimize the presence of an environment where hate crimes against Muslims can potentially flourish and disseminate.

Demonization and dehumanization of a minority group only widens division in the country and further hurts the overall social and mental health of the society. Learning about the experiences of a marginalized group such as the Arab hijabi women who are too often demonized, dehumanized, misrepresented, and are shown as the other could help reverse such negative presentation. It could also help those who identify as the participants or with their experiences in understanding that they are not alone in experiencing certain phenomena as a result of part of their identity such as ethnicity, gender, or religious ideologies. Though knowing this might not help with their overall experiences, it might help reduce some of the pressure and self-blaming on matters that are not fully under their control. When little is known about a minority group, its needs, and its issues while there is limited coverage, this results in a lack of attention and urgency to try to solve, reduce, and eliminate those issues, especially when the political interest favors the opposite. Studies such as this will shed light on the experiences and
challenges faced by veiled Muslim women in the U.S., which is a small but important step in demanding institution-based changes within American politics and various policies.

Definitions

_Islamic Head Covering or Veiling or Hijab_: Though they might mean different things to different individuals or in different contexts, this study utilizes these words interchangeably throughout. They refer to the Islamic practice of covering the hair with some type of clothing for Muslim women, which also makes them visibly Muslim.

_Arab American_: American residents who have an Arab heritage.

_Muslim American_: American residents who are Muslims.

_Stereotype_: Attributing certain characteristics to a group of people different from oneself based on limited information about them and disregards individual differences; “an oversimplified generalization” (Parrillo, 1999, p. 573).

_Prejudice_: Carrying a negative connotation (Healey, 2006) and derived from the Latin praedjudicium, it means prejudgment and refers to the presumption someone makes based on certain characteristics about others on the basis of stereotypes, omissions and misinformation, or lack of knowledge (Parrillo, 1999; Tatum, 2013).

_Racism_: A combination of racial prejudice and social power (Tatum, 2013) that uses biological characteristics and sociocultural means to create a sense of superiority against other races (Parrillo, 1999). Prejudice is the negative thoughts and feelings toward a certain group whereas racism is taking action upon those feelings (Tatum, 2013).
Xenophobia: The irrational fear and overreaction toward strangers and foreigners that could be displayed in variety of forms such as in writing, speech, policy, and violent action (Parrillo, 1999). Ethnocentrism is thought to be a driving force for creation of prejudice and, ultimately, xenophobia.

Ethnocentrism: This happens when people view and compare others in reference to their own group (Parrillo, 1999). Though this is a natural way of understanding the unknown, by referring to the self’s cultural heritage, and everyone is somehow ethnocentric, those who have ethnocentric views judge other groups’ cultures “as inferior to one’s own” (Barger, 2018, para. 2).

Delimitations

This study is delimited to Arab Muslim women who wear the Islamic head coverings (18–40 years old) and live in Southern California. In addition, the participants of this study were chosen based on purposeful sampling in which the researcher only selects participants who can provide the best insight and information about the research question and address the purpose of study. Therefore, this study’s findings are limited to those who participated in the study.

Organization of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old) in the contemporary era. Prejudice and hate crime against hijab wearing Muslim women have been increasingly on the rise in recent years. However, only a small body of research has explored the lived experiences of veiled Arab Muslim women in America post-September 11 and less currently.
This study consists of five chapters. Chapter II provides an overview of literature on Islam, in general, and Muslims in America as well as a review of literature on veiled Muslim women, in particular. Theories of prejudice and hate crime are discussed in addition to the current social and political climate. Chapter III is allocated to the research design and methodology of the study where population, sample, and data collection are explained in detail. Collected data and findings are analyzed in Chapter IV. Finally, Chapter V presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for future actions and research studies. A reference list and group of appendices conclude this study.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter II provides an insightful review of literature on the history of Islam in general as well as a historical, societal, and political background on Muslims in America. An overview of theoretical foundations and theoretical framework on prejudice and hate crime is then presented. There are many dimensions to prejudice and conflicts against minorities, and for this study, the theoretical foundations are presented through a sociological perspective. The three main theories within the sociological perspective are briefly discussed: functional theory, conflict theory, and interactions theory (Parrillo, 1999). As for the theoretical framework, an attempt to explain prejudice through three major approaches of personality-centered, cultural-based, and power-conflict is made (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Parrillo, 1999). Following are discussions of prejudice and hate crimes against Muslims in America, the rise of hate crimes in recent years and Trump’s presidency, the role of mass media in creating a stereotypical image for Muslims and Arabs, and the political scapegoating of Muslims. Finally, a comprehensive review of literature on hijab-wearing Muslim women in America provides a multidimensional perspective on the important historical and contemporary elements relevant to this study.

The History of Islam

The word Islam (Arabic: الإسلام) literally means submission or surrender (to God), and it is rooted in the Arabic word salam, which means peace and safety (MuslimVoice, n.d.). The word salam is also used in greetings, as-salaam ‘alaykum, which means peace be upon you and wa ‘alaykum salaam in return, which means upon you be peace. Although Islam means submission and surrender, and its followers are called Muslims and submitters (Nassar-McMillan, Ajrouch, & Hakim-Larson, 2013), this is not an
indication of an enslavement to Allah (Arabic: ﷲ), which is the Arabic word for God (MuslimVoice, n.d.).

Just as Jews and Christians throughout history were advised to surrender to God by obeying his commands, following his prophets, and putting their lives in his capable hands as a way of living to be granted prosperity, stability, and security, Muslims are also advised to surrender to God to find peace and safety (MuslimVoice, n.d.). Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all Abrahamic religions, and their followers worship the same God. Allah is not a different God, but rather the Arabic word for God and is used by both Arab Christians and Muslims. However, even though there are religious figures and scholars, “Islam is not a hierarchical religion, [and] there is no priesthood” (Jandt, 2010, p. 215), thus, everyone is viewed equally under Islam. Further, public prayer places for Muslims are called mosques in English or masjid in Arabic (Arabic: مسجد).

**Prophet Muhammad.** Islam was founded in the early seventh century in the western cities of Arabia (Jandt, 2010). It is said that the Prophet Muhammad ibn Abdullah (Arabic: ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ ﷲ) was given the first verses of the Quran in 610 C.E. by Gabriel when he was 40 years old in Ghare Hara. In the Islamic faith, the Prophet Muhammad is considered to be the last and most important prophet of Abrahamic religions.

After the passing of the Prophet in 632 C.E., and by the eighth century, other political Muslims continued spreading the word of Islam and grew their leadership, which was grounded on Islamic beliefs, to “three continents from what is now Pakistan across the Middle East and North Africa to Spain” (Jandt, 2010, p. 217). The lands under such leadership were called Caliphates, and their leaders, known to be successors of the
Prophet, were called caliphs. However, the caliphate system came to an end in 1924, under the founder of Modern Turkey, Kamal Ataturk, as caliphs had become more political in the 10th century. Nevertheless, thoughts of restoring Caliphates are still alive among some Muslims, as they wish to have a religious leader who has the authority to restore order similar to the Pope in the Catholic church. Additionally, religious leaders in Islam are often referred to as Imams by Muslims.

**Quran.** Quran (Arabic: القرآن, also spelled as Qur‘an and Koran, is the holy book of Islam, and was given to the Prophet Muhammad between 610 C.E. to 632 C.E. in the Arabian cities of Mecca and Medina, located in Saudi Arabia (Sinai & Ringgren, 2017). The word Quran means recitation, and it is believed its sacred scriptures are “a literal transcript of God’s speech” (Sinai & Ringgren, 2017, para. 1) revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Muslims believe two of the greatest phenomena of the Quran are that it was given to the Prophet Muhammad, who was an illiterate individual, and also that the Quran is well preserved and untouched throughout the years. The Quran is written in Classical Arabic, and it is the foundation of Islamic law covering different domains of family, criminal and commercial laws, as well as ritual practices and obligations and dietary regulations in forms of stories and admonitions. The Quran provides a unique and complete guidance to all social, political, and human matters on a micro and macro scale (Jandt, 2010). In addition to its completeness, the Quran is also unique for its presentation and communication where the presence of God is felt during human transactions. Unlike other religions, Islam does not distinguish politics (state) from religion (church), but instead, it offers a way of life, a spiritual guidance, and codes of ethics that govern Muslims lives. Yet, in addition to the Quran, many Islamic laws
and details are also driven from the Hadith (Sinai & Ringgren, 2017). Hadiths (Arabic: حدیث) are statements and behaviors attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, which make them an imperative source for extracting Islamic law and code of conduct (Cragg, n.d.). However, Islamist scholars carefully examine the rightness of the Hadiths within the context of history to prevent disseminating any false information to the Muslim community.

**Religious practices.** Muslims practice their religion based on the guidelines given in the Quran first, and then the teachings and life story of the Prophet Muhammad, which are passed on to them through Hadiths and the Prophet’s close and trusted associates. As an Abrahamic religion, the principles of Islam are said to be similar to Christianity and Judaism (Jandt, 2010). Similar to Judaism, Muslims have dietary restrictions, and the rules of kashrut, or kosher, resemble the Muslim guidelines. In Islam, drinking alcoholic beverages and eating pork are strictly forbidden or Haram (Arabic: هرام), and in addition to other specific dietary guidelines, the animal must be killed in a certain way for it to be permissible or Halal (Arabic: حلال) to be consumed by Muslims. As for Christianity, Muslims believe Jesus was one of the five most respectful prophets in the Abrahamic faith, and that he was sent before the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims highly respect prophets Abraham, Noah, Moses, and Jesus, and believe they were the main messengers of God who were sent before the last and most important prophet of Abrahamic religions the Prophet Muhammad. However, Jesus is only considered to be a prophet and not the son of God.

**Five pillars of Islam.** Islam is composed of five main pillars: the Shahadah, daily prayers, giving Zakat, fasting during Ramadan, and Hajj (BBC, 2009; Oxford Islamic
Studies Online, n.d.). The first pillar of Islam, Shahadah (Arabic: التَّوْقُرَاءُ), is a declaration of faith; it is sincerely verbalized with complete conviction “La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammadur rasoolu Allah” (BBC, 2009; Oxford Islamic Studies Online, n.d.). This means “there is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God” (Oxford Islamic Studies Online, n.d.). By saying the Shahadah wholeheartedly three times in front of witnesses, one becomes Muslim (BBC, 2009) and is considered to be part of the Muslim community also called Ummah (Arabic: ﻣَأ; Oxford Islamic Studies Online, n.d.). Shahadah is a declaration of one’s faith that there is only one god, and that God chose Muhammad as his prophet to send his messages to humanity through him.

The second pillar of Islam is the obligatory five daily prayers, Salat (Arabic: صلَة). Muslims have to pray five times a day at different times of the day starting early in the morning, at dawn. The call for prayers or Adhan (Arabic: ﺃَذَٰٰٰٰن) is recited at prescribed times when each prayer is due. Although Adhan is announced throughout the cities of most majority Muslim countries, Muslims in Europe and nonmajority Muslim countries usually refer to a timetable for their prayers. Salat is a ritual and spiritual way of directly connecting to God and showing submission to his will (Oxford Islamic Studies Online, n.d.). Muslims believe they pray for their own benefit and not because God needs their prayers (BBC, 2009). After doing Wudu (Arabic: ﺍِﺿَوْر), a ritual ablution, Muslims face toward Mecca and perform their prayers, which consist of standing, kneeling, and sitting in a certain way while saying the sacred prayer scripts (Jandt, 2010). Praying in groups and at mosques is highly advised as a mean of unity and a reminder of equality (BBC, 2009). In fact, the first call for prayer in Islam was recited by a freed slave Black man named Bilal Al-Habashi by the Prophet Muhammad (D. Robinson, 2004). He was one of
the first to convert to Islam, and he was one of the most trusted and loyal companions of the Prophet Muhammad.

_Zakat_ (Arabic: زكاة) or alms tax is the third pillar of Islam in which Muslims are obligated to pay a small portion of their wealth, which exceeds their basic expenses (i.e., gold, silver, cash), to the needy and charity (BBC, 2009; Jandt, 2010). _Zakat_ is usually given to religious representatives or mosques to be used for the needy and other appropriate causes such as relieving debtors and defending the faith (Oxford Islamic Studies Online, n.d.). Besides following God’s will and contributing in the community, _Zakat_ helps participants with self-discipline and disengages them from materialism by reminding them living in this world is only temporary, and the focus must be on doing good deeds not artificial attachments (BBC, 2009).

The fourth pillar of Islam is fasting or _Sawm_ (Arabic: صوم). In the holy month of _Ramadan_ (Arabic: رمضان), the ninth month of the lunar Islamic calendar, Muslims around the world deprive themselves from eating, drinking, and any sexual activity from dawn to dusk (Jandt, 2010; Oxford Islamic Studies Online, n.d.). However, the purpose of fasting is not food and drink deprivation or to just feel the hunger the poor endure, but it is a spiritual practice to work on one’s soul and inner purification and a time for faith and self-reflection (BBC, 2009; Jandt, 2010). Thus, Muslims must also do their best to avoid any evil thoughts and practice good deeds (BBC, 2009). _Ramadan_ brings all Muslims together, encourages them to do even more charity works during this month, builds a stronger spirituality and resilience, and helps them become more understanding of the hungry and appreciate what is given to them by God. However, the physically or mentally ill, pregnant and breast-feeding, or menstruating women, and travelers, as well
as the very young and very old are excused from fasting (BBC, 2009; Jandt, 2010). Those adults who have a justification for not fasting during Ramadan can try to fast when they can or make some donations to the poor (BBC, 2009). During Ramadan, Muslims typically eat two main meals, one before sunrise, Suhur (Arabic: سحور), and one after sunset, Futur (Arabic: فطور). Futur is when they break their fasts, and it is an opportunity for family, friends, and the community to come together to socialize and eat as a group. 

Eid ul-Fitr (Arabic: ﺑﻦ ﺍٰﻟﻒ) ends the holy month of Ramadan, which is the first day of the next lunar month after Ramadan. This day is considered to be one of the most important days in the Islamic calendar and culture. On this day, Muslims are prohibited from fasting, and they are to celebrate the end of the holy month of Ramadan by gathering at the mosque for a special prayer, sharing sweets, visiting family and friends, and enjoying festive meals.

Last but definitely not least, the fifth pillar of Islam is Hajj (Arabic: ﺡَжَ). All Muslims are required, at least once in their lives, to go to Hajj or on a pilgrimage to Mecca during the first third of the lunar month of Dhu al-Hijjah (Arabic: ذو الحجة; Oxford Islamic Studies Online, n.d.). This is only required for those who have the physical and financial means to do so. Special rituals must take place for the Hajj to be completed. Each year, millions of Muslims from around the globe go to Hajj. However, contrary to Hajj is Umrah (Arabic: ﻋُﻣْرَة), which could be performed any time throughout the year. Even though most rituals are similar, Hajj has some additional rites (BBC, 2009).

The history of Hajj goes back to the time of the Prophet Ibrahim when he took his wife Hajar and their son Ismail to the city of Mecca to protect his baby son from his first
wife Sarah (BBC, 2009). Mecca was only a desert then, and as the Prophet Ibrahim went 
back to Palestine, Hajar and Ismail were left alone and quickly ran out of food and water. 
Dehydrated, desperate Hajar ran up and down two hills, Safa and Marwa, hoping to find 
water, but after trying several times, she fell down beside Ismail in exhaustion and prayed 
for help. Miraculously, a spring of water (known as Zam Zam; Arabic: زَمْـمَـ) came to the 
surface as Ismail started stroking his feet on the ground while crying. Soon, the spring 
became a source of living for Hajar, and it brought prosperity to that place. The Prophet 
Ibrahim later built a small shrine there for people to worship God, as he was directed. 
However, with the passage of time, polytheistic ideas became popular in that area, and 
Kaaba, the shrine built by the Prophet Ibrahim to worship God (Allah), became a place of 
storing and worshiping icons. Thus, the Prophet Muhammad was sent to follow the 
Prophet Ibrahim’s tradition by restoring Kaaba to its original state, worshiping only the 
true God, and fighting against polytheism and the worship of lifeless statues. The 
Prophet Muhammad and a large number of his followers performed the first Islamic 
pilgrimage in 628 C.E.

**Major doctrines in Islam.** Muslims fall into two major sects of Sunni (Arabic: 
سُنّة) or Shia (Arabic: شيعة; Jandt, 2010). The difference arose after the Prophet 
Muhammad passed away, and people had different opinions of who should be the 
Prophet’s successor. In the Sunni doctrine, Muslims believe in series of Caliphs or 
Khalifas (Arabic: خليفة), Abu Bakr (Arabic: أبو بكر), Umar ibn Al-Khattāb (Arabic: عمر بن الخطاب), 
Uthman ibn Affān (Arabic: عثمان بن عفان), and Ali ibn Abī-Talib (Arabic: أبي طالب) 
are respectively the four Caliphs for the Sunni Muslims (El-Hibri & al Faruqi, 
2004). The caliphs were chosen by the people (El-Hibri & al Faruqi, 2004; Triana,
However, in the Shia doctrine, Muslims do not believe in caliphs (El-Hibri & al-Faruqi, 2004; Triana, 2017). In addition to being from the same clan, Bani Hashim, and bloodline, Shia Muslims believe the Prophet Muhammad, in an event, Ghadir Khumm (Arabic: غَدِير خُمْمَة), introduced and appointed Ali ibn Abi Talib, his cousin and son in law, as his successor. Moreover, Shias “tend to be more ecstatic in religious practice and have messianic expectations of a future imam who will bring justice to the world” (Jandt, 2010, p. 218). Although more than 90% of Muslims are Sunni, a large population of Shia Muslims live in Iraq, Iran, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, and east of Saudi Arabia.

**Islamic Culture**

Muslims live by the Quran’s guidelines and the Prophet Muhammad’s deeds and traditions, Sunnah (Arabic: سَنَنَة; Jandt, 2010). These guidelines also frame the social and legal system, Sharia (Arabic: شَرِیعَة) of a Muslim community or country. Contrary to the U.S. legal system, in Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, the legal system follows Islamic law. However, not all Muslim majority countries favor or practice Sharia law; this is especially true in Eastern European and Central Asian countries such as Turkey and Kazakhstan (Lipka, 2017). In Sharia, crimes and their appropriate punishments are described in detail, which is why punishment such as amputation of a thief’s hand does not occur often even in the strictest Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, and it almost never happens in other major Muslim countries such as Iran, despite to the common beliefs among non-Muslims (Jandt, 2010). Considering Western standards, punishment tends to be less strict.

Islamic teachings and values are strongly seen in the Muslim community where alcohol, drug use, and premarital sex are strictly prohibited, and immodest behavior and
living is frowned upon (Jandt, 2010). Preserving ethics and family values are utmost priorities. Many Muslims rebuke American culture, which they believe is the foundation for broken families, pregnant teenagers, illegitimate babies, fatherless or abandoned children, abortions, an epidemic of AIDS, pornography, and abandoned elderly parents. Although many Muslims enjoy the Western pop culture, the majority of Muslims believe Western culture and its entertainment industry are immoral and harm their societies (Pew Research Center, 2013). However, disliking Western entertainment products is not exclusive to the Muslim community; many people from different regions such as Southeast Asia find such products immoral and harmful to their people and culture. The Arab and Muslim culture is centered on family and God, and following Islam is not only a religion but a way of life (Jandt, 2010).

Furthermore, Islam does not separate religion and the state as do Western Christian countries (Jandt, 2010). Thus, even though democracy and religious freedom is highly sought, a large population of Muslims still wish to see the presence of religion in politics and might be in favor of more religious politicians or want religious leaders to have some influence in politics (Pew Research Center, 2013). Ideologically, “Muslim Americans tend to be socially conservatives and economically liberals” (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012, p. 22), whereas politically, they tend to have more moderate views, which is why the majority affiliate with the Democratic Party. American Muslims believe the government must play a stronger role in society by preserving morality, helping the needy, and providing more services to the people (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012).

Separate from the family, legal, and political sides of Islam, it is also vital to note Islam puts a high value on education, and seeking knowledge and educating oneself are
heavily encouraged in Islam (Jandt, 2010; Nakosteen & Szyliowicz, n.d.; Yasin & Jani, 2013). That is why Muslim researchers believe exploration, education, and scientific studies help them understand this universe better, which can lead them to a deeper appreciation of God’s creation (Jandt, 2010; Yasin & Jani, 2013). In fact, much of today’s science and their principles were found between the ninth and 13th centuries by Muslim scholars as they introduced significant principles in mathematics, algebra, trigonometry, astronomy, medicine, chemistry, physics, architecture, and agriculture (Jandt, 2010; Nakosteen & Szyliowicz, n.d.).

Muslim scholars also contributed significantly to science by calculating the angle of the ecliptic; measuring the size of the Earth and proposing that it turns on an axis; proposing a helio-centered universe; producing astronomical tables; introducing concepts of gravity, refraction of light, and capillary attraction; advancing medications as well as surgical tools and technics such as the use of anesthetics in surgery; initiating the analysis of anatomy; discovering certain diseases and their causes; establishing hospitals with new concepts; discovering important substances such as potash, alcohol, nitrate of silver, nitric acid, sulfuric acid, and mercury chloride; as well as introducing new ways of irrigation, fertilization, and soil cultivation (Jandt, 2010; Nakosteen & Szyliowicz, n.d.).

Muslim scholars also took particular interest in poetry, philosophy, religious and spiritual studies, as well as other types of art such as building unique architecture and creating beautiful textiles and ceramics (Nakosteen & Szyliowicz, n.d.). However, the golden age of Islamic scholarship and the scientific spirit declined noticeably after the 13th century (Jandt, 2010; Nakosteen & Szyliowicz, n.d.).
Nevertheless, seeking education and obtaining college degrees have become a growing trend among Muslims and Muslim countries in recent decades (Pew Research Center, 2016). In America, immigrant Muslims tend to be more educated than the U.S. born Muslims (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012), and the average years of schooling for Muslim adults (25 and older) in North America is still the highest compared to other regions around the globe (Pew Research Center, 2016). Currently, many Muslim countries, specifically in the Middle East, are thriving to educate better the new generations and have been trying either to bring high quality education systems and colleges to their home countries or help young students get a higher education in Western countries through scholarships; Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates are among the countries taking the lead in this regard (Jandt, 2010). In 2013–2014 school year, the U.S. alone had more than 100,000 Saudi students enrolled in its colleges (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). With a population of less than 30 million and with only 20% of the populace of college age (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017), Saudi Arabia became the fourth largest international students’ sponsor in the U.S. in 2014 (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). Furthermore, in 2015, a $6 billion budget was allocated to the study of Saudi students aboard (Walcutt, 2016).

**Dominant Cultural Patterns**

This section covers the dominant cultural patterns that are evident in Arab and Islamic culture. Different dimensions of Arabic and Islamic culture are briefly overviewed as follows: worldwide, activity orientation, time orientation, human nature orientation, relational orientation, and role of women.

**Worldview.** As mentioned before, Islam does not separate religion from other aspects of life, so Muslims’ world view is through the lens of Islam (Jandt, 2010). In
Islam, God is the ultimate power and world administrator; everything in this world happens based on God’s laws, but human beings were given the intelligence and choice to live by his laws or not. That is why Islam obliges Muslims to seek the truth by educating themselves about the universe. In Islam, people are responsible for taking care of the environment and natural resources, and they must be respected and looked after as God’s creation and blessings to human beings and be preserved for future generations. Wastefulness and destruction of the environment are strictly prohibited in Islam.

**Activity orientation.** Working is also obligatory in Islam (Jandt, 2010). Muslims are asked to work hard and provide for themselves and make a positive contribution in their community. No one is better than another based on their type of work, and all types of works are respected as long as they are religiously and morally right. Any earning that is rightfully gained is the individual’s possession, but greed and selfishness have no place in Islam. Anything that a Muslim has is a blessing and thought to be borrowed from God.

**Time orientation.** There is a strong correlation between Muslims’ daily activities and the cosmos, as the Islamic daily prayers are observed based on the movement of the sun throughout the day, and the Islamic calendar is based on new moons (Jandt, 2010). Muslim countries follow the Hijrah calendar, which started when the Prophet Muhammad escaped prosecution in Mecca and left for Medina on July 15, 622 C.E. The Hijrah calendar is lunar based and has 12 months, which are not correlated to the season, and since it is 11 days shorter than the solar calendar, it changes slightly each year. Westerners refer to Hijrah dates as A.H.; an abbreviation for anno Hegria.
Unlike Northern Europe and North America, where monochromic time is practiced, Arab countries and the Middle East, similar to Latin America, work based on polychromic time (Hall, 1983). Monochromic time is time oriented, so it is based on scheduling and working through orders while completing tasks one at the time. In contrary, polychromic time is task oriented, more flexible in timing, and multitasked. Polychromic cultures are also people oriented, involve human relationships, and greatly value family. Having a polychromic culture, Arabs can conduct different affairs at the same time, change plans as needed, and interact with several people at the same time (Jandt, 2010).

**Human nature orientation.** In Islam, it is believed everyone is born pure and innocent, but since human beings are given intelligence and choice, they will be responsible for their actions and intentions once they reach the age of maturity (Jandt, 2010). Being born innocent, human nature is drawn more toward good and positive changes than to evil. As mentioned before, the word Islam means submission or surrender (MuslimVoice, n.d.), so Muslims believe human beings are created “to worship God by knowing, loving, and obeying him” (Jandt, 2010, p. 240).

**Relational orientation.** The most prominent character of Arab culture is being group oriented and the strong definition of family in one’s life (Jandt, 2010). Dissimilar to Western culture, individuality has no place in the Arab culture, and everything is centered around family and tribes. In Arab culture, any honor and accomplishment as well as loyalty and duty are to the family. Family is the most important factor in Arab culture; the priority and loyalty of an individual goes to the family first then the clan, tribe, and government respectively. Arabs have large families, and it is common to live
with extended families, especially in countries such as Saudi Arabia. Sons have the burden of carrying their fathers’ bloodline and traditions; therefore, they are the honor of a father; the more sons, the better. Elders are greatly respected and have particular influence in decision making, and families take care of their elders; they are never abandoned by their families.

Arab culture is strongly attached to Islam and its teachings, and social lives and organizations are founded on family and Islam (Jandt, 2010). Islam does not favor or distinguish among people of different colors, races, ethnicities, and wealth. Taking care of each other, contributing to the community, and giving to charities constitute one of the five pillars of Islam, which is sensed greatly in the Arab culture and Muslim communities (BBC, 2009; Jandt, 2010; Oxford Islamic Studies Online, n.d.). Generosity and hospitality among Arabs are honorable traditions (Jandt, 2010).

**Role of women.** Muslim women do not see themselves as less than men and believe in equality (Jandt, 2010). However, equality does not mean identical in the Muslims’ view. Both men and women are equally granted freedom of expression and are encouraged to seek knowledge and education, but they are encouraged to play different roles within the family and society, which is seen as equal yet not identical. The Prophet Muhammad was the most important advocate for women’s rights in Arab culture (Aslan, 2005; Jandt, 2010), and in the seventh century, he granted women many revolutionary rights, including “access to the mosque, full participation in public affairs, and the right to inherit property” (Jandt, 2010, p. 227). In addition to inheritance rights, Muslim women were also granted divorce rights, privileges that stayed foreign to Christian and European women for another thousand years (Aslan, 2005).
Aslan (2005), an editor and associate professor who studied religions at Santa Clara University, Harvard University, and the University of California, Santa Barbara, attributed a chapter of his book *No god but God: The Origins and Evolution of Islam* to women in Islam. Referring to Quran verses and historical facts, Aslan described the role and status of women in Islam by providing different examples. One of the most challenging issues the Prophet Muhammad was faced with was to create a different society that had become submissive and degrading to women throughout the years while still considering the existing cultures and traditions (Aslan, 2005). The Quran provides many verses throughout to specify and emphasize the importance of women and the way they should be treated. A widely known example among Muslims is a hadith attributed to the Prophet Mohammed, when upon being asked advice by Jahima, one of his followers, regarding joining a battle, he in turn recommended to stay behind alongside his mother “for Paradise is beneath her feet” (Arabic: ﻓَأَلِزُّهَا ﻓَإِنَّ ﺔِﺟََّـَ~3104). Thus, Islam requires men and children to display great respect towards women and mothers. Aslan (2005) believes including “unbiblical conviction that men and women were created together and simultaneously from a single cell [in the Quran] (4:1; 7:189)” (Chapter 8, para. 1) shows the emphasis Islam has on the “equality of the sexes in the eyes of God” (Chapter 8, para. 1).

Though, God offers different roles and tasks for women and men in society because of their differences in nature such as, “strength” (Quran 4:34), the Quran distinctly specifies there is no difference between men and women in God’s eyes; they are both treated equally by him and are accountable for ensuring their duties. As Aslan (2005) pointed out, the Quran gives great details to show this equality:
God offers forgiveness and a great reward, for men who surrender to Him, and women who surrender to Him, for men who believe, and women who believe, for men who obey, and women who obey, for men who speak truth, and women who speak truth, for men who persevere, and women who persevere, for men who are humble, and women who are humble, for men who give alms, and women who give alms, for men who fast, and women who fast, for men who are modest, and women who are modest, for men who remember God, and women who remember God. (Quran 33:35)

However, even though the Prophet Muhammad worked hard to make exceptional changes for women, and the Quran delivers those rights and conditions in detail, by the passing of the time and certain circumstances such as differences in Arabic dialects and word usage and their definitions as well as other unique geographical, geopolitical, and economic factors, Muslim women were again faced with limited rights in certain places (Aslan, 2005). In some instances, radical followers changed some of the practices and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad or simply some stories of his life and hadiths were fabricated or changed throughout the years and by inaccurate retelling. This partly explains some challenges women faced in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. As most false Islamic rulings were made by male authorities, many Muslim women scholars and advocates have been trying to clear Islamic societies from those incorrect and fabricated narratives and regain their rights that Islam gave to them by referencing to the Quran and authentic hadiths. Just as Jewish and Christian biblical scriptures were given based on the cultural and societal structures of that time, Islamic scriptures reflect the seventh century’s norms and issues. Advocates for Muslim women
emphasized this issue and worked hard to ensure women’s rights are reflected by the 21st century and are separated from the cultural and traditional prejudices of the seventh century.

**Global Demographics of Muslims**

**Population**

The latest statistics from the Pew Research Center estimated there were about 1.8 billion Muslims in the world in 2015, making up nearly 24.1% of the population worldwide (Lipka & Hackett, 2017). Islam also has the second largest number of followers after Christianity and has been identified as the fastest growing religion (Lipka, 2017). Furthermore, the Pew Research Center anticipates Islam to become the largest religion by the end of this century “if current demographic trends continue” (Lipka, 2017, para. 3; Lipka & Hackett, 2017). A 70% increase in the global Muslim population is expected to be seen by 2060 (from 1.8 billion in 2015 to 3 billion in 2060) when there is an anticipated growth of 32% in the world’s population (Lipka & Hackett, 2017). This rapid growth of the Muslim population is the result of three demographic reasons: having higher birth rates (2.9 children per woman for Muslims versus 2.2 for non-Muslims), having the youngest median age of other major religious groups (24 versus 32), combined with a larger upcoming Muslim generation that will be at the age of forming families of their own.

Asian-Pacific countries (Bangladesh, Iran, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Turkey) are home to 62% of all Muslims, with Indonesia currently being the largest Muslim country (Lipka, 2017). The second largest global population of Muslims, 20%, reside in the Middle Eastern and North African countries such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and
In addition, the growth of Muslims in Europe is expected to make 10% of all Europeans by 2050.

Furthermore, according to the latest study by Pew Research Center, the U.S. Muslim population was approximately 3.3 million in 2015, which was about 1% of the total U.S. population, about 322 million people (Mohamed, 2016). The Pew Research Center anticipated this number, Muslim population in the U.S., to be doubled by 2050. However, varying reports state varying numbers from four to 12 million for the current U.S. Muslim population (Sullivan et al., 2015). These discrepancies result for different reasons, including that “the Census Bureau does not track people’s religious affiliation” (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012, p. 21), and “religious loyalty cannot be easily or accurately measured” (Laderman & Leon, 2003, p. 125).

The Arab States

There are 22 Arab countries, and more than 280 million people around the world are Arab. These countries have diverse cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds as well as populations, life expectancy, literacy, and gross income (annual per capita gross domestic product). For instance, Bahrain has the smallest population of .07 million whereas Egypt has 65 million people (Jandt, 2010).

Being the fifth most spoken language in the world and the official language of 24 countries, Arabic is spoken by more than 400 million people and has become one of the most important languages in the world of business and security (Western Kentucky University, n.d.). The Quran was sent in Arabic, which has led more than 1 billion Muslims around the world to become familiar with the basics of this language despite speaking another language. Arabic is an ancient language with a rich history. It was
once the language of science and literature and has influenced other languages such as Persian or Farsi, Urdu, and Spanish.

Arab history is very rich, and it goes back more than 5,000 years. However, it has also gone through many wars and invasions throughout these years. European countries specifically started conquering Arab countries by force starting in 1798 when Napoleon invaded Egypt, and by the end of World War I, almost 90% of Arab countries were invaded by European forces. Only after World War I, did European countries start to lose power in the area (Jandt, 2010).

“Nationalism, pan-Arabism, and Islam” are typically identified as three political and cultural trends for Arabs (Jandt, 2010, p. 225). Arab nationalism was greatly and negatively impacted when Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was a pan-Arab leader of Egypt, died in 1970.

Even though the terms Middle Eastern and Arab-Americans have been used interchangeably, there are many countries in the region that do not identify themselves as Arab such as Iran and Turkey (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2013). Islam was originally sent to and was spread by the Arab ethnic groups (Jandt, 2010). However, many still greatly associate Islam with Arabs and Arabs as Muslims, incessantly overlooking that not all Muslims are Arabs and not all Arabs are Muslim. Islam is the second largest Abrahamic religion in the world, and it has followers of many nationalities and races globally while Arabs are a minority within this religion. Nevertheless, Arabs share a cultural bond, as it is based on Islamic teachings and history.

Currently, about 75 countries around the world are home to a large population of Muslims. However, some countries have suppressed their minority Muslims regarding
their practice of religion, culture, or language (Jandt, 2010). For decades, minority Muslims in Burma, China, and Russia were socially, politically, and violently persecuted, oppressed, and even deprived of some of the most basic human rights.

**Saudi Arabia**

Islam was born in Saudi Arabia, and Mecca and Madinah, two of the most religious and important places for Muslims, are located in this country. Therefore, Saudi Arabia has always played an important role in the Arab and Muslim world (Jandt, 2010). Even though Saudi Arabia is the 12th largest country in the world, about 98% of the land is desert and unlivable. However, holding 25% to 30% of the world’s oil resources, Saudi Arabia started to rise to a strong economic and political country not only in the region but in the West following the discovery of oil in the late 1930s.

Saudi Arabia is also home to *Wahhabism* (Arabic: المهرابي), which is often referred to as an ultraconservative Islamist movement (Jandt, 2010). Wahhabism is practiced by the Saudi ruling family of Al Saud, which came to power in the 1920s. Identified as the most conservative Islamic country in the world because of its practice of Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia exercises strict rules to maintain its beliefs, culture, and traditions. Smoking, drug use, drinking, and contact between any unmarried opposite sex individuals are frowned upon. All types of literature and its portrayal in any media (e.g., movies, advertisements) must fit the requirements of the government’s Ministry of Information and respect the conservative culture of the country. Furthermore, *Mutawa’een* (Arabic: المطورين), morals or morality police, patrol the public to maintain the Wahhabism standards, which include stores being closed during prayer times and females and males dressing appropriately. Saudi Arabia’s legal system is based on the
Quran and Sharia law. Even though almost all Muslim countries might practice certain degrees of conservatism and the foundation of their culture is influenced by Islam, it is imperative to note Saudi Arabia has the strictest rules of all Muslim countries, and that it does not represent all Muslims or Muslim countries throughout the world. The best example of such differences is in Dubai, the second largest emirate of the United Arab Emirates. This rapidly changing and progressive city has been called the Las Vegas of the Middle East and has become a center for tourism. As a conservative Muslim state, Dubai is fully committed to preserving its traditions and Islamic values while showing tolerance and being accommodating to tourists and its non-Muslim population (Jandt, 2010).

However, it is important to note the new Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, commonly known as MBS, has been causing major shifts in changing many longstanding conservative traditions in the country such as not allowing females to drive and traveling guardianship policies since he has come to the power (van Wagendonk, 2019). MBS has branded himself as a reformist thriving for an end to “endemic corruption, encouraging Saudis to be less dependent on the state with his Vision 2030 economic strategy, and discouraging ultra-conservative interpretations of Islam” (A. S. Ahmed, 2017, para. 9). Though his methods and contradictory actions have raised much concerns within inside and outside of its borders (A. S. Ahmed, 2017; Cook, 2018; van Wagendonk, 2019).

Politically, Saudi Arabia has become an important U.S. ally in the Middle East since President Franklin Roosevelt, and later, after signing the first security agreement with President Harry S. Truman in 1947 (Jandt, 2010). Throughout these years, Saudi
Arabia and the U.S. have worked together closely to manipulate the economy by overseeing oil prices as well as balancing and solving political issues in the region in their mutual interest (Jandt, 2010). Being directly or indirectly involved in critical international incidents such as the war in Yemen, “Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Sudan, and Algeria” (Twaij, 2019, para. 3) has brought much complexity and resentment toward the Saudi ruling family by the neighboring countries and many Muslims around the world. Most recently, on June 5, 2017, a Saudi-led blockade was placed on Qatar a week after newly elected American President Donald Trump visited Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt suddenly cut all ties with their neighboring country Qatar, accusing its government of supporting terrorism and instability in the region (Al Jazeera, 2019a). Qatar denied all accusations and claims the blockade was a means to control the country’s independence. This issue has brought much tension to the region, and while the White House and the Trump administration have been sending mixed messages, the U.S. attempts to play the role of a mediator by urging the neighboring countries to resolve their issues through mutual respect and dialogue (Al Jazeera, 2019b). Such conflicts have also caused many Muslims to call for internationalizing the cities of Mecca and Medina, so all Muslims can go on a pilgrimage regardless of regional political issues (Osman, 2017). Also, while Saudi Arabia was traditionally seen as the prominent defendant of Muslim rights internationally, it has been notably silent and even appearing to condone China regarding its human rights violations towards Uighur Muslims (Fifield & Fahim, 2019).

However, in addition to international political issues, Saudi Arabia also experienced tension within its borders from the Shia minority, the fundamentalists, and
the liberals (Jandt, 2010). Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince, MBS, is also believed to be involved in series of crackdown, imprisonment, torture, and even killings of many Saudi nationals descendents and activists (Al Jazeera, 2019c; Chehayeb, 2019; Reuters, 2019; van Wagtendonk, 2019). The Crown Prince has been particuallry under international scrunity over the slaying of a Suadi national and self exciled U.S. citizen journalist, Jamal Khashoggi, inside the Saudi Consulate in Turkey in 2018 (Al Jazeera, 2019c; Corbin, 2019; Trew, 2018; van Wagtendonk, 2019). Being a close ally to the U.S. and having an important historical and religious background attached to it, Saudi Arabia plays a key role in the stability of the Middle East and Muslim world.

**American Muslims**

**Demographics and Immigration**

Although the West and the media like to portray all Muslims as one and in one general subgroup (Laderman & Leon, 2003), American Muslims are from various racial, ethnic, social, economic, and educational backgrounds (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Laderman & Leon, 2003; Nassar-McMillan et al., 2013). Originating from many differing countries with a variety of races and ethnicities as well as unique cultural backgrounds and speaking different languages and dialects, this large subgroup is made of many distinctive subsets. Furthermore, American Muslims practice different sects of Islam with different levels of religiousness and tend to have varied political points of view (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012). Figure 1, reprinted from the *National Geographic Magazine* (Fadel, 2018), provides a full overview of the American Muslims demographics such as age, region of origin, race, and education.
Figure 1. American Muslim demographics. Reprinted from “How Muslims, Often Misunderstood, Are Thriving in America,” by L. Fadel, 2018 (May), National Geographic Magazine. Retrieved from https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/05/being-muslim-in-america/

Though Arabs and Muslim Americans immigrated to the U.S. for variety of reasons and mostly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, evidence suggests American Muslims came to the U.S. around the 15th century because of the slave trade (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012). By 1986, American Muslims had immigrated from more than 60 countries (Haddad, 1986), but the first Muslims who came to the U.S. were mostly from African countries (Austin, 1997; Diouf, 1998; Leonard, 2003). Some of those early African Muslims who were brought to the U.S. as slaves are well-known to the historians, such as Estevanico (also known as Stephen the Moor or Mustafa Zemmouri and bought by the Spanish to the U.S.), Omar ibn Sayyid (a well-educated scholar before being abducted from his home town), Abdul Rahman Ibrahima Sori (a West African Prince before being captured as a slave), Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq (from a wealthy and well-known family prior to
being sold as a slave), Bilali Mohamed (armed by his master as he convinced and led his fellow slaves to fight against the British in 1812), and Mohammed Ali ben Said (later named Nicholas Said and authored an autobiography claiming his African Muslim heritage; Austin, 1997; Diouf, 1998). However, in the late 19th century, small groups of Arabs and Muslims such as Lebanese, Syrians, Egyptians, and Palestinians decided to immigrate willingly to the U.S. looking for a better life (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012).

Depending on the focus of their studies and origins of immigrants, scholars have cited different waves and times for Muslim immigration to the U.S. (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2013). However, “Most scholars cite anywhere from two (e.g., Suleiman, 1999) to four (e.g., Nassar-McMillan, 2010) primary waves of immigration from the Arab world to the USA” (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2013, p. 3). Nevertheless, it should be noted that each wave of immigration is unique to its people because of the major incidents, such as the Gulf War in Iraq in the early 1990s, and critical political changes, such as the civil war in Lebanon in the 1970s, that happened in the country of origin or region. Table 2 is a timeline of Muslim immigration to the U.S. that is cited the most by varying sources and is gathered by Nassar-McMillan et al. (2013) in their book, *Biopsychosocial Perspectives on Arab Americans: Culture, Development, and Health*.

Table 2

*Most Cited Waves of Arab Immigration to the U.S.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1400s</td>
<td>• Arabs accompanied Columbus and Spanish settlers to the New World (Arab American National, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500s</td>
<td>• Millions of Arabs with origins in African countries were brought to the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
U.S. as part of the slave trade. Because their names were changed during that process, immigration and lineage for this group of immigrants is difficult to track (Arab American Nationals, 2013).

1880s – 1920s
- The first waves are said to have come as part of the Great Migration, joining immigrants from countries worldwide in search of better economic opportunities. In many cases these Christian Arabs were fleeing the vast Ottoman (i.e., pan-Islamic) Empire (Orafalea, 2006).

Post-World War II
- Often referred to as the Brian Drain, these Arab immigrants came to the U.S. to escape political tensions in their region. This group was primarily Muslim and well educated (Orafalea, 2006).

1960s
- This group, like its immediate predecessors, was predominantly educated and Muslim; with its reason for immigration to the US being economic opportunities, opened up by loosened immigration restrictions; many were also unhappy with the continued political strife in the region (Orafalea, 2006).

1970s – 1980s
- Civil War and Israeli invasion of Lebanon prompted large numbers to leave Lebanon for the U.S. via chain migration (Samhan, 2014).

1990s
- The Gulf War caused an Iraqi refugee crisis, with U.S. President George W. Bush agreeing to allow refugees who had supported the U.S. to immigrate to the U.S. (Samhan, 2014).

1990s and beyond
- Refugees and immigrants from the Arab Middle East continue to migrate to the U.S. for various reasons.

September
- The Twin Towers, New York City bombings and the subsequent War
11, 2001 on Terror and its corresponding long-term occupation of Iraq by the United States, have provided a context for continued immigration from the Arab Middle East, most notably from Iraq (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2012).


It is also imperative to note that immigration of many Arabs or Muslims from the Middle East to the U.S. have been the result of a direct or indirect involvement of the U.S. with the political unrest in the region (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2013). The War in the Gulf is an example of many pro-U.S. Iraqi soldiers and their families immigrating or fleeing their country for security and safety issues (Jamil, Nassar-McMillan, & Lambert, 2007; Jamil, Nassar-McMillan, Lambert, & Hammad, 2007). The U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq in the name of the War on Terror is another example of U.S. involvement in Arab countries and the Middle East, and how its involvement might have affected immigration trends and perhaps policies (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2013), as it has recently with the Trump Muslim ban.

It also should be highlighted that in the last couple of years, the U.S. has played a key role and had a strong presence in the wars and conflicts in Syria and Yemen. However, even though a small number of people from these countries immigrated or fled to the U.S. compared with some European countries, in March 2017, the then newly American President Trump signed an executive order banning people of several Muslim
majority countries, including Yemen and Syria, from entering the country for 90 days as well as an indefinitely ban on Syrian refugees. This Executive Order was temporarily blocked by a Hawaiian federal judge (de Vogue, 2018), but on December 4, 2017, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the White House and allowed the latest version of the ban to be fully enforced (Williams, 2017). The Supreme Court revisited this issue in April 2018 and heard arguments concerning the merits of the ban and its constitutionally (de Vogue, 2018). The Supreme Court’s final decision was a victory to President Trump, allowing him to continue with the ban (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], n.d.).

**Muslim and Non-Muslim Conflicts Have a Long History**

In 2015, “heartbreaking pictures of a dead refugee baby on a Turkish beach” (Tharoor, 2015, p. 1) saddened many people’s hearts around the world. Three-year-old Alan Kurdi, who was from a town called Kobani in north Syria, was escaping violence along with his family and looking for a safe place. The image of Alan’s lifeless body on the beach has become “the most tragic symbol yet of the Mediterranean refugees’ crisis” (Tharoor, 2015, p. 1). The year 2015 was a year of many wars, tragic incidents, violence, and social division.

According to a United Nation Refugee Agency report, “wars, conflict, and persecution have forced more people than at any other time since records began to flee their homes and seek refuge and safety elsewhere” (UNHCR, 2015, para. 1). The 59.5 million people forcibly displaced by the end of 2014, a staggering record, has risen much higher since (UNHCR, 2015). The main reason for this spike in refugees and displacements can be attributed to the wars and conflicts during the past few years. According to UNHCR (2015), “at least 15 conflicts have erupted or reignited” (para. 8) in
the past five years. Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Mali, Northeastern Nigeria, Burundi, South Sudan, Ukraine, Pakistan, and Myanmar are where some of these ongoing conflicts have remained unresolved. By the end of 2014, Syria alone was responsible for 7.6 million displaced people and 3.88 million refugees; “Afghanistan (2.59 million) and Somalia (1.1 million)” (UNHCR, 2015, para. 15) were the “next biggest refugee source countries” (para. 15).

Much of the tension and violence around the world that has led to worldwide concern has been caused by the birth of a militant group in the Middle East. ISIS is a militant radical and anti-Western group, which originally started as part of Al Qaeda in 2004, and its goal has been to gain control in the region by “establishing an independent Islamic State” (Thompson et al., 2015, para. 2). ISIS was able to seize some parts of Iraq and Syria and to terrorize the people in the region as well as many leaders around the globe (Thompson et al., 2015). Besides killing many innocents in the region, ISIS also has been either directly or indirectly (by inspiring) involved in terrorist attacks in other places, including Lebanon, France, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Turkey (Yourish et al., 2016). The U.S., France, Russia, Australia, and Canada bombed Syria to fight with ISIS whereas countries such as Iran and local volunteers such as Kurdish fighters fought ISIS on the ground (BBC News, 2015c; BBC News, 2016b; McClam & Williams, 2014).

All these events and the resulting chaos caused many non-Muslims around the world to hate Muslims and blame Islam for the violent and unfortunate circumstances (Daulatzai & Rana, 2018; Faiola, 2016; Osiewicz, 2017; Payne, 2015; Siemaszko, 2015; Zunes, 2017). Muslims, specifically Arab Muslims in America, were scrutinized closely after the terrorist attack of September 11 when radicalism and terror erupted again.
American Muslims specifically felt an intense backlash after the Paris attack and San Bernardino shooting in California (Sullivan et al., 2015). On December 2, 2015, a Muslim couple started shooting at a holiday party in San Bernardino, California, leaving 14 people dead and many injured (Ortiz, 2015). The couple was killed later that day by the police. Law enforcement officials later reported that the woman, Tashfeen Malik, had posted her oath of allegiance to ISIS on her Facebook page right before the shooting (Yourish et al., 2016).

However, many scholars attribute the roots of today’s conflicts between American non-Muslims and American Muslims to history. Evidently, the long-lasting conflicts between European Christians and Middle Eastern Muslims centuries ago, as the Roman Empire was defeated by the Muslims in the seventh century, the European Christian’s Crusades from the 11th to 14th centuries, and again the rise of the Ottoman Muslim Empire in (1299–1923) resulted in distrust and prejudice toward Muslims and the Middle East (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Suleiman, 1999). The negative feelings and grudges European Christians and White Americans held as a result of centuries of conflict with Middle Eastern Muslims inherently influenced White Americans’ view (Suleiman, 1999). Furthermore, the strong urge and action of the West to “access and control over Middle Eastern economic and geopolitical resources specially [sic] oil and natural gas” (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012, p. 27) has long been a source of constant conflict and tension among involved countries. The United States’ recognition of Israel as a country in 1948 and its strong support since then has been a major issue and barrier between Muslim and Arab countries and the American government (Jandt, 2010). America’s involvement in the Persian Gulf War in 1991, and its invasion of Iraq in 2003, only degenerated its
relationship with the Muslim and Arab population. The U.S. is not viewed as the liberator of Iraqis, and it is viewed as an occupier whose only interest is to protect oil reserves and to favor Israel’s interests. The strong existing participation of the U.S. with Saudi Arabia in the Yemen civil war and Syria has escalated such feelings and views and the exacerbated turmoil in the Middle East. Even though the U.S. might have benefited in some way from the constant animosity against Iran and fueling of division among the Sunnis and Shias and Muslim countries in the Middle East, such divisive propaganda and foreign policy tactics have also worked against it and deepened the aforementioned animosity.

Ongoing wars and terrorism, while using Muslims as scapegoats, historically fueled frustration and prejudice toward American Muslims (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012). Arab and Muslim activists have marked the “Arab-Israeli war and oil embargo [early 1970s] as a starting point for increased prejudice and hostility against their communities in the United States” (HRW, 2002, p. 11). A new wave of anti-Muslim sentiment and an increase in hate crimes against Arabs, Iranians, and Muslims proliferated during the hostage crisis in 1979. According to the HRW (2002), the former President of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Albert Mokhiber, addressed the issue of discrimination caused by the hostage crises by saying, “Iranians were being targeted for hate crimes at that point…so were Arab-Americans, and Arabs and Iranians aren’t the same” (HRW, 2002, p. 11). Thirty years later, discrimination and hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims still exist (FBI, 2018; HRW, 2002). A theoretical perspective on prejudice and hate could help clarify this phenomenon of otherness that American Arabs and Muslims have faced in Western countries including that in the U.S.
**Theoretical Foundations**

It is part of human nature to react to the unknown and follow certain patterns when it comes to strangers; perception is key here (Parrillo, 1999). When facing strangers, an outsider who is unknown, human beings start to compare and evaluate how similar or different the other is. Thus, interethnic tensions and hostilities have always existed amongst countrymen; killings of Bosnian Muslims by the Serbian Orthodox Christians in 1990s and the bloody war between different Nigerian tribes (Hausa, Ibo, and Yoruba) in 1980s are examples of such hostilities within a nation. In the context of similarity and attraction phenomenon, many studies indicate the perception of similarities is a much stronger indicator than similarities, and the more similar, the more receptive human beings are.

Perceptions of strangers are often created based on comparison to one’s own culture and experiences as well as judgments and generalizations as a result of limited knowledge or scanty information (Parrillo, 1999). Stereotypes are then formed if an individual becomes the single representative of a group. George Simmel and Alfred Schutz offer different approaches when describing a stranger. In Simmel’s theory, a stranger is a collective form of both nearness, physical close proximity, and remoteness, socially and culturally different (Wolff, 1950). Even though he or she is around and in the same territory, nearness, he or she displays different values and behaviors as the rest of the natives and known community. Schutz (1944), on the other hand, viewed strangers as those who lack intersubjective understanding. In Schutz’s theory, strangers do not share the common historical, social, and cultural domains of the new place and do not have a good grasp of the daily language and behavior.
Sociological Perspective

By identifying and analyzing social forces and their influence on human behavior, sociologists try to understand better human relationships and patterns of behavior (Parrillo, 1999). Regarding minorities, there are three main theories within the sociological perspective: functional theory, conflict theory, and interactions theory. However, prior to exploring these theories, it is important to note the word minority in sociology does not describe a group in numbers but “its relative power and status in a society” (Parrillo, 1999, p. 12). Many scholars (Schmerhorn, 1970; Shibutani & Kwan, 1965; Wirth, 1945; Young, 1932) attempted to define minority in a sociological perspective. However, Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris led the way in bringing all social scientists together by recognizing five common characteristics that almost all minority groups around the world share (as cited in Parrillo, 1999). Minority groups suffer from unequal treatment as a whole, are easily identifiable as a result of distinguishing physical or cultural features, have a sense of peoplehood within their own group, are born to that group (ascribed status), and have a tendency to marry within their own group (practicing endogamy) whether by choice or isolation (Parrillo, 1999). It should be noted there are exceptions to these domains, as not all minority groups such as disabled are born to that group or would be able to marry within the same group such as women when considered a minority.

Functional theory. According to this theory, a society depends on relative stability and functionality, where everything and everyone works harmoniously to fulfill their roles within society and to maintain order and balance (Parrillo, 1999). As dysfunctions develop for a variety of reasons such as disorganization and maladjustment,
and since dysfunction usually does not get resolved quickly, problems arise. Rapid social change is the most frequent cause of dysfunction in societies. In functional theory, problems are viewed as temporary and solutions are sought to resolve the problems either by removing the issue and restoring the previous harmonious state or by making (ideally smaller) corrections and/or adjusting to the new state.

**Conflict theory.** Contrary to the stable and harmonious functional theory, in conflict theory, people always need to fight and compete against each other because resources are limited, so there is always friction, disagreement, and clashes in society (Parrillo, 1999). Unlike a functional society, instability and change are the norm in a conflict society while inequalities further the distance and animosities among different racial and ethnic groups. In conflict theory, “racism is [only] an ideology [and] a set of generalized beliefs” (Parillo, 1999, p. 10) that are used to identify those who try to maintain power and control over the limited resources, and who also push the ideas of false consciousness to keep the rest of people from fighting over the resource and their real personal interests (Parrillo, 1999).

**Interactionist theory.** Instead of macrosocially analyzing a society as functional and conflict theories do, interactionist theory focuses on individuals and their microsocial world as they interact with others in their daily lives and analyzes the patterns of their interactions (Parrillo, 1999). Symbolic interaction, which includes shared symbols, body language, tone of voice, common social concepts and trends, and expressions, become vital in interactionist theory, as it helps explain how individuals create and interpret what they experience daily. Social construction of reality is the highlight of this theory; how individuals analyze and process the actions and interactions to create their reality.
Through continuous interactions, shared history, expectations, and understanding are developed, which result in “reciprocal typifications—mutual categorizations—of one another” (Parrillo, 1999, p. 11). A variety of ideologies and scientific approaches are used to resolve problems that arise. Ultimately, over time, the creation of mutual categorizations and a constructed social and cultural environment become the reality of that society.

**Theoretical Framework**

In many situations, race is used to identify and group people, but many factors such as intermarriages and migration make it very difficult to do so rightfully (Parrillo, 1999). Nevertheless, as Parrillo (1999) explained “Racial classification is a sociopolitical construct, not a biological absolute” (p. 13). Thus, to explain racial prejudice, sociologists attempt to identify and understand factors that contribute to such classification.

Although the terms prejudice and racism are often used interchangeably (Tatum, 2013), they have separate meanings and scholars argue there is a distinct difference between the two. The word prejudice, deprived from the word Latin praejudicium, means pre judgment (Parrillo, 1999), and many scholars refer to it when someone reaches conclusions and presumes certain characteristics about others on the basis of stereotypes, omissions and misinformation, or lack of knowledge (Parrillo, 1999; Tatum, 2013).

Tatum (2013), a psychologist and university professor, refered to prejudice as an inescapable part of a racially charged society, and believed that all people carry some type of prejudice because of exposure to misinformation. However, some scholars such as Louis Wirth argued prejudice occurs when there is at least some degree of knowledge
about or contact with the other (as cited in Parrillo, 1999). In Wirth’s opinion, prejudice is “an attitude with an emotional bias” (as cited in Parrillo, 1999, p. 65). Healey (2006) also emphasized the negative views and emotions the word prejudice carries.

Meanwhile, racism uses biological characteristics and sociocultural means to create a sense of superiority against other races (Parrillo, 1999). Tatum (2013) pinpointed key aspects when defining racism. She described racism as a form of oppression that, “is not only a personal ideology based on the racial prejudice, but also a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of the individual” (Tatum, 2013, p. 66).

Another common definition of racism also emphasizes the combination of racial prejudice and social power, which could lead to institutionalized racism and surface as policies and practices (Tatum, 2013). Hence, even though prejudice has a negative connotation (thoughts and feelings), prejudice alone cannot be explained as racism; racism is taking actions upon certain held prejudices, and power helps the individual (racist) not only take action but also control and benefit from the situation. That is why scholars such as Tatum firmly believe in the concept of systematic advantages and disadvantages, which is essential when trying to understand issues of racism in countries such as America.

**Theoretical Approaches to Prejudice**

Many researchers have studied different dimensions of prejudice to understand how and why prejudice is formed and how and why it continues to exist (Schaeffer, 2006). Different theories attempted to explain this phenomenon. However, personality-
centered, cultural-based, and power-conflict approaches are the three major approaches in the research (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Parrillo, 1999).

**Personality-centered approach.** In this approach, prejudice is seen as a manifestation of personality malfunction, and it analyzes prejudice from a personality point of view (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012). The personality-centered approach looks for the causes of prejudice within an individual’s personality dynamics and early childhood, and acknowledges prejudice as a great tool for people to project their own shortcomings and weaknesses and hurt others’ feelings. While being intolerant of others, intolerance is firmly denied, and yet prejudice might become a scapegoating strategy for one’s own problems and failures. Schaeffer (2006) explained that people turn to scapegoating by pouring their anger and frustration on a vulnerable group when they refuse to take responsibility for their own issues and mistakes and fail to identify the real problems and address them responsibly. Moreover, scapegoating often happens when the problem’s source is too powerful or out of touch, such as with large corporations or terrorist groups, for people to show their frustration and anger, so they vent on a vulnerable group as a substitute (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Healey, 2006; Schaeffer, 2006).

In addition to scapegoating theory, authoritarian personality theory attempts to explain prejudice through a personality-centered approach in which the individual forms his or her personality characteristics, such as an urge to be tough and powerful, early in life (Schaeffer, 2006). Since authoritarian personality develops early in life, parents’ behaviors and personalities have a direct impact on the child’s behavior and character development (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Healey, 2006). For instance, when parents tend to be harsh and cold toward their children and spend limited time with them, children might
display their outburst and anger outside and toward minorities and more vulnerable groups (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012). However, authoritarian theory focuses solely on the individual’s personality and childhood but fails to consider other social and cultural domains such as education, gender, and ethnicity (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Brown, 1995; Simpson & Yinger, 1985).

**Cultural-based approaches.** Cultural domains and social situations are the main points of attention when studying prejudice using cultural-based approach (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012). Based on this approach, prejudice can be formed, reduced, or encouraged, depending on cultural norms and social settings. When prejudice is observed as a personality malfunction in the personality-centered approach, it is a normal manifestation of a prejudiced environment in the cultural-based approach. When prejudice seems to be the norm for a culture, being prejudiced is an indication of one’s well-adjustment to the cultural norms and environment, thus, it is not viewed as taboo (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Healey, 2006). In such environment, the culture not only directly or indirectly promotes prejudice (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Healey, 2006), but it also directs the society’s people to which groups should be favored or not (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Schaeffer, 2006). Culture, racial inequality, and the development of prejudice works as a cycle where one group is seen as more powerful and superior because of their access to resources for variety of reasons such as race and color of skin, and both the dominant group and minority group continue to stay in their social class because their access to the resources remains unchanged (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Myrdal, 1962). For instance, when a minority group does not have the skill set or the financial resources to go to college to get higher paying jobs, it stays in the same socioeconomic class because the members of that
group can’t obtain needed skills because of their socioeconomic disadvantages (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012).

**Power-conflict approaches.** Theories that take a power-conflict approach tend to have a better explanation for why prejudice even comes into play when compared with personality-centered and cultural-based approaches, which tend to focus on “how prejudice passes from generation to generation, how it persists, and why it varies from person to person” (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012, p. 24). As also explained in the conflict theory earlier, the power-conflict approach describes prejudice as a means of survival and success in competition over limited resources. Prejudice is moralized and rationalized by people who use racial and ethnic exploitations for their own benefits. Prejudice and social class are created by the society’s elites to control resources and limit competition by keeping minorities as subordinates.

**Prejudice and Hate Crime Against Muslims in America**

An international survey in 2016 found that most countries tend to overestimate their Muslim population and exaggerate their population increase rate (Ipsos MORI, 2016). The Perils of Perception Survey by Ipsos MORI (2016) included 40 countries in its study and showed how people have wrong ideas and perceptions about some of the important issues in their countries. One of the elements in this survey asked participants to estimate the Muslim population in their countries, and almost all countries overestimated the numbers. France, South Africa, and the Philippines respectively guessed the highest misperception rates in this question. The French were the farthest from reality by thinking 31% of the French population is Muslim, although it is only 7.5%. Meanwhile, Americans also overestimated the American Muslim population by
17%, which means there must be 54 million Muslims in the U.S. compared to the 3 million estimated by Pew Research Center in 2015 (Mathias, 2016a). Some scholars and human activists view this tendency to overestimate the Muslim population in one’s country as a sign of Islamophobia and growing anti-Muslim sentiment (Mathias, 2016a; Petulla, 2016).

Without a doubt, the Arab and Muslim community have played a notable part in American society, history, and its cultural foundations and concepts such as freedom of speech, religion, and economic activity. Yet, even though 4 million to 12 million Muslims currently live in America, there has been a substantial and increasing amount of anti-Islamic sentiment and hate offenses toward Muslims (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Sullivan et al., 2015). The substantial number of studies, polls, and surveys prove the existence of such growing sentiments (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012). Other than endangering civil rights, the increase in inflammatory unfavorable sentiment toward Muslims in America has led to uncontrollable social, professional, and institutional suffering for this community (Muqtedar Khan, 2004). Within a span of few months, crimes against Arabs and Muslims nearly tripled after the incidents of Paris and San Bernardino (Campbell, 2015; Gopalakrishnan, 2015).

Many Muslims in America feel the intensity of the anti-Islamic environment (Sullivan et al., 2015). President Obama specifically advised non-Muslim Americans to stay away from bigotry and stereotyping Muslims, and he highlighted that “prejudice and discrimination helps ISIL [ISIS], and it undermines our national security” (as cited in Atkinson, 2015, para. 3). Although Muslims worldwide reported the highest percentage of victimizations from acts of terror (more than 80%; U.S. Department of States, 2012),
many Americans and the media continue to associate American Muslims with terrorist groups (Cagle, Cox, Luom, & Zaphiris, 2011; Dixon & Williams, 2015). The latest reports suggested that anti-Islamic hate crime incidents have risen since 2013, according to the FBI Hate Crime Report when comparing the numbers of incidents in 2013 (135) to 2014 (154; FBI, 2014, 2015b). Furthermore, a study conducted by the Public Religion Research Institutes (Cox & Jones, 2015) reported, “Nearly half (47%) of the public believe the values of Islam are at odds with American values and way of life” (para. 15). Although this survey’s participants had dividing points of view in regard to “how responsible Muslims are for addressing extremism” (Cox & Jones, 2015, para. 14) based on their political views, the majority (67% of Republicans, 45% of Democrats, and 52% of independents) believed, “American Muslims have not done enough to address extremism in their communities” (para. 14). This type of view among non-Muslim Americans has indeed had its impact on Muslim American perceptions. S. R. Khan (2014), an associate professor of psychology at the University of San Francisco, in an article titled “Post 9/11: The Impact of Stigma for Muslim Americans,” uncovered some of the concerns Muslim Americans have had post-September 11 terrorism attack. For instance, Muslim perceptions of stigma are that, “In public places, people who look Muslim make people nervous or suspicious” (p. 582) and that, “Most Muslims in America are hostile and hate the United States” (p. 582). Based on this study, Muslims felt that they are viewed by their non-Muslim Americans as disloyal, hostile, hateful, and suspicious.

Even though groups of politicians, activists, and community leaders have worked hard to reduce and prevent stereotyping and hate toward Muslim Americans (Atkinson,
2015; Wang, 2015), this (Muslim) community “appear[s] to be facing a perfect storm of hate” (Brumfield, 2015, para. 1). Throwing a pig’s head at a mosque, making threatening phone calls to mosques, assaulting Muslim storeowners, beating up a Muslim man, harassing females with Islamic head coverings, and refusing Middle Eastern Muslim passengers onboard or on their original flight itinerary are only some examples of the most recent hateful incidents experienced by American Muslims since the terrorist attack in France and shooting in San Bernardino, California (Araiza, 2015; Brumfield, 2015; Curwen & Shyong, 2015; Neiwert, 2015). The evidence further suggests that young Arab males and females with Islamic head coverings may be specifically vulnerable to hateful actions and discrimination because of their appearance (Aziz, 2012; Cainkar, 2002, 2009; Ernst, 2013; Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017; Perry, 2013). As a result of the ensuing political landscape, a growing anti-Muslim bias could have serious repercussions for all young Arab males and females in their work, school, family, or social arenas.

It is imperative to note that there are many other incidents of hate that go unreported and underreported each year for a variety of reasons, including improper data collection, failure to identify hate crimes, not reporting to authorities (e.g., fear of law enforcement, immigration status), and failure to submit recorded hate crimes to the Department of Justice (Singh & Singh, 2012). For instance, in 2008, “there were 112 additional hate crime incidents” (p. 2) in New York that were not reported to the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (p. 2). It is not the first time that American Muslims have been the target of hate crimes and hate speech (HRW, 2002). In the last 30 years, Arabs and Muslims in America have been targets of hate crime and backlash as a result of “conflict in the Middle East and acts of terrorism associated with
Arabs or Muslims” (HRW, 2002, p. 3). Nevertheless, Arabs and Muslims lives in America have drastically changed since the attacks of September 11, 2001. Many political and legal actions were implemented after the 2001 incident, which were mostly against Arabs and American Muslims.

The Effects of September 11 on Arabs and Muslims in America

One of the most important effects of September 11 that impacted Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians in America is the USA Patriot Act (Senzai, 2004). The USA Patriot Act was signed by President George W. Bush on October 26, 2001, in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The USA Patriot Act stands for the “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001” (Senzai, 2004, p. 9). This act was passed unanimously by the Senate and signed very quickly when the country was in the state of shock and panic, and little attention was paid to its extent and unintended consequences (Cole & Dempsey, 2006; Senzai, 2004).

This act quickly changed many methods of investigation, penalties and procedures, and the mind-set of the security services and law enforcement (Senzai, 2004). The USA Patriot Act disregarded due process, privacy, and equal protection and in many ways undermined American constitutional foundations and civil rights. Furthermore, “ambiguities in interpreting the law have led to misapplication of the law by government officials as well as abuses by enforcement officers” (p. 4) such as “airport profiling, verbal harassment, and physical assaults” (p. 4).

Since the September 11 attacks, many American Muslims have been wrongfully included on the terrorist watchlist (Devereaux, 2016). A no-fly list that was limited to
only 16 individuals “due to suspected terrorism links” (Devereaux, 2016, para. 4) prior to the attacks was increased to 47,000 people by 2013, expanding not only the no-fly list, but also adding other categories such as selected for enhanced airport screening and affecting those listed to various degrees. However, what is concerning to many human rights activities such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) beside unjustly targeting a minority group is that placing people on lists that identify the individual as a threat to the national security of a country has extreme and damaging consequences for those listed that could greatly affect his or her personal and professional life. Despite the importance and sensitivity of this, reports have revealed “U.S. officials require neither ‘concrete facts’ nor ‘irrefutable evidence’ to secretly label an individual a known or suspected terrorist” (para. 7) and placing them on the terrorist watchlist (Scahill & Devereaux, 2014). “Nearly half the 680,000 people listed on the TSDB [Terrorist Screening Database] were described as having ‘no recognized terrorist group affiliation’” (Devereaux, 2016, para. 7). The report also suggested the number of individuals listed on the Terrorist Screening Database was raised exponentially (10 times) during President Obama’s presidency (Scahill & Devereaux, 2014). The report also showed, “The second-highest concentration of people designated as ‘known or suspected terrorists’ by the government is in Dearborn, Mich.—a city of 96,000 that has the largest percentage of Arab-American residents in the country” (Scahill & Devereaux, 2014, para. 6). Important to note is that this is a 2014 report, so the numbers and scope of the issue have most likely grown since then considering the current political climate and the rise of biased incidents involving law enforcement and federal government officials.
The USA Patriot Act also had a direct and indirect effect on hate crime against Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians (Senzai, 2004). HRW (2002) explained:

Aspects of the U.S. government’s anti-terrorism campaign the detention of twelve hundred mostly Middle Eastern and South Asians because of possible links to terrorism, the effort to question over five thousand young Middle Eastern men, and the decision to fingerprint visitors from certain Middle Eastern and Muslim countries reinforced a public perception that Arab and Muslim communities as a whole were suspect and linked to the “enemy” in the U.S. war against terrorism.

(p. 3)

There was a great change in the treatment that Muslims and Arab Americans received after the September 11 attacks (S. R. Khan, 2014; Senzai, 2004; Steele, Parker, & Lickel, 2015). There was a substantial increase (17%) in violence against Muslims and Arabs in America in 2001, when compared with hate crime incidents in 2001 (481) to 2000 (28; FBI, 2001, 2002). Even though “the post-September 11 violence against Arabs and Muslims was not unprecedented” (HRW, 2002, p. 3), they “were unique in their severity and extend” (p. 3). There were 15 times more hate incidents against Arabs and Muslims reported by the officials for the Los Angeles County and Chicago in 2001 than in 2000 (HRW, 2002). Anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hate incidents have ranged from employment discrimination and racial or religious profiling at airports to verbal and physical assaults, vandalism, death threats, and even arson and murder (Senzai, 2004).

The effects of the anti-Arab and anti-Muslim backlash on these communities’ college and higher education students are neglected in the literature and scholarly studies (Daraiseh, 2012). In addition, the image of Arabs and Muslims and their points of view
are either disregarded or presented incorrectly in academia, usually leaving a negative impression. These negativities are also presented when discussing Islam in textbooks, often making a “correlation to violence, intolerance, and Islam, leaving out the similarities and basic grounds related to that of the Christian and Jewish faiths” (p. 13). Providing inaccurate and negative information in academia causes confusion and lead non-Arab and non-Muslims students to stereotyping. At the same time, it leaves Arab and Muslim students with feelings of shame, low self-esteem, and the burden of educating others about their roots and backgrounds, which may, in turn, affect their learning and academic achievement.

Work and workplace discrimination against Arabs and Muslims substantially increased post-September 11 attacks (Daraiseh, 2012; Disha, Cavendish, & King, 2011; A. Moore, 2010; Senzai, 2004). Young Arab males (16 to 25 years old) have been specifically impacted (Rabby & Rodgers, 2009). A Davila and Mora (2005) study found that Arab, Afghan, Iranian, and Pakistani men, who are all mostly perceived to be associated with Islam or ethnicities of the September 11 terrorists, experienced a significant decline in earnings between 2000 and 2002. Employment ratios and work hours for American males of the described backgrounds, specifically young Arab males, decreased (Davila & Mora, 2005; Rabby & Rodgers, 2009). However, Rabby and Rodgers (2009) argued that this decline was rather a short-lived effect and started to disappear by 2004. Increased hostility in the workplace as well as the anti-terrorism programs such as the USA Patriot Act, which created a difficult environment for Arab males to work, are seen as some of the contributing factors in this decline (Daraiseh, 2012; Rabby & Rodgers, 2009). However, discrimination against Muslim workers has
continued in the workplace, and there were many reports of such discrimination (A. Moore, 2010). In 2010, workers complained about “name calling by co-workers, such as ‘terrorist’ or ‘Osama,’ and complain that employers bar them from wearing the headscarf or participating in prayer times” (A. Moore, 2010, p. 93). Such complaints increased up to 60% in 2010 from 2005. Although Muslims made up “only percent of the U.S. population, they compose[d] nearly one-quarter of religious discrimination claims filed by the EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] in 2010” (A. Moore, 2010, p. 93).

Scholars identified Islamophobia as one of the main triggers for bias and hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims in America (Arani, 2015; Lambert & Githens-Mazer, 2010; A. Moore, 2010; Sayyid, 2014). Islamophobia is defined as, “unfounded hostility toward Muslims, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims” (University of California, Berkeley, n.d., para. 1). This term was “first introduced as a concept in a 1991 Runnymede Trust Report” (para. 1) based on “the more common ‘xenophobia’ framework” (para. 1) but, specifically, for the Muslims and their experiences in Europe, particularly in the UK. Islamophobics normally act based on their commonly held beliefs that “Islam is monolithic and cannot adapt to new realities” (para. 3), and that it “does not share common values with other major faiths” (para. 3). They view Islam as being “archaic, barbaric, and irrational” (para. 3), and “as [a] religion [that] is inferior to the West” (para. 3). They also believe “Islam is a violent political ideology” (para. 3) and is a religion of violence that supports terrorism. Islamophobia consists of a “series of ‘moral panics’ that seem to regularly sweep over mainly Western plutocracies” (Sayyid, 2014, p. 11) and threatens Western values “such as the freedom of expression, gender
equality, or tolerance” (p. 11). Different polls by Pew Research Center found out a large number of Americans believe “Islam is likelier than other religions to encourage violence among its believers” (Lipka, 2017, para. 16); though that percentage has fluctuated throughout the years: 25% in 2002, 36% in 2005, 45% in 2007, 38% in 2009, and 41% in 2016. There are many misconceptions about Islam among Americans, and this has been echoed throughout many polls (A. Moore, 2010).

Throughout the years, media, political views, and politically motivated incidents have affected Americans’ views of Islam and treatment of Muslims (Copsey et al., 2013; Daraiseh, 2012; A. Moore, 2010). “Demographics, economic conditions, and the distribution of political power” (Disha et al., 2011, p. 23) are often the driving forces of intergroup conflict, prejudice, and hate offenses. In addition, according to integrated threat theory, “In-group identity is an antecedent to threat, and Riek, Mania, and Gaertner (2006) found correlations between identification and perceived threat, including realistic and symbolic threats” (Steele et al., 2015, p. 194). Therefore, Steele et al. (2015) believed investigating and “examining anti-Muslim bias following an external threat of terrorism” (p. 194) is particularly important. However, through an empirical analysis of personality-centered theories, culture-based theories, and power-conflict theories in examining prejudice and its causes and manifestations, Alibeli and Yaghi (2012) concluded, no single theory is comprehensive enough to be able to fully explain all the merits of prejudice as it is a “very complicated and multifaceted issue” (p. 28).

Personality-centered theory approaches prejudice from the personality dynamics and early childhood–experience point of view, whereas cultural-based theory defines it from the social and cultural perspective. Power-control theory, on the other hand, suggests
prejudice “begins as a result of competition over scarce resources between and among groups in society” (p. 24).

“Muslim minorities in the United States are seen through the sphere of ‘otherness,’” (A. Moore, 2010, p. 91) so “political fears about Muslims as a security or terrorist threat” (Copsey et al., 2013, p. 6) as well as racism become important factors in committing hate crimes against Muslims and Arabs. There is a very fine line between race hate crime and religious hate crime, and its blurry boundaries make “conceptual and reporting clarity difficult” (p. 6). However, a variety of methods can be used that could “help to alleviate some of the hatred and misunderstanding of Islam” (A. Moore, 2010, p. 94), with education being the main focus.

**Discrimination Against Muslims and Trump’s Presidency**

Discriminating against and targeting another group of people violates human rights, breaks local and federal laws, and is entirely against the American constitution and spirit. However, America has an extensive history of human rights violations, bigotry, and violence against various groups of newcomers and people of color (Parrillo, 1999). As time passed, many of those groups have settled down and fought for their rights. However, this has not been the case for the American Muslim population throughout the years even though their arrival in the U.S. began in the 15th century, before many other groups (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012). It is believed that bigotry, demonization, and dehumanization of Muslims in the West, and specifically in America, is institutionalized (Bradford, 1999; E. W. Said, 1977), and that is reflected in their media and film industries (Bradford, 1999; Hussain, 2010; Kanji, 2018; Perry, 2015; E. W. Said, 1977; Shaheen, 2003). However, the level of hostility and bigotry against minorities and
Muslims has been increasingly on the rise since the 2016 American presidential campaign and the presidency of Donald J. Trump (Bauman, 2018; CAIR, 2017a, 2018; CAIR Florida, 2017; Costello, 2016; Everding, 2018). President Trump ran his campaign based on an anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric, so many attribute the rise of hate crimes and biased incidents to him (Bauman, 2018; CAIR, 2017a, 2018a; Everding, 2018; Costello, 2016).

In policy, many illegal immigrants were deported and many more arrested (Torbati, 2017). Though the data released by the Department of Homeland Security for 2017 showed a 6% drop in deportation compared with the period during Obama’s presidency, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement “arrested far more suspected illegal immigrants in the months after President Donald Trump took office than in the same period” (Torbati, 2017, para. 3) the previous year. In addition, the scope of deportation has changed since the Obama era when deportation was used mainly for undocumented persons convicted of serious crimes and not a broad spectrum as during the Trump administration. In 2017, about 111,000 illegal immigrants were arrested along with those who were targeted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement simply by being present at the raided premises (Torbati, 2017).

In addition, the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) enforced a Trump administration policy that separated illegal immigrants and asylum seekers crossing the border from their children, which led to an ongoing chaotic situation, with approximately 2,000 children separated from their parents, including infants and toddlers (Domonoske & Gonzales, 2018). The imprisonment, inhumane treatment, and separation of children from their parents was halted because of mounting pressure from human rights activists,
nationwide protests, and international condemnations. However, reunification of children with their parents took many weeks and faced many obstacles as a result of CBP’s improper processing of immigrants (Dickerson, Jordan, & Nixon, 2018).

Besides confronting illegal immigrants, the Trump administration has worked to change immigration and naturalizations laws, making it harder for legal immigrants to become naturalized citizens and easier to be deported if they are involved in any type of illegal activity (Gessen, 2018). Furthermore, Trump signed an executive order in January 27, 2017, only a few weeks into his presidency, that banned foreign nationals of seven Muslim majority countries of Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, and Sudan from entering the country for 90 days, Syrian refugees indefinitely, and all other refugees for 120 days (ACLU, n.d.). The ban, which was rushed into effect on January 28, 2017, affected thousands of people entering the country, including those who were given valid visas, permanent resident status, and naturalized citizens largely as a result of unclarity and confusion. Revisions to the order removed Iraq from the list for security reasons and excluded permanent residents (Thrush, 2017). The order also originally offered “a preferential status to persecuted religious minorities, a provision widely interpreted as favoring other religious groups over Muslims” (Thrush, 2017, para. 4).

However, the ban created an uproar around the country with thousands of people protesting at airports and different rallies calling for an end to the ban (Thrush, 2017). A federal judge in New York ordered a nationwide block on the ban on January 29 (ACLU Washington, n.d.). Other judges also disputed the order and placed a temporary block on the ban on different grounds (de Vogue, 2018; Laughland, 2018). Each time, the administration made changes to the order in an effort to address some of the issues the
judges raised. Meanwhile, North Koreans and officials from Venezuela were added to the ban. However, the main issue that it is a Muslim ban as President Trump himself called it, and that it targeted groups of people based on their race and religion remained a concern. The case was ultimately sent to the Supreme Court for a final decision and with a five to four majority (Republicans to Democrats), the Supreme Court ruled that it is within the President’s power to take such measures for the sake of national security (Liptak & Shear, 2018). However, unlike the lower courts, which took the anti-Islamic rhetoric around the ban into consideration, the Supreme Court did not.

In addition to implementing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim policies, President Trump also repeatedly attacked minority groups using derogatory language. While running for presidency and then as president, Trump continuously called Mexicans criminals and rapists (Mark, 2018) and Muslims terrorists (Zurcher, 2017). He was also involved in several highly controversial incidents in which he ridiculed Black people’s intelligence; Democratic Representative Maxine Waters and LeBron James, a well-known NBA basketball player, as well as Cable News Network anchor Don Lemon are some of these examples (Obeidallah, 2018). In January 2018, President Trump also used a belittling term referring to Haiti and African nations in frustration over immigration policies, saying that instead of people from these countries, “we need more people from Norway” (Morin, 2018, para. 4).

As for his views on Islam and Muslims, in March 2016, then candidate Trump said in an interview “I think Islam hates us” (Zurcher, 2017, para. 12), which conflicted with what he said in September 2015, saying, “I love the Muslims” (para. 14) and “I think they’re great people” (para. 14). However, Trump’s tone about Muslims has been
mostly negative since running for presidency, calling for a Muslim ban, and creating a “watch list’ for those already in the U.S.” (para. 8). Khaled Baydoun, a professor at the University of Detroit, stated, “From start to finish, the 2016 presidential election vividly revealed that Islamophobia is alive, and potent and politically resonant as ever” (as cited in Zurcher, 2017, para. 10). Baydoun believed “Scapegoating Islam and vilifying Muslims was far more than merely campaign messaging; for Donald Trump it was a winning strategy” (as cited in Zurcher, 2017, para. 10). Trump’s advisors also echoed similar anti-Islamic rhetoric, with some even denying Islam as a religion. Zurcher (2017) cites some of such examples. For instance, one of President Trump’s early advisors for National Security, Michael Flynn, once referred to Islam as a “‘political ideology’ that ‘hides behind this notion of it being a religion’” (para. 18). Comparing Islam to “a malignant cancer” (para. 19), he justified any fear of Muslims as “rational” (para. 19). However, Flynn was not alone, and many other key individuals within the Trump administration such as Steve Bannon as senior advisor, Jeff Sessions as attorney general, and Sebastian Gorka as the President’s deputy assistant shared very similar ideologies and disseminated them to the nation and their supporters.

As previously mentioned, American’s political policy has been always against Muslims regardless of the party or the president in charge. The examples of that are the invasions of Islamic countries of Afghanistan and Iraq by President George H. W. Bush and bombardment of “Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan” (Zurcher, 2017, para. 10) by President Obama, despite his administration’s positive statements about the majority of the Muslims and Islam as a religion. However, what makes President Trump and his administration different from his predecessors is that they
have directly attacked Islam as a religion, and named its followers terrorists and enemies of the U.S. Zimmerman (2013) believed, “Politicization of Islam globally, [particularly] after the terrorist attacks, has reinforced the existing perception that Islam is not compatible with Western democracies’ values and that being a Muslim is often synonymous to being an Islamic fundamentalist” (p. 3), and yet, President Trump and his administration have used “bellicose rhetoric … directed at Muslims” (Zurcher, 2017, para. 28). Insisting on a Muslim ban despite the backlash from the general public, pushing for a Muslim registry, and using derogatory language in an accusative tone are examples of such differences (Zurcher, 2017), which are indications of Islamophobia and bigotry at its core and its insertion into American society, in his opponents’ view (Bauman, 2018; CAIR, 2018a; Gessen, 2018; National Association for Advancement of Colored People, 2018; Pitter, 2017; Zurcher, 2017).

There has been a substantial increase nationwide in biased and hate crime incidents not only in the public sphere but also at schools and campuses since the 2016 presidential campaign (Anti-Defamation League’s Center on Extremism, n.d.; Bauman, 2018; Pitter, 2017; Costello, 2016). A scientific measurement of President Trump’s effect on the spike of biased and hate crime incidents would be extremely difficult (Bauman, 2018) mainly because prejudice and hate crimes are multidimensional phenomena (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Parrillo, 1999; Schaeffer, 2006; Schutz,1944; Wolff, 1950). Nevertheless, “Critics have accused President Trump, both during his campaign and presidency, of arousing and mainstreeming racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia” (Bauman, 2018, para. 13). However, critics’ claims are not entirely baseless; for instance, “more than one-third of post-election hate crimes” (Everding, 2018, para.13)
and “many campus incidents” (Bauman, 2018, para. 2) have referenced President Trump or his campaign slogans. Furthermore, a recent study by Müller and Schwarz (2018) found a strong correlation between Trump’s anti-Muslim tweets and the increase in Islamophobic incidents against Muslims in counties with high Twitter usage.

David Cunningham, a professor of sociology in Arts and Sciences and the author of Klansville, U.S.A.: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era’s Largest KKK, attempted to explain the surge of hate crime incidents. In an interview with Everding (2018) where he spoke about the findings of his study, Cunningham said, “Trump’s election signaled the closing of the perceived threats that drove hate groups to form during the Obama administration and provided a perceived window of opportunity for existing groups and their supporters to act with relative impunity” (para. 2). Based on his research, Cunningham (2018) believed trends in hate crimes and their sources tend to differ and change based on key elements, including perceived threats and opportunities. He explained, “Hate groups tend to grow in response to threats emerging from environments where social groups perceive their standing to be uncertain or at risk” (Everding, 2018, para. 5), whereas hate incidents tend to rise when perpetrators find opportunities to commit hatful acts, believing they are less likely to be held accountable or punished accordingly whether they are part of a hate group or acting alone (Cunningham, 2018).

Based on a report by Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC; Potok, 2017), hate group organizations have nearly doubled in the past two decades, from 457 active hate groups in 1999 to 917 in 2017. It is argued this steady rise was driven by two major perceived threats to “the traditional white order” (Cunningham, 2018, p. 511): fear of being outnumbered by other races in the near decades (2043) and having a Black
president. In Cunningham’s view, a strong fear of these perceived threats led to more racial tension and expansion of extremist groups in America during the Obama presidency. However, there was an interruption to this growth in 2016, despite the rise of hate crime incidents, which Cunningham believed is a result of Trump’s presidency and the belief that his election is an opportunity to regain White power. In addition, Trump’s nationalist campaign and his “consistent unwillingness to condemn” (Cunningham, 2018, p. 512) White nationalist organizations and their hateful and violent actions, were interpreted as a green light to launch “a fresh wave of anti-immigrant, anti-black and anti-Muslim hate crimes” (Everding, 2018, para. 12) believing there would be little or no consequences. Cunningham (2018) explained while hiding behind their groups and living in the shadows before, White supremists and extremists are emboldened to act in the open now due to “the current political climate” (p. 511).

Cunningham’s assessment of the current political climate and conclusions on the rise of hate crimes in America are aligned with many surveys (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2018; Costello, 2016) and resonated with many human rights activities such as CAIR. Cunningham (2018) highlighted what is important about his study is that understanding and differentiating the surge of hate groups and hate crime incidents could benefit politicians and policymakers in addressing the problems’ roots and identifying causes of fears and opportunities in order to prevent and reduce such acts. It is also critical to understand that just as prejudice research is “largely dependent on the political and social atmospheres” (Haji-Ghasemi, 2014, p. 25), prejudice is directly associated with social and political domains. Thus, “demonization of Muslims on the part of politicians” (Perry, 2015, p. 8) could eventually find “its way into
policies and practices that further stigmatize the group” (p. 8) in addition to other negative effects. To many, this is exactly what President Trump and his administration represent.

**The Role of Western Media in Prejudice Against Muslims**

Western media played a key role in creating a stereotypical narrative of the Muslims and Middle Easterners to the West’s perspective of them as barbaric, violent, misogynistic, and terrorists (Hussain, 2010; Shaheen, 2003). Muslims and Arabs are too often portrayed as terrorists in the movies. In fact, Shaheen (2003), a prominent professor at Southern Illinois University and “the world’s foremost authority on media images of Arabs and Muslims” (p. 171) wrote in his book titled *Reel Bad Arabs*, “driven by the need to expose an injustice: cinema’s systematic, pervasive, and unapologetic degradation and dehumanization of a people” (p. 172). Viewing more than 900 Hollywood movies, he exhibited how unjustly and distorted Muslims and Arabs are shown (Shaheen, 2003). Hussain (2010) suggested Arabs have become a synonym for “bad guys” (p. 59) since the Soviet Union collapsed, and his analysis of North American television shows indicated Muslims are portrayed as dangerous immigrants and Islam as violent and alien to other faiths, never focusing on the similarities.

The Arab culture and traditions are ridiculed and demonized in Western movies and media (Hussain, 2010; Shaheen, 2003). Hollywood has repeatedly shown the image of the Arab it wants to portray: “brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits, and abusers of women” (Shaheen, 2003, p. 172). Though the media might have amplified this image post-September 11, Hollywood has always had the same distorted and biased narrative. Shaheen (2003) quoted three movies, one from 1937, *The
Sheik Steps out; another from 1968, Commando; and the last from 1986, Hostage, in which they all have a remark in an effect that all Arabs look the same to them. As quoted in Shaheen (2003), the U.S. Ambassador in the movie Hostage stated, “I can’t tell one [Arab] from another. Wrapped in those bed sheets they all look the same to me” (p. 172). Hollywood has never shown Arabs in the light of normal people having normal families; they are always crazy people who scare others and no one wants to be around them (Shaheen, 2003).

Shaheen (2003), a prominent scholar researching the stereotypes and negative images of Arabs and Muslims in the media industry, showed Arab women are also “humiliated, demonized, and eroticized” (p. 183) in Hollywood movies. In his analysis, Shaheen found more than 50 movies in which Arab women are either sexualized as belly dancers and enslaved sex workers, or as ugly and undesirable, as generalized black covered women, as oppressed and followers of their bearded men, as poor and uncivilized, and as devils, vampires, and demons. Hollywood’s portrayal of Muslim and Arab women is unworthy, illiterate, treacherous, hostile, unpleasant, extremists, and killers (Shaheen, 2003). Cleopatra (1917), The Leopard Woman (1920), Saadia (1953), Beast of Morocco (1966), Nighthawks (1981), and The Sheltering Sky (1990), are some of the movies Shaheen (2003) used in his analysis. Furthermore, Wilkins (1995) analyzed published images of the Middle Eastern women in the New York Times (July 1991 to June 1993). Subsequently, she found out only 13% of the Middle Eastern images of persons were women, and they were shown as passive, distant, and impersonal (Wilkins, 1995). She also believed that Middle Eastern women in the Western media and literature
are mostly referred to as “subservient” (Wilkins, 1995, p. 51) and victims of ethnic or religious oppression.

Whether it is in movies or in television, males or females, Arab and Muslim images are generally negative and stereotyped (Hussain, 2010). However, this biased narrative and purposefully and negatively selected images of Arabs and Muslims is not exclusive to Hollywood. Western news and social media also treat anything related to Islam, Muslims, and Middle Easterners with great prejudice and unfairness, thus playing a very strong and impactful role in drawing a negative image in the mind of non-Muslims. S. Ahmed and Matthes (2016) conducted a meta-analysis study of more than 300 published studies (from 2000 to 2015) to examine the media’s role in construction of a Muslim and Islamic identity. As part of their findings, S. Ahmed and Matthes learned Muslim countries and Muslim media are largely neglected in the field of research, and when studied, they are predominantly in regard to “‘migration’, ‘terrorism’, and ‘war’” (p. 219). Furthermore, Muslims are mostly and generally presented in a negative light and Islam as a violent religion (S. Ahmed & Matthes, 2016). Kamalipour (2000) identified 50 movies that contained Arabs and Arabic speakers as committing terrorism against Americans; interestingly, all these movies were released between 1974 and 1998 and well before the September 11 attacks. Such prejudicial portrayals of the media are not only unfair but also false and misleading.

Ridouani (2011), an associate professor at Moulay Islamic University in Morocco, explained in one of his articles, “The Representation of Arabs and Muslims in Western Media,” how Arabs and Muslims have been chosen as scapegoats by the West’s politicians and mass media. Just as Hussain (2010) suggested, Ridouani (2011) believed
that the definition of terrorism in the West tends only to work around the frame of Arabs and Muslims to the extent that the two concepts have become interchangeable, and the distorted Orientalist perception of Arabs and Muslims has been present continuously. Although the word terrorism is oftentimes used loosely in association with Middle Easterners and Muslims, Western politicians and media are not only very cautious but also sometimes too reserved to use the word when Whites or non-Muslims are involved (Ridouani, 2011). For instance, Ridouani (2011) observed that from the moment the 1995 bombing in Oklahoma City, and the media first reported the incident when there was still no information about the culprit(s) and the intention, the media identified the incident as terrorism and aggressively attacked Arabs and Muslims. Some Arabs were arrested and questioned as terrorist suspects, and their names were broadcasted in national news (Ridouani, 2011). However, once a White American was identified as the criminal, the tone of reporting and wording suddenly changed; the word terrorism was changed to “‘attack,’ ‘incursion’, [and] ‘offensive’” (Ridouani, 2011, p. 11), even though it had a death toll of 169 and more than 500 injuries of the innocent people. This is when Arabs and Muslim Americans had become the main focus of the investigation, were repeatedly attacked by the mainstream media as well as some politicians and officials, and their loyalty and integrity were undermined (Ridouani, 2011).

Nevertheless, this was not an isolated case, and in fact, a rush of immediate accusations targeting Arabs and Muslims has become the norm. Kamalipour (2000) pointed out this issue by adding other incidents such as the crash of a TWA Boeing 747 in 1996 and the bombing at the Olympic Games in Atlanta where Middle Easterners and Muslims, who had no connections to the incidents, were met by similar quick and phony
accusations and reactions by the media and American officials. By the time the offenders were identified, the image of Arabs and Muslims was already damaged in the minds of Americans and non-Muslims (Kamalipour, 2000). Such rushed and baseless responses, especially when the stakes are high, damage the image of Muslims and Middle Easterners, and yet nothing was done to clear that image and clarify or undo their biased reporting (Kamalipour, 2000).

Two decades later, and the American media’s prejudicial way of reporting and treating Middle Easterners and Muslims has not changed. After the San Bernardino, CA shootings in 2015, many criticized the media for the actions taken right after and the way the incident was reported, as they blamed Islam for the incident. Some addressed the shooters as “Muslim Killers” (Wang, 2015, para. 8) and immediately these words “began trending on Twitter” (para. 8). The New York Post also used the headline “Muslim Killers” (para. 8) on its front page. In addition, much criticism was generated as a result of the media storming the shooters’ house where they went through many personal belongings of the household, including identification cards, bank account statements, family photos and albums, and even the baby crib as well as pictures of individuals who had no ties to the incident (Carlton & Hagey, 2015; Spargo, 2015). Nevertheless, “The religious identity of violent perpetrators is only highlighted when they’re Muslims” (Elmasry, 2015, para. 1) while it is also ignored when they are the victims.

However, scapegoating Arabs and Muslims goes beyond being the sources of violence and terrorism to being also the source of the West’s economic downfalls and infliction by being equivalent to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Ridouani, 2011). In the American media, Arabs are not only shown as barbaric, violent,
patriarchal, and unmerciful, but also as grossly and undeservedly oil-rich people whose greediness is the reason for high oil prices and economic hardships around the world (Ridouani, 2011; Shaheen, 2001). This mentality is echoed in many American movies and the media’s portrayals such as in *Aladdin*, which portrays a greedy Arab salesman with hands full of gold coins or in *The Washington Post* editorial that calls Arabs greedy and claims oil prices are controlled and manipulated by them (Ghareeb, 1983; Ridouani, 2011). Even Western games capture such images; *Oil Sheik* is one where “players attempt to acquire real estate and...are encouraged to gain control over the oil producing nations” (Semaan, 2014, p. 20). This game furthers its insults by stating inappropriate and biased instructions, including the encouragement of the players to wrap “their heads or if the player is ugly to cover his/her head with the pillowcase” (Semaan, 2014, p. 20) to have a more “life like” (p. 20) experience.

The prejudice of American politicians and media against Middle Easterners, Arabs, and Muslims is influenced by political agendas, and this has been shown repeatedly throughout the years. The distorted and unfair media reports and political stance of America on the issue of the Palestine-Israel conflict is one prominent example (Ridouani, 2011; Semaan, 2014; Thussu, 1997). Many researchers have extensively studied, compared, and documented the American media prior to and after the start of the Palestine-Israel conflict (Semaan, 2014). They have all determined the American media’s reports regarding the conflict and the created images of Arabs and Muslims have greatly changed since the start of this conflict where Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims are dehumanized, and facts, figures, and images are manipulated and presented in favor of the Israelis (Artz & Pollock, 1997; McClaure, 1975; McDavid, 1983; Samo, 1975;
Semaan, 2014; Stockton, 1994; Suleiman, 1975; Terry, 1975). The Western and, specifically, American media have always showed Palestinians as the peace breakers and terrorists whereas Israel has been only the victim of such violent and unjust actions, ignoring the level of aggression and inhuman actions of Israelis against Palestinians (McDavid, 1983; Ridouani, 2011; Semaan, 2014).

Similarly, the wars and invasions that America has been involved in are portrayed as justified and a right to protect its country even when the evidence proves otherwise such as in the invasion of Iraq (Ridouani, 2011) and prior to that, the second Gulf War in 1991 and first Gulf War by not only providing arms support but also chemical weapons to the Iraqi government to fight Iran in 1980–1988 and demolish Iran’s Islamic revolution (Thussu, 1997). The U.S. military invaded Iraq in March 2003 in response to the September 11 attacks and based on fabricated and false claims that Iraq had nuclear weapons. Though the war with Iraqi government officially ended in 2011, the American military still had a strong and active presence there in 2018 ostensibly to fight terrorist groups such as the Islamic State. Almost 15 years later, and after hundreds of thousands of civilians’ deaths, the crisis of thousands of people being misplaced as refugees, and creation and expansion of the Islamic State, the U.S. narrative of the Iraq war has stayed the same.

As for Iran, the U.S. government had an exceptional relationship with the Shah (king) of Iran since he was leading the country and its resources generously in favor of the American government; during this time, Iran also received positive coverage from the media (Thussu, 1997). Once the Shah was replaced with Islamic leaders who were against America’s political agenda and who were not willing to please the American
government, Iran started to receive continuous negative coverage such that Iran is known as a threat and a terrorist country to many Americans and Westerners (Thussu, 1997). Similarly, Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq who led the country as a dictator from 1979 to 2003, was once considered an American ally and was heavily supported during the war with Iran (Thussu, 1997). However, as soon as he decided not to live up to the Washington’s wishes, American collation forces fought against him in 1991 in response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait (Thussu, 1997), and killed him in 2003. Nevertheless, the main reason for America to be so involved in the Middle East has been to ensure a “permanent military presence in the Gulf to control oil and U.S. agenda for the post-cold war world” (Thussu, 1997, p. 266); yet this is rarely mentioned in the Western media.

Scapegoating Arabs and Muslims as terrorists has effectively helped the U.S. justify its military actions overseas such as the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and its questionable internal policies such as the Patriot Act and the Muslim ban. Media have been important tools for American politicians to accomplish this goal. It is perpetuated through the power of media’s scapegoating policy (Ridouani, 2011), demonization of Islam (Thussu, 1997), a systematic stereotyping and dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims that helps to justify the maltreatment of these groups (Stockton, 1994), and America’s involvements in wars and hostilities toward Middle Eastern countries (Artz & Pollock, 1997; Ridouani, 2011). Thussu (1997) argued, “The mainstream western media projects Islam as inimical to civilised values” (p. 264) because “the demonising of Islam fits in well with the western geo-political interests in arms and oil” (p. 264). This strategy has allowed the American government to “publicly justify” (Ridouani, 2011, p. 12) its wars and policies against Arab and Muslim countries.
Western media and writers created false images of other groups such as the Japanese and Jews to create a narrative that met their propaganda and justified the mistreatment of those minority groups (Stockton, 1994). They are doing the same to Middle Easterners and Muslims this time (Stockton, 1994); Arabs and Muslims’ image in the Western media have become the image of a dumb, rapist, murderer, abuser of women, religious fanatics (Shaheen, 2003), greedy, unworthy oil-rich, punitive, violent, barbaric, terrorist, and patriarchal (Ridouani, 2011; Shaheen, 2001) as well as inhumane, lustful, and backward (Semaan, 2014). On the similar line, Middle Eastern and Muslim women are shown as submissive, oppressed, evil, killers, illiterate and uncivilized, poor, hostile, extremist, ugly and unpleasant, or sexualized and cheap (Shaheen, 2003) as well as distant and impersonal (Wilkins, 1995).

**Prejudice and Hate Crime Against Veiled Muslim Women in America**

**History of the Hijab**

Although veiling has become a symbol of Islam and Muslim women in the recent centuries, many other cultures around the world practiced some form of veiling prior to the birth of Islam (Das & Shirvani, 2013). Different ancient civilizations used veiling for variety of reasons. Historically, veils were used to distinguish social status and as a mean of fashion trends (Das & Shirvani, 2013). For instance, the royal Assyrian women wore veils to demonstrate their majestic status, and the Chadri, a type of face covering, was used by females of higher social economic status in Afghanistan (Das & Shirvani, 2013). Furthermore, ancient Greek and Roman women used different forms of veils to cover their hair or partial part of the head (Das & Shirvani, 2013).
However, veiling for religious purposes was originally introduced by Judaism (Das & Shirvani, 2013), and many Orthodox Jewish women still cover their heads and wear modest clothing (Croucher, 2008; Das & Shirvani, 2013). Married and sometimes single Orthodox Jewish women cover their hair with a hat, net, scarf (tichel), wig (sheitel), or even a combination of the mentioned articles (Freund, 2011). However, veiling and modesty are also rooted in Christianity; in addition to nuns, many Catholic and Orthodox Christians wear modest clothing and cover their head and/or shoulders during prayers and when at a church (Das & Shirvani, 2013; Freund, 2011; Kuhns, 2003; Ruth, 1980). In fact, statues and portrayals of the Virgin Mary have always portrayed her with a veil to cover her head and loose clothing to cover her body (Freund, 2011). Subsequently, Islam, being an Abrahamic religion, reintroduced and encouraged veil use and modest clothing for its followers in its closing phase of evolvement in 627 C.E. (Aslan, 2005; Das & Shirvani, 2013). The practice of veiling in Islam is known as hijab and has become a symbol of Islam (Das & Shirvani, 2013).

However, centuries later, many people and global rulers not only strongly dislike the hijab, but also feel very threatened by it, such that there has been many political implementations and laws to ban it (Das & Shirvani, 2013). Despite being majority Muslim countries, Turkey in 1925, under its first president Mustafa Ataturk, and Iran, under King Reza Shah, banned hijab throughout their countries (Das & Shirvani, 2013). Even Chadri, which was once a symbol of class and higher status among Afghan women, was banned by a new ruler who found them “a symbol of class disparity” (Das & Shirvani, 2013, p. 259). Chadri, by then, was mostly used by lower socioeconomic populations (Das & Shirvani, 2013).
Though those bans were subsequently overturned by the people, more Western countries in the 20th century have banned or considering a ban of some sort on hijab (Das & Shirvani, 2013; Jailani, 2016; Piatti-Crocker & Tasch, 2015; Zempi, 2014). With France being the leading country in marginalizing the Islamic covering, Belgium, Italy, and the Netherlands have also had their share of controversial policies (Das & Shirvani, 2013; Piatti-Crocker & Tasch, 2015). France was once again in the midst of a controversy where about 30 cities started to ban Muslim swimwear in summer of 2016 (Bittermann et al., 2016; Breeden & Blaise, 2016; L. Said-Moorhouse, 2016). The Islamic swimwear, called burkini, is a two-piece swimsuit that covers the full body except face, hands, and feet (Bittermann et al., 2016; L. Said-Moorhouse, 2016). Burkinis allow Muslim women to enjoy beaches and water activities while holding to their cultural and religious values. However, after a series of terrorist attacks in France, mayors of different cities started to ban burkinis and heavily enforced the new law by issuing fines (Bittermann et al., 2016; Breeden, & Blaise, 2016; L. Said-Moorhouse, 2016). Despite its popularity among majority of the public and politicians, including the French Prime Minister Manuel Valls and Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, the French highest administrative court suspended the law because of insufficient grounds (Bittermann et al., 2016; Breeden, & Blaise, 2016; L. Said-Moorhouse, 2016). Though burkinies were designed and advertised for Muslim women, they are basically a wet suit that has been used by both men and women around the globe for many years and for a variety of reasons such as protecting oneself from cold as well as sun exposure. Although anyone is free to wear a full body wet suit, Muslim women are shamed for and are deprived from wearing one solely because they want to wear it for
modesty and religious purposes. Therefore, banning burkinis and opposing this concept is only a political one and is based on anti-Islamic grounds (Taub, 2016). Banning burkinies and nighabs are just examples of a systematic Islamophobia and xenophobia views of Western governments and countries. Secular countries such as France particularly view hijab as a symbol of Islam (and theocracy) and therefore a threat to their principles (Das & Shirvani, 2013) even though they undermine their very own democratic values of freedom by dictating to Muslim women what they can and cannot wear (Jailani, 2016). Though the scrutiny of hijab started in the early 20th century when a growing population of Muslims emigrated to non-Muslim and Western countries (Das & Shirvani, 2013), it is the mounting hate and prejudice against Muslims and those perceived as Muslims that is exceptionally concerning (Considine, 2017; Lichtblau, 2016).

**What Is Hijab in Islam?**

The practice of veiling in Islam is called hijab (Arabic: حجاب) which in Arabic means curtain or cover. Although hijab is often referred to as veiling and is a piece of clothing such as a scarf that covers the head and not the face. The hijab is also a form of modest dressing and behaving (Jailani, 2016). Muslim women are encouraged to observe modesty in clothing, which means not to show their hair, skin, and body shape other than the face, hands, and feet in the presence of men to whom they could potentially be married to. Other than clothing, hijab is also equally if not more attributed to modest behavior such as avoiding inappropriate mingling with adult men whom they can potentially marry, speaking and walking with dignity and respect, and demonstrating high ethical values and Islamic teachings not only as Muslims but also as Muslim females (Hannan,
2011; Jailani, 2016; Zempi, 2014). Hijab is to prevent women from being sexualized in the public (Gabriel, 2011; Zempi, 2014). Thus, there might be Muslim women who do not practice veiling for different reasons but still practice hijab in their clothing and demeanor (Zempi, 2014). Furthermore, it is imperative to note that hijab is not exclusive to women, and that there are certain requirements for men as well. For instance, men also have to dress modestly and lower their gaze in the presence of females to whom they can potentially be a married to. However, for the purpose of this study, the word hijab is only used to the practice of Islamic veiling.

**Types of Women’s Islamic Clothing**

Muslim women around the world wear different Islamic attire based on their cultural background, interpretation of hijab, and level of religiosity. However, burqa, jilbab, hijab, and niqab are some of the most common types of Islamic coverings that Muslim women use. They are also the most common words and images associated with Islam and Muslim women in the Western countries. Burqa (also burka) or chadri covers the whole body and face and includes a see-through mesh screen around the eyes for vision. Burqas are worn in different subtle colors. Jilbab or abaya is a long loose-fitting outer garment that works similarly to a very long coat covering the whole body under the neck; the face is not covered. Hijab is often headscarves worn in the Islamic context to cover the hair, ears, and neck but not the face. Niqab, on the other hand, is a piece of clothing that is made to cover only the face except the eyes. Niqabs are usually worn in black and in addition to a headscarf or hijab (Zempi, 2014).
Muslim Women’s Perspective on the Hijab

Muslim women wear the hijab for variety of reasons that might differ from one individual to another (Croucher, 2008; Jailani, 2016; Litchmore, & Safdar, 2016; Zempi, 2014). Wearing the hijab is more than just a religious symbol. In Islam, men and women are required to practice modesty (Jailani, 2016), and to many Muslim women, hijab is a religious obligation (Bullock, 2011; Croucher, 2008; Das & Shirvani, 2013; Jailani, 2016; Litchmore, & Safdar, 2016; Zainal & Wong, 2017; Zempi, 2014). In addition to that, many Muslim women believe hijab is an inseparable part of their religious, cultural, and/or personal identity; it defines who they are (Jailani, 2016; Zempi, 2014). Many want to be proudly identified as a Muslim by wearing the hijab (Bullock, 2011; Jailani, 2016; Litchmore, & Safdar, 2016; Zempi, 2014).

Many Muslim women in Western countries also choose to wear the hijab to object to the Western lifestyle and their display of public indecency (Hasan, 2011; Jailani, 2016; Litchmore, & Safdar, 2016; Zempi, 2014). Through a qualitative interview and ethnography study of veiling British Muslim women with the niqab, Zempi (2014) found that there are two dimensions within the practice of veiling: religious and gender related. On one hand, hijab is to fulfill a religious submission and obligation as well as practice of modesty in society; on the other hand, it is considered to be “a form of protection, empowerment, and identity” (Zempi, 2014, p. 92). Besides the religious doctrine on hijab and wanting to please God, Muslim women wear the hijab to protect themselves from the male gaze and from being sexually objectified (Jailani, 2016; Litchmore, & Safdar, 2016; Ruby, 2006; Zebiri, 2008; Zempi, 2014).
Moreover, hijab is a form of empowerment and liberation to many Muslim women, particularly in the West (Hannan, 2011; Jailani, 2016; Ruby, 2006; Zempi, 2014). Muslim women who wear the hijab view women as valuable, which they refer to as “‘pearls’ or ‘jewels’” (Zempi, 2014, p. 96) that should be covered and protected. By wearing the hijab, women feel safe and protected from unwanted attention and sexual harassment; they feel empowered to participate in the social domain without being judged by their outer presentation (Al Wazni, 2015; Jailani, 2016; Ruby, 2006; Zempi, 2014). Some women even argue the concealments that come with the hijab protects them from the burdens of social expectations to look and dress in a certain way and wanting to fit the trends in society (Al Wazni, 2015; Bullock, 2011; Jailani, 2016; Zempi, 2014).

Although referring to Islam as a source of empowerment, participants in an exploratory, qualitative study conducted by Al Wazni (2015) also “stated that the hijab gave them a sense of respect, dignity, and control over who has access to their physical body” (p. 329), which ultimately “offered them security, self-confidence, and empowerment” (p. 329). Nonetheless, it does not matter what dress code one chooses, but the intent and decision to do so make it liberating for a person (Jailani, 2016). Jaliani (2016) also noted that neither nudity nor the hijab are inherently liberating.

Hijab is a symbol of Islam and being identified as a Muslim is essential to many Muslim women in the West (Al Wazni, 2015; Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; Ruby, 2006; Zempi, 2014). Wearing the hijab also creates a sense of belonging and inclusion to the larger community of Muslims globally, referred to as *ummah* (Arabic: أمَّة), which does not know race, color, politics, or geography (Afshar, Aitken, & Franks, 2005; Al Wazni, 2015; Gabriel, 2011; Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; Zempi, 2014). This feeling of belonging
is specifically important to those who live in non-Muslim countries (Gabriel, 2011; Zempi, 2014). Participants in several studies expressed this feeling of inclusion and belonging and explained how they would automatically feel connected to another Muslim woman identified by their hijab (Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; Zempi, 2014). As Zempi (2014) put it, “The wearing of the veil gives meaning and significance to the person’s individual and collective identity in Islam” (p. 107).

Furthermore, Muslim women around the world have utilized hijab as a social and political agent in different contexts (Litchmore & Safdar, 2016). For instance, while some American Muslim women started to wear the hijab to combat the negative stereotype when the negative portrayals of Muslims emerged post-9/11 (Badr, 2004; Litchmore & Safdar, 2016), some French Muslim women began to cover in response to the 2004 hijab ban in public schools (Croucher, 2008; Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; Zimmerman, 2013). In addition, several studies suggest some British women choose to practice Islam and/or veiling as a mean of rebelling against their parents and their interpretations of Islam; they want to empower themselves by choosing their own paths in life against their families’ will or their traditions (Afshar et al., 2005; Werbner, 2007; Zempi, 2014).

The West’s Perspective on the Hijab

As Jailani (2016) indicated in “The Struggle of the Veiled Woman,” “Though one cannot deny nor condone the unfortunate reality in which some women are actually forced to wear the veil [in some Islamic countries (Bullock, 2000)], the Western image of the tradition falls far from the mark” (p. 52). As mentioned in the previous section, Muslim women’s perspective on hijab is multidimensional and multipurposed (Afshar,
2008; Jamal, 2011; Litchmore & Safdar, 2016). However, the perspective of the West on the hijab has always been the narrative of oppression, backwardness, and terrorism.

**Oppression.** The Islamic garment and the hijab have long become a symbol of oppression in Western societies (Al Wazni, 2015; Byng, 2010; Croucher, 2008; Das & Shirvani, 2013; Hodge, Husain, & Zidan, 2017; Jailani, 2016; Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; Piatti-Crocker & Tasch, 2015; Sloan, 2011; Zempi, 2014). In the West, practicing of the veil is often seen as a sign of “submission and a threat to freedom and individuality” (Jailani, 2016, p. 52) as well as “the patriarchal power of religion” (Zempi, 2014, p. 2). Historically, hijab and the image of Muslim women have been politically interoperative by the West, and this is evident in the relationship between the West and the Muslim world (Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; Zine, 2002). Not only the Western world views the hijab as oppressive and presumes Muslim women are forced into the practice of veiling and the Islamic lifestyle, but they also take it even further to believe it is their duty to free these women (Al Wazni, 2015; Das & Shirvani, 2013; Jailani, 2016; Mancini, 2016; Zempi, 2014). However, despite the West’s presumption, a large body of study suggests many Muslim women, in fact, practice the Islamic veiling voluntarily (Al Wazni, 2015; Jailani, 2016; Zempi, 2014;). In response, Billaud and Castro (2013) argued women who choose to veil are not only victims of oppression, but they are also completely oblivious to this fact.

In addition, many feminist activists argue veiling is the foundation of inequality between women and men in Islam; it degrades women; and it signals women have a lower status in the society (Al Wazni, 2015; Hodge et al., 2017; Zempi, 2014). However, many Muslim women deny that narrative and believe although the Islamic image of
women empowerment might be different from the West’s, “it is not necessarily in contradiction” (Al Wazni, 2015, p. 330) either. Although Muslim women support gender equality, many do not feel validated or represented by feminist activists (Al Wazni, 2015). Moreover, whereas the West claims to be the place of liberty for choosing one’s clothing and lifestyle, and particularly for women, countries such as France, ironically, dismiss the freedom to veil (Al Wazni, 2015; Jailani, 2016). However, studies indicate the ability to freely practice veiling in the West is, in fact, a sign of freedom (Al Wazni, 2015; Bullock, 2011; Franks, 2000; Hannan, 2011; Jailani, 2016; Mondal, 2008; Tarlo, 2007; Zempi, 2014).

What the feminist movement advertises as the image of a liberated and empowered woman is what the world of capitalism and Western countries have created for women (Al Wazni, 2015; Kantola & Squires, 2012). Therefore, as the covered body of a Muslim woman does not fit the marketable Western image of a free woman who is sexually expressive and desirable, the Islamic image of a Muslim woman is projected as oppressed and subjugated (Al Wazni, 2015; Fernandez, 2009; Jailani, 2016; Kapur, 2002; Klaus & Kassel, 2005; Raju, 2002; Zempi, 2014). The West’s obsession with female body and uncovering it (Macdonald, 2006; Zempi, 2014) is portrayed in all aspects of Western living through social media, advertisements, magazines, and movies (Al Wazni, 2015; Zempi, 2014). The ideal image of a woman’s body by Western standards is always shown as glamorous, “‘natural,’ ‘open’ and ‘unveiled’” (Zempi, 2014, p. 11) as well as being White and youthful whereas a Muslim woman “is perceived to be sexually constrained, illiterate, tradition-bound, domesticated and poor” (p. 11).
Al Wazni (2015), Jailani (2016), and Kapur (2002) explained such behavior is rooted in colonialism and the West’s feelings of superiority. Many Westerners believe they are superior to other less advantaged countries; therefore, they feel emboldened to take the lead and act as an agent of change and voice of freedom on behalf of such countries (Jailani, 2016). This concept of “white savior complex” (Jailani, 2016, p. 53) also explains the “white liberal feminism” (p. 53). According to Jailani (2016), “Some groups associated with this movement pressure all women into accepting and celebrating their narrow view of feminism and notion of liberty” (p. 53) with the assumption that they need to liberate all types of oppressed women in these groups espouse. One such example is creating the International Topless Jihad Day by a Ukrainian feminist group, FEMEN, where they managed topless protests in front of mosques and embassies (Jailani, 2016). These protests were done in an effort to liberate veiled women by seeking a ban on the veil (Jailani, 2016). Such groups often either miss what is really important to the oppressed women, if they even consider themselves oppressed, or dismiss their voices if they do not consider themselves oppressed (Jailani, 2016). Jailani (2016) suggested even if there are veiled women who are oppressed and are in need of help, there are much more important issues such as “education and employment opportunities” (p. 53) for which to advocate. According to some scholars such as Leila Ahmed, a distinguished American professor and Islamist feminist, it is the White supremacy of the West that drives this idea of righteousness that they know the best and the rest are “ignorant and have to be saved” (as cited in Jailani, 2016, p. 53); though this presumptuous behavior is ignorant and racist.
**Backwardness.** L. Ahmed (1992) indicated the West’s presumptuous feelings of superiority toward the Muslim world based on having a presumably superior system of liberty and democracy is not something new. In fact, it started in the beginning of the 19th century and the effects are evident in the international relations since then (L. Ahmed, 1992). The West particularly felt threatened by the hijab and the Islamic school of thought as more Muslims emigrated to Europe in the 20th century; secularism is a key component in such countries (Das & Shirvani, 2013). Islam in the West is perceived and projected as misogynistic, patriarchal, backward (Zempi, 2014), and barbaric (Macdonald, 2006; Zine, 2002) as well as a threat to democracy and secularism (L. Ahmed, 1992), and the veil has become a symbol for that (Afshar, 2008; L. Ahmed, 1992; Al Wazni, 2015; Das & Shirvani, 2013; Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; Zempi, 2014).

The fascination of the West with Muslim women and veiling is embedded deep in history (Zine, 2002). However, the West did not know much about Muslim women and veiling prior to the colonializations (L. Ahmed, 1992). Prior to the 18th century, the West was not fully exposed to the Muslim women and the veiling, and prior to the 17th century, its limited information was only based on having access to translations of some Arabic scripture and the stories told predominantly by male travelers (L. Ahmed, 1992). However, in the 18th century, as the West started to have more interactions with Muslim women through colonialization, it also started to form and disseminate its own narrative and understanding of the Muslim women (L. Ahmed, 1992), and that is when it also started to create the world of us and the other (E. W. Said, 1981). This feeling of otherness still exists in the Western political and cultural domain (Tindongan, 2011; Zempi, 2014). E. W. Said (1981) further asserted that the West’s narrative of veiled
Muslim women and the colonized world, the East, was created unjustly and politically motivated. Through the concept of Orientalism, which he introduced in 1977, E. W. Said (1977) asserted how Westerners exaggerated the differences and displayed a distorted image of the East by and through the lens of the West’s presumptuous superiority to the oriental world.

The inconsistent portrayal of the veil and Muslim women in the West has been an indicator of its politicization (Litchmore & Safdar, 2016). In the 18th century, the West was still mesmerized by Muslim women’s veil use and associated that with exoticism and mystery (Mabro, 1991; Nussbaum, 1995). Concurrently, although Western art and paintings of the East, at the time, was centered on veiled women and their uniqueness (Mabro, 1991; Nussbaum, 1995), women were also portrayed as unhappy and needing to be saved (Kahf, 1999). Western literature disproportionally referred to the harems as if that was the norm in the Middle East (Mabro, 1991), and the orientalist paintings often portrayed women naked or with partial clothing also mostly in the harems (Haddad, 2007) or in settings such as Turkish baths (Mabro, 1991). When comparing the paintings of Western women to Oriental women, Mabro (1991) detected very few instances of Oriental women shown as mothers. Marbo (1991) further expanded her observation by citing Peter Gay, “A provocative, barely clothed girl in an Algerian doorway was exotic; the same girl in the same attitude in a Parisian doorway would have been obscene” (p. 9).

Though the West was very much interested in the unknown world of the East, its populations were also in search for reassurance that they were superior (Mabro, 1991), and so “Clearly, such paintings presented a sharp contrast between the civility of the West and the barbarity of the East, between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Zempi, 2014, p. 9).
Creating a strong urge to become the saviors of the veiled victims of the patriarchal society of the East was an important substance to feed and instigate the West’s imperialistic domain (Zempi, 2014).

**Terrorism.** Though the West’s fascination with veiled Muslim women might have started as a sexual urge and fetishistic desire to unveil the veiled women and uncover the unseen prior to colonization (Mabro, 1991; Zine, 2002), as time passed by and throughout history, this image and fascination changed to victims of barbaric society (Zine, 2002), oppressed, subjugated, and illiterate to Islamist terrorism (Zempi, 2014). In the contemporary time where there has been alleged Islamist terrorism attacks such as 9/11, veiling in the West has become a symbol of terrorism and extremism (Zempi, 2014). Veiled Muslim women are easily identifiable and the practice of veiling is seen not only as oppressive, but also as a visible threat to the national security, and it is also understood as a tool “to proselytize non-Muslims to Islam” (Zempi, 2014, p. 15).

As mentioned, veiled Muslim women have always been a target for interpretation and politicization, and the West’s narrative of hijab and Muslim women’s identity once more cast its focus on this group and the veil specifically after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Though all Muslims have been scrutinized excessively after those attacks, and the men have been the target of prejudice in a different shape and scale, the veil has become the symbol for oppression and violence (Haddad, 2007). Those women who cover their faces in addition to their hair, with a nighab, have been particularly in the center of political and social attacks; they are referred to as the symbol of extremism, carrying a secret agenda to change the Western values and impose Sharia law (Zempi, 2014). Based on similar perspectives and following France’s anti-Islamic rhetoric, several countries in
Europe such as Belgium, Italy, and the Netherlands have banned the full-face veils and considered a ban on Islamic veils altogether in schools (Piatti-Crocker & Tasch, 2015; Zempi, 2014).

Muslim women with Islamic veiling in the West are constantly seen and represented as a threat to the national security and identity (Jailani, 2016; Zainal & Wong, 2017; Zempi, 2014). They have become a symbol for extremism, a visible threat to the West (Zempi, 2014), and evidence for Muslims’ incapability to integrate (Zimmerman, 2013). Muslims and Middle Eastern people in America are seen through the sphere of otherness (Tindongan, 2011). “Television shows about sleeper cells to racial profiling and even to the overrepresentation of news coverage of peoples and events presumably associated with Islam” (Tindongan, 2011, p. 73) are just some of the examples of how this otherness exists in American society.

This automatic setting of otherness for Muslims and Middle Eastern people is partly a result of a lack of knowledge of Americans about the Islamic faith and its followers as well as the history of colonization (Tindongan, 2011). More important, the negative stereotypes created and given to Muslims and Middle Eastern people are caused by the “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient [East]” (E. W. Said, 1977, p. 4). As E. W. Said (1977) explained, the West started its institutionalized treatment of the Orient in the late 18th century by creating and disseminating a distorted image of the East to feed its own interests. Retracing the concept of orientalism, which contrasts sharply between the Occident (West) and the Orient (East), was crafted by the West as an embodiment of the world of us versus the other by shaping the West’s identity and creating an opposing and distorted image of the
East (E. W. Said, 1977); it was to fulfill the need for superiority, distinguish the self, and ultimately, to justify the imperialism and colonization of the other (Bradford, 1999; E. W. Said, 1977). Orientalism explains “the nature of this troubled and exploitative relationship between Western nations and the Middle East and South and Central Asia” (Tindongan, 2011, p. 72). It also explains the West’s politicization of the Islamic veil and the image of Muslim women (Bradford, 1999; E. W. Said, 1977) as well as the contemporary war on allegedly Islamic terrorism (Al Wazni, 2015).

Western politicians, particularly the French and the British who were proactively looking for an image for women in their democratic states, created an image for Western women in contrast to those in the Eastern nations. These same politicians employed that image to colonize aggressively those countries in the name of saving and liberating their veiled and oppressed women (Al Wazni, 2015; Bradford, 1999). The unjustified military occupations of Muslim countries suddenly became justified by employing Western women’s image and feminism (Al Wazni, 2015; Bradford, 1999; E. W. Said, 1977). An example of this notion was highlighted in Algeria where French women publicly unveiled the local and veliger Algerian women in a military celebration while singing in French; a symbolic gesture for bringing Western democracy to their country (Lazreg, 1994). This was an effort French military generals made in Algeria to show the French government that Algerians support their actions (Lazreg, 1994). Although the French military was presumably fighting for women’s rights in Algeria, French women were fighting gender inequality in their home country (Al Wazni, 2015). Though little is known about those unveiled native women who were also purposefully photographed, and it was not unusual to use the locals in the “demonstrations of loyalty to France” (Lazreg, 1994, p. 135), the
unveiling of the Algerian Muslim women revealed the “one constant feature of the Algerian occupation by France: its obsession with women” (p. 135).

By Eastern nations identifying Muslim women as oppressed and picturing the veil in their narrative while comparing it to the created image of an ideal Western woman, the West paved its way for years of unlawful occupation of Muslim countries (Al Wazni, 2015; Bradford, 1999; E. W. Said, 1977). Although Western countries justified their occupation by identifying themselves as the saviors of the oppressed Muslim women, the truth behind it was only a fusion of Western men’s sexual desire to unveil the veiled Muslim women and their greed for imperialism (Zempi, 2014). As Zempi (2014) simply put it, “the removal of the veil signified the ultimate form of colonisation” (p. 9), as this visible change of appearance “was a key factor in subduing resistance toward colonial powers” (p. 9) as well as “the establishment of Western superiority” (p. 9).

The West purposefully painted a twisted and stereotypical image of Islam, the Middle East, and the Muslim women with Islamic head coverings to obtain its geopolitical and economic gains. Thus, the Islamic veil became the symbol for Islam and a symbol for oppression, backwardness, and terrorism. Though the shape and purpose of its unlawful occupation has changed and evolved throughout the years, its greed for political and economic power remains the same. The West has always projected Muslims and Middle Easterners as backward (L. Ahmed, 1992) and barbaric (Macdonald, 2006; Zine, 2002) and dismissed their multicultural background and rich history. Even though Islam does not know race, and Muslims come from various and different racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds, they have become and are treated as a single race (Considine, 2017), and “portrayed as a homogenous group” (Zimmerman, 2013, p. 34). Rescuing the
subjugated Muslim women, a civilizing mission, was the theme for the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Bradford, 1999), and “the War on Terror” (Al Wazni, 2015, p. 326) has been the new theme for the 21st century.

**Life of Muslim Women in the West**

The existing clashing ideologies of the West and the Muslims manifest in the daily lives of Muslim women and men in many ways. Many studies and surveys attempted to discover such experiences and shed a light on these struggles. However, since veiled Muslim women are in a unique position, as they are visibly identifiable, their veils have become symbols for Islam and associated with a negative stereotype in the Western world. Because of the nature of this study, this section focuses only on the struggles of veiled Muslim women in Western society, specifically the U.S.

**Feminism and Muslim women.** As discussed previously, the notion of freedom and feminism in Western countries is a double-edged sword for veiled Muslim women living there. Although they are supposedly given the freedom to choose their lifestyle and live as they wish, they are questioned if they choose to live as a Muslim and practice modesty. Their voices are dismissed by the majority of feminist activists (Al Wazni, 2015), and their capability as independent individuals who can think rationally and openly to choose their lifestyle, religion, spouse, clothing, and philosophy in life in general is undermined (Zempi, 2014) solely because their lifestyles do not fit the crafted feminism ideology of the West and its priorities (Al Wazni, 2015). In its view, no right-minded female would want to cover her body and hair and be modest with her feminine features. Thus, if they wear the veil, they must be oppressed and forced to wear it, and if
they truly and freely choose to wear it, they must be blind to their oppression (Billaud & Castro, 2013).

Western feminists have only one perspective of equality and gender roles in mind, which does not take other cultures into consideration; it is uniform internationally and is presumed to be universal (Hodge et al., 2017; Sherif-Trask, 2014). Furthermore, Western feminism, for the most part, is in conflict with mainstream religious points of view, and therefore, religion is viewed as oppressive toward women (Hodge et al., 2017). Regarding Muslim women, Western feminists often focus on liberating those women from religion instead of working toward ensuring gender equality and miss that freedom from gender oppression is far more important (Hodge et al., 2017). Western feminists’ views on hijab are just as their politicians: hijab is a symbol of oppression and violence forced on Muslim women by men (Al Wazni, 2015). Not only has the image of a liberal woman become “the exposed female body, active in the public sphere” (p. 326), but also the “Western liberal neo-Orientalists [have been trying to] superimpose their values” (p. 326) on Muslim women.

Many scholars have criticized the current feminist movement, arguing it is too simplistic to address issues women of color and different cultures experience (Hodge et al., 2017; Wing, 2003; Zimmerman, 2013), and that it has greatly shifted from liberating women from patriarchal societies and empowering them, to feeding capitalism while also setting unrealistic standards for them to meet (Al Wazni, 2015; Eisenstein, 2005).

Kantola and Squires (2012) argued the feminist movement has changed from “state” (p. 383) to “market” (p. 383) feminism where traditional advocacy for policy changes within the state to promote gender equality and women’s rights are attained through a marketing
framework and private sectors. Eisenstein (2005) went even further to explain this phenomenon of Western feminism where, “‘modern’ equals women’s rights, the Judeo-Christian heritage, and democracy, while ‘traditional’ equals patriarchal suppression of women’s rights, the Islamic heritage, and terrorism” (p. 509). Therefore, there is often a notion within capitalism that women’s rights, democracy, and a free market are directly linked (Sherif-Trask, 2014).

Mainstream Western feminism is not only at odds with most religious beliefs (Hodge et al., 2017) and non-White cultures (Hodge et al., 2017; Sherif-Trask, 2014), but it also enforces its own beliefs and lifestyle through marketing and other means to other women, potentially causing them harm (Al Wazni, 2015). For instance, in regard to culture, Western feminism advocates for individualism whereas many non-White cultures focus on “nationalism and ‘traditions’” (Sherif-Trask, 2014, p. 75). Furthermore, the ideal image of a liberated woman has become a revealed, “glamorous, white, [and] youthful” (Zempi, 2014, p. 11) body. Such ideal bodies and images marketed to women through advertisements are attained through different means of dieting, exercising, and even plastic surgery (Zempi, 2014) as well as photographic manipulations. Though, according to some research, these unhealthy and unrealistic images and standards for a liberated woman have “contributed to body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, and poor mental health” (Al Wazni, 2015, p. 327) as well as “a decrease in body esteem” (p. 327).

In contrary to the Western image of a liberated woman, is the sexually constrained, uneducated, and traditional Muslim woman who is mentally, emotionally, and physically oppressed by uncivilized Muslim men (Zempi, 2014). Though despite the perception the West has about the hijab and Muslim women, studies show hijab is seen as
a liberating tool to many that protects women from being subjected to manipulation, objectification, humiliation, and degradation (Al Wazni, 2015; Droogsma, 2007; Hodge et al., 2017; Zempi, 2014). In their view, Western society exploits women to artificial and superficial beauty and fashion trends, degrades them by objectifying them, and exposes them to unwanted sexual encounters (Droogsma, 2007). Furthermore, studies show veiled Muslim women have higher levels of body esteem (Husain & Aziz, 2014) or positive attitudes toward their bodies (Al Wazni, 2015), experiencing lower levels of depressive symptoms (Hodge et al., 2017). According to Al Wazni (2015), veiled Muslim women feel respected, dignified, and empowered and have a sense of security and self-confidence all because of wearing the hijab.

Veiled Muslim women are still viewed as oppressed and their voices are mostly dismissed, even by the majority of feminist activists, though studies and strong claims negate the West’s narrative of hijab and Muslim women. Zimmerman (2013) asserted, “Critical race feminism may help understand the oppression experienced by young Muslim women as members of ethnic minorities in [Western countries such as] the United States and France” (p. 46). Emerging in the late 1980s, Critical Race Feminism evolved from Critical Race Theory, based on the assumption that experiences women of color have are similar to their male counterparts (Zimmerman, 2013). However, some scholars (Wing, 2003) have criticized Critical Race Feminism and argued the perspective of women of color is dismissed in the discourse of mainstream feminism that is centered around White women and the civil rights movement that is mostly about men of color. Delgado (2003) inserted, “The world of the woman of color is unique; it is not a combination of the two worlds of black men and white women, A plus B equals C” (p.
Experiences and circumstances of patriarchal issues and dominance differ from White women to women of color (Zimmerman, 2013).

Believing “contemporary feminist and antiracist discourses have failed to consider intersectional identities such as women of color” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242), Crenshaw (1991) argued that gender issues cannot be addressed solely or separately based on race or gender. In her view, experiences of women of color, specifically, the need to be considered within the multidimensional aspects of their social identity that not only includes race and gender but also other social factors such as class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, are all interconnected (Crenshaw, 1991). Patricia Williams and Adrien Katherine Wing, prominent scholars and activists in Critical Race Feminism who are strong advocates of women of color, frequently refer to women’s suffering from oppression and discrimination as spirit injury. Wing (2000) explained, “Spirit injury is a Critical Race feminist term [first introduced by Williams] that contemplates the psychological, spiritual, and cultural effects of the multiple [oppressive] assaults” (p. 333) women of color experience from inside and outside of their culture and community. Williams (1987) also believed, “disregard for others whose lives qualitatively depend on our regard” (p. 151) constitutes to spirit murder. Expanding on this notion of racism by Williams, Wing (2000) inserted spirit murder is the cumulative and combined incidents of minor and major spirit injury that “leads to the slow death of the psyche, the soul, and the persona” (p. 333). She, furthermore, emphasized the danger spirit injury creates not only to its victims, but also to society as a whole and identified it as a psychologically, mentally, and financially demeaning factor (Wing, 2000). Spirit injury degrades individuals, and by devaluing them, it makes them think of themselves as less and
ultimately creates a mind-set that justifies the experiences of oppression (Wing, 2000). When dignity and self-value are constantly damaged and oppressed from inside and outside of the self’s cultural group as well as her own immediate family members, the person loses her voice and self-identity (Wing, 2000). A group of individuals shattered by spirit injury within society could negatively affect and jeopardize its people’s way of life or even an entire cultural landscape (Wing, 2000).

**Freedom, Struggles, and Prejudice**

According to the Pew Research Center (2017), about 52% of American Muslim women believe dressing modesty is an essential part of being a Muslim. However, the more their appearance is identifiable as a Muslim, the more they are likely to be discriminated against, about two thirds (64%; Pew Research Center, 2017). As mentioned previously, veiled Muslim women have always been at the center of Westerners’ attention, while their interpretation of the veil and its meaning have changed throughout the years. Nevertheless, the September 11 terrorist attacks drastically changed how veiled Muslim women are viewed and treated in the West. Moreover, though anti-Muslim rhetoric and incidents in America are not new phenomena to American Muslims, there has been a new spike in discrimination and hate incidents in recent years. In America, many Muslim women have been discriminated against and have a growing concern about their life in American society (Pew Research Center, 2017). In fact, more Muslim women than Muslim men have reported being discriminated against, are dissatisfied with the current state in the U.S., and are worried about the future of Muslims in America, as they believe American Muslim lives have become even more challenging lately (Pew Research Center, 2017).
Furthermore, according to scholars such as K. M. Moore (2007), “The First Amendment right to wear religiously-inspired attire is not quite as strongly protected as some might expect” (p. 243). Prejudice against veiled Muslim women affects different aspects of their social and personal lives, as they have been historically deprived of participating in certain activities. This section attempts to portray some challenges veiled Muslim women face in three major settings: school, work, and public sphere.

**Schools.** Growing up in Western countries, Muslim children, particularly females who practice hijab, encounter prejudice early in their childhoods with the majority of such incidents happening at or around their schools. These hateful and prejudicial instances often take place through organizational policies and national laws instituted by politicians, policy makers, and school staffs as well as non-Muslim student peers and even their parents.

For instance, as recent as November 2017, the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills in the United Kingdom announced it intends to have primary school girls (some as young as 4) who wear the hijab to be questioned by its inspectors to find out why they do so (Packham, 2017). This announcement has caused an outcry among the British Muslim community, as its members fear such acts would only target this minority group even further and add to the increasing phenomenon of Islamophobia (Packham, 2017). Talha Ahmad, treasurer of the Muslim Council of Britain, has strongly opposed this decision by referring to it as “wrong and dangerous” (as cited in Packham, 2017, para. 3), as she expressed her deep concerns regarding the freedom and equality of the Muslim community. However, in the opposing view, some Muslims believe wearing a hijab should be a well-informed and conscious decision, and
since there is no Islamic base for veiling young girls, doing so is an extreme interpretation of the faith and a misrepresentation of Islam (Packham, 2017). On the other hand, Amanda Spielman, the head of the Office for Standards in Education, in a statement revealed the main reason for its decision is to ensure equality for the children and prevent any type of sexual projection as wearing the hijab “could be interpreted as sexualisation of young girls” (Packham, 2017, para. 12), disregarding that many young girls already wear skirts and dresses that could be interpreted in the same context. Nevertheless, Ahmad strongly disagreed with such claims; sharing the concerns of the community, she argued and emphasized Muslim parents have the right to choose their children’s attire as any other parent does (as cited in Packham, 2017). “Moreover” (as cited in Packham, 2017, para. 8) she disputed, “wellbeing—particularly emotional and psychological—of children questioned in this manner may adversely suffer from being singled out and their choices questioned” (para. 8).

However, this is not the first time that Muslim school goers were targeted by the government. In recent decades, some Western countries such as France passed laws pertaining religious articles and practices at public schools. Though they have not specifically mentioned any religion, human-rights activists argue such policies are targeted at the Muslim population (Das & Shirvani, 2013; Jailani, 2016; Piatti-Crocker & Tasch, 2015). It is important to note hijab is not just a religious symbol but a religious obligation to many Muslim women (Jailani, 2016). As a result, Muslim school girls who refused to take off their head coverings have been expelled from schools (Das & Shirvani, 2013). Such controversial laws are often passed by claiming there is a need to protect the country’s secularism and maintain cultural integration (Das & Shirvani, 2013;
Jailani, 2016). Nevertheless, the true intention and the consequences are often questioned and undermined by the Muslim community and human rights activities (Jailani, 2016).

Scholars such as Read (2007) noted Western countries such as France and the U.S. have difficulty incorporating Muslim communities into their societies, as they do not see Islamic teachings compatible with their secular social structure, leading to animosity against this minority group. Though there is no doubt America and France have historical and cultural differences that have also ultimately shaped their philosophy about assimilation, Read (2007) argued both countries share one commonality, and that is discouraging veiling. Though unlike France, which only encourages adoption of French identity and abandonment of ethnic identity that helps embed antiveiling practices within its laws, America encourages multiculturism and supports all religions, including Islam, and yet it discourages veiling by failing to have explicit legal protections (Read, 2007).

To illustrate this issue, Read (2007) explained, in America, “laws ostensibly driven by security concerns are aimed at women seeking identity cards, while in France, the focus is on problems of immigrant integration epitomized by adolescent girls veiling in school” (p. 233).

Besides, many studies and reports indicate government officials and politicians play an important role in adding to prejudice and mistreatment when it comes to the Arab and Muslim community, including students. For instance, in May 2018, the Council on American-Islamic Relations–Dallas-Fort Worth chapter (CAIR-DFW) urged Muslim parents to teach their children about their constitutional rights and the importance of exercising them after learning Muslim students at Plano West High School in Texas were individually interviewed by FBI agents while in school without notifying their parents or
without the presence of any legal aid (Hooper, 2018a). As a result, they have also asked for an investigation by the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice and the Texas State Board of Education into this matter (Hooper, 2018a). The CAIR-DFW representatives worry minors could easily be intimidated by law enforcement officers and do not fully understand the outcome of speaking with them without having legal or parental advice (Hooper, 2018a). The Executive Director of CAIR-DFW, John Janney, criticized the FBI’s action and said (as cited in Hooper, 2018a):

> It is outrageous that the FBI would exploit the vulnerability of young people while they are attending school and are in no position to seek legal counsel or parental advice before submitting to interviews that could result in severe consequences for themselves and others. (para. 6)

Janney further emphasized, “Educational institutions should be safe places for students of all faiths and should protect the civil and constitutional rights of young people in their charge” (as cited in Hooper, 2018a, para. 6).

Separate studies and organizations have determined American Muslim students are more likely to be a target of bullying based on their faith. After conducting a poll in 2017 on American Muslims, the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding discovered American Muslim students (K-12) are nearly twice as likely (42%) to be bullied at school compared to their peers of the Jewish faith, 23% (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017). This number is four times more when compared to the general public (10%; Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017). Notably, teachers and school staff comprised 25% of such incidents (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017). The same report shows though the majority of American Muslims of all ages, 60%, have experienced some type of religious discrimination within
the past year of conducting the study, three groups are particularly more vulnerable to becoming victims of prejudice: “younger Muslims, women, and Arabs” (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017, p. 4).

Another study conducted by the Teaching Tolerance program at the Southern Poverty Law Center also confirmed Muslim students have been particularly a target for prejudice and hateful acts (Costello, 2016). This study was specifically conducted to investigate if the political climate surrounding the presidential election of 2016 has had any impact on the American schools nationally. Through their investigation, which was based on more than 10,000 respondents, more than 90% of the participants believed the election has had a negative impact on the school environment and students directly (Costello, 2016). Furthermore, 80% of the participants believed part of this negative impact has been an increased level of anxiety among students, especially those of the marginalized groups such as “immigrants, Muslims, African Americans and LGBT students” (Costello, 2016, p. 4). The results show a rise of aggression and intolerance that includes, “verbal harassment, the use of slurs and derogatory language, and disturbing incidents involving swastikas, Nazi salutes and Confederate flags” (Costello, 2016, p. 4). Accordingly, many of those respondents who did not report having experienced any type of xenophobic behavior or derogatory language attributed that to the exclusive catering of such groups, and instead described their schools as being filled with feelings of anxiety and fear in relation to their community at large (Costello, 2016).

Though the SPLC survey was not designed scientifically, the results do not surprise scholars who study and monitor school violence such as Ron Avi Astor, who is a professor at the University of Southern California (Ochieng, 2017). Receiving large
number of calls from schools and school districts, Astor said, “There’s been a two-year spike in school bullying and harassment, and right now there is a generalized climate of permission to say hateful things to other groups that are deemed as ‘different’” (Ochieng, 2017, para. 6). Acknowledging many groups such as “Jewish, Latino and undocumented children” (Ochieng, 2017, para. 6) are specifically being targeted for hateful acts and remarks, he emphasized the particular pressure Muslim children are experiencing as a result of their family origins.

What is disturbing to many educators and parents is that hateful incidents in schools are not just perpetrated by the students and some of their parents, but by school staff members who are supposed to safeguard the students from harm as well as teaching them about equality, fairness, tolerance, and harmony. A report by Teaching Tolerance (Collins, 2018), founded by SPLC, indicated too many school staff members are filled with prejudice against certain groups of students and are acting on it, and that much of this has been in the form of social media bullying and abuse of power. However, “much of this prejudice remains unreported” (Collins, 2018, para. 13), which is even more unfortunate and concerning. Many K-12 and college students in America have experienced varying degrees of hate and derogatory incidents solely based on their color of skin, ethnicity, sexual identity, country of origin, and religious point of view. However, only some of such incidents are reported each year and even a smaller portion is addressed adequately. As mentioned previously, Muslim students have been especially vulnerable to such abuse. Posting anti-Muslim comments such as “Ban Islam in America!” (Collins, 2018, para. 10) or referring to the religion as “Satanic death cult” (para. 10) on social media and singling out Muslim students in classrooms by treating
them differently such as deliberately giving them materials that demonize Islam and belittle its followers are among some of the reported actions done by the school staff members. Schools have also seen anti-Muslim incidents on their premises such as posted “Muslim-Free America” (Stegmeir, n.d., para. 7) signs and having the word “Trump” (para. 7) written on a Muslim prayer area (para. 7). However, more violent incidents have also occurred. For instance, a Muslim student who was wearing a hijab on a college campus was hit on the head with a bottle and suffered a concussion as a result (Stegmeir, n.d.).

California, specifically, is experiencing a high number of reports of anti-Muslim incidents at its schools. Though California is home to the largest population of American Arabs (Arab American Institute, n.d.) and one of the largest populations of American Muslims (Pew Research Center, 2017), and while it is well known to be a liberal and diverse state, a study released in 2017 revealed, “Muslim students in California are bullied at a rate that is more than twice the average of Muslim youths nationally” (Bharath, 2017a, para. 1). The California chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations found 53% of its participants were “mocked, verbally insulted or abused” (Bharath, 2017a, para. 2), 26% were cyberbullied, 57% witnessed “their peers make offensive comments about Islam and Muslims online, and 36 percent of female respondents reported having their hijabs, or head scarves, tugged or pulled off their heads” (para. 4). The Muslim students who participated in this study (1,041) were between the ages of 11 and 18 and were from both sectors of California public and private schools (Bharath, 2017a). While this report shows a sharp increase of hate incidents against Muslim students statewide, it also highlights the increase in the level of
aggression and physical contact (Bharath, 2017a). For instance, some female Muslim students who practiced hijab, stopped wearing theirs at schools after being a victim of bullying and aggression, as their scarves had been pulled off their heads (Bharath, 2017a). Some other students are hesitant to talk about their Muslim identity in fear of rejection (Stegmeir, n.d.) or becoming targets for hate and bullying.

It is because of the rise of these xenophobic and hatful experiences that many Muslim students in America have adopted a “constant state of vigilance” (Stegmeir, n.d., para. 10) according to “Mary Ann Bodine Al-Sharif, director of recruitment and admissions at Oklahoma City Community College” (para. 10). When analyzing the situation, Al-Sharif sees American Muslim students as proud and empowered individuals, but she believes the constant need of defining self, defending Islam, and fighting against otherness have an overwhelmingly negative effect on them and their mental health (Stegmeir, n.d.). She described this experience as having to work two jobs, which causes exhaustion and wear and tear (Stegmeir, n.d.).

Furthermore, Ka’rin Thornburg, associate director of admissions at the University of Texas at Austin and chair of the National Association for College Admission Counseling’s Inclusion, Access, and Success Committee, believed “the unique needs of Muslim students” (Stegmeir, n.d., para. 22) in America is often easily disregarded because of their very small representation as a minority group.

Work. Muslim women in the West face many challenges economically. Statistics show Muslim women in the UK “are three times more likely to be unemployed jobseekers than women generally, and twice as likely to be economically inactive” (Easton, 2016, para. 3). The Women and Equalities Committee believed one of the
reasons for this disadvantage and discrimination against Muslim women is the “triple penalty” (para. 6) phenomena; “being women, being from an ethnic minority, and being Muslim” (para. 6). While the report cited family pressure and lack of Muslim community support as contributing factors, it emphasized Islamophobia and recruitment discrimination and their impact that “should not be underestimated” (para. 16). Factors such as Muslim women’s names and their cultural or religious appearance could trigger employment discrimination (Easton, 2016). The experiences and perception of Islamophobic encounters at interviews and in workplaces discourage many Muslim women in the UK from pursuing certain jobs (Easton, 2016).

Though studies suggest many Muslim women are economically inactive because of many and complex factors (Abdelhadi, 2017; Abdelhadi & England, 2016), those who are active in the workforce or seek paying opportunities face more challenges than other women (Ali, Yamada, & Mahmood, 2015; ACLU, 2008; CAIR, 2017a, 2018a; Easton, 2016). According to a new ruling in 2017 by the highest court in the European Union, the European Court Justice, banning hijab is allowed by the employers, and “it does not constitute ‘direct discrimination’” (el-Aabedy, 2017, para. 2) as long as it is embedded in their internal policies and equally enforced such that all employees cannot wear any type of religious, philosophical, and political articles. European Court Justice, which interpretes the union’s laws, released this ruling in response to two cases of Muslim women, in France and Belgium, who lost their jobs after refusing to remove their head coverings at work (el-Aabedy, 2017).

The ruling was received positively and welcomed by many nationalists and right-wing figures. For example, the head of Centre-right European People’s party, Manfred
Weber, claimed victory in a tweet saying, “Employers have the right to ban the Islamic veil at work. European values must apply in public life” (el-Aabedy, 2017, para. 12). However, many Muslim and human rights activists were disappointed by this decision and condemned the ruling. “Kim Lecoyer, president of Belgium-based Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights” (el-Aabedy, 2017, para. 7), criticized the European Court Justice’s decision and said in an interview with Al Jazeera, “The court could and should have seized the opportunity to put a halt to the multiple discriminations faced by Muslim women and protect their fundamental rights, but they chose not to” (para. 8). As mentioned before and emphasized by many human rights activists, wearing a hijab is an obligatory practice of Islam to many Muslim women, and this matter does not change by occasion or location. For instance, wearing a cross is a religious symbol, but it is not obligatory among Christians. However, wearing a hijab to many Muslim women or a turban by Sikhs is mandatory. That is why many human rights activities believe such rulings target Muslim women and will have a direct impact on an already marginalized group (el-Aabedy, 2017).

Furthermore, unemployment rates among Muslims in Canada are twice that of other groups (Rahnema, 2006). R. Robinson (2016) explained in her research article, “Hijab in the American Workplace: Visibility and Discrimination,” that discrimination against hijabi Muslim women is structural in the U.S., and it increases as they appear more Muslim. Throughout this study, she learned many oppose promoting rights for hijabi women in the workplace; anti-Muslim sentiments are seen throughout different political parties; regardless of the party, there is a mutual fear that giving rights to veiled Muslim women could endanger White privilege; and disagreements over interpretations
of hijab and Islamic modesty among Muslims prevents full support from the community (R. Robinson, 2016). King and Ahmad (2010) suggested discrimination and challenges Muslims face for employment are a sign of intolerance and rejection of their identity. Though King and Ahmad (2010) did not see significant differences in receiving “formal” (p. 896) or overt discrimination between Muslim women who were clothed identifiably as Muslim and those who were not during the employment process, they found Muslim women in Islamic clothing “encountered more negative interpersonal behavior (e.g., rudness, hostility)” (p. 896) and “managers spent less time interacting with” (p. 896) them.

Ali et al. (2015) uncovered findings similar to King and Ahmad’s, and learned, “Women who reported higher levels of commitment to Muslim ideology, stronger perceptions of workplace discrimination, and lower social class reported lower levels of job satisfaction” (p. 154). This study suggested there is a correlation between self-reported lower social class and lower job satisfaction, and that the hijabi participants in this study categorized themselves as lower social class because of wearing the hijab. Based on this study and the increase in workplace discrimination against Muslims, Ali et al. (2015), “Assumed that the discrimination is taking its toll on Muslim women’s satisfaction with their jobs” (p. 154), a finding that is aligned with other studies in that among different religious groups, Muslim Americans demonstrate “lower ratings of overall job satisfaction” (p. 154).

Moreover, when researching discrimination against veiled Muslim women during the hiring process, Ghumman and Ryan (2013) conducted a field experiment, and they discovered hijabi women faced varying degrees of formal and covert discrimination such
as receiving fewer call backs from the employers, being permitted to complete the application, and having negative and disengaged encounters. The rate of call backs was even lower when there was low employee diversity (Ghumman & Ryan, 2013). In another study, Acquisti and Fong (2016) manipulated main social media platforms of numbers of job seeking participants to see if their social media’s data would affect their level of interview invitations. They found out Christian applicants were favored by 13% over Muslim applicants (Acquisti & Fong, 2016). They also learned “employers in Republican areas exhibit significant bias both against the Muslim candidate, and in favor of the Christian candidate” (Acquisti & Fong, 2016, p. 1); the difference between Democratic and Republican areas was also significant. Other studies also suggest being a Muslim and immigrant negatively impact the applicants’ success rate in the hiring process compared to his or her Christian counterparts (Esses, Bennett-AbuAyyash, & Lapshina, 2014).

Meanwhile, ACLU (2008) reported Muslim women in America have been denied the right to wear Islamic head coverings at work and fired when they refused to remove them. The followings are just some examples of such cases. In 2001, a car rental company fired a Muslim woman employee who insisted on wearing her hijab during the holy month of Ramadan despite the company’s request (ACLU, 2008). She later won a lawsuit against the company’s discriminatory request and dismissal (ACLU, 2008). Another Muslim woman working at Jiffy Lube Store in Virginia was told her hijab fell under the “no hats” (ACLU, 2008, p. 3) policy, so she could not wear her headscarf while working; CAIR intervened and helped to solve the problem. In Garland, Texas, a young Muslim woman who was just accepted for a position at a Dillard’s site was told by the
site’s manager she could not maintain her hijab while working on the sales floor (CAIR, 2018a). In 2003, a Muslim policewoman in Philadelphia was denied her desire to wear a headscarf while in her police uniform and was disciplined when she wore her hijab for couple of days anyways (Webb v. City of Philadelphia, 2009). In 2009, a higher court of appeal upheld the ruling in favor of the police department (Webb v. City of Philadelphia, 2009). Last, Samantha Elauf won the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in 2015 over Abercrombie & Fitch, a clothing line, for its discriminatory hiring process when it refused her because she was a hijab-wearing applicant and on the basis of their employees’ dress code (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Abercrombie & Fitch Stores, 2015). Abercrombie & Fitch has a history of discriminating against other Muslim women over the hijab; a settlement of $71,000 was made in 2013 in connection with firing a hijabi employee for refusing to take her scarf off and dismissing another Muslim woman applicant after inquiring about her hijab (Levine, 2015).

Even when Muslim women are hired and working, they are still subjected to hate and discrimination by the customers and the public. For instance, a veiled Muslim woman who was working for Delta Airlines was cornered in her office, threatened, and kicked at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York City by a male traveler who was mocking her as a Muslim and shouting expletives (Rossman, 2017). In 2008, a customer of a private, French-based company, Micropole, complaint about one of their design engineers, Asma Bougnaoui, that she should not be wearing a headscarf (el-Aabedy, 2017). After the incident, the company asked Ms. Bougnaoui to remove her scarf, so it does not upset the clients; she was then dismissed (el-Aabedy, 2017). Muslim women who wear a headscarf could have difficulty securing jobs and passing through
discriminative hiring processes, but securing a position does not necessarily end their work struggle, as they might also face harassment from their colleagues and customers.

**Public sphere.** Muslim women who wear the hijab in America experience various degrees of prejudice and hate once in public, regardless of their age, social, or racial background. Studies show Muslim women who wear the hijab are more likely to experience prejudice than Muslim women who do not (ACLU, 2008; Pew Research Center, 2017). Just as in schools and workplaces, part of the prejudice targeted at Muslim women who wear the hijab in the public sphere is perpetrated by government officials and by the public. As shown in Table 3, the number of biased incidents instigated by American government agencies has been on the rise in the last couple of years, and they significantly increased in 2017 (919), compared to 2016 (540) and 2015 (314; CAIR, 2018a).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Government Agency-Instigated Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>919</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though the numbers in the Table 4 do not include all incidents, as a large percentage of prejudice and hate incidents go unreported (Lou, 2017; The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2018; The New York City Commission on Human Rights, Frazer, & Howe, 2018; Schwencke, 2017), and it does not specify the number of incidents related to males or females, it still offers some perspectives to this issue.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Reported Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customs and Border Protection</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Bureau of Investigation</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Federal Agencies</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation Security Administration</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Citizenship and Immigration Services</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration and Customs Enforcement</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>919</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there are constitutional rights, First and Fourteen Amendments, as well as other clauses, The Religious Freedom Restoration Act and The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, and federal civil rights law, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that protect Muslim women’s practice of hijab from the federal and state points of view, veil practicing Muslim women’s rights are not always honored (ACLU, 2008). Many head covering Muslim women in the U.S. have found themselves at odds with practices of governmental entities despite these existing laws; most common incidents have involved prohibition or unveiling the hijab (ACLU, 2008). According to the ACLU (2008), “Muslim women have been denied the right to wear a headscarf while in jail and courthouse detention, while visiting family members in correctional institutions, while accompanying family members to court, and even while working in correctional institutions” (p. 2).

Based on the ACLU (2008) report, “Women also have been harassed by police officers for wearing headscarves, both when being arrested and when they have called the police for help” (p. 2). For instance, San Bernardino County, California implemented a new policy in October 2008 that allows Muslim women to wear head coverings while in the custody in the county jails after a lawsuit was filed against it (ACLU, 2008). In 2007, Jameelah Medina, had her hijab forcibly removed when in custody of San Bernardino County’s West Valley Detention Center (ACLU, 2008). In addition, the arresting deputy, allegedly, called Medina a terrorist and a supporter of Saddam Hussein while also calling Muslims evil (ACLU, 2008; Median v. County of San Bernardino [Complaint], 2007). In great distressed and disbelief, Ms. Medina “experienced humiliation, a sense of having
had both her religious beliefs and personal integrity violated, and shame” (*Median v. County of San Bernardino* [Complaint], 2007, p. 8).

Similarly, the officials in the California Orange County courthouse holding facility made Souhair Khatib remove her head covering while in their custody (ACLU, 2008). The Long Beach California Police Department has also overhauled its policy to accommodate veil practicing Muslim women where only female officers are allowed to remove and search the inmates’ head coverings for safety reasons, and it is done so away from any male presence (Rocha, 2017). The headgear would then be returned to the individual to be worn while in the custody (Rocha, 2017). This change came after Kirsty Powell, an African American Muslim woman, was arrested and her hijab was forcibly removed by a male officer and in front of other male officers and inmates; she was also denied the ability to cover her head while in the custody (Rocha, 2017). The lawsuit described Powell’s experience as humiliating and said she felt “distraught, vulnerable and naked without her headscarf to everyone that passed” (Rocha, 2017, para.12), and that she had cried throughout her holding. She was awarded $85,000 in the settlement (Rocha, 2017).

Muslims, Arabs, and those perceived to be Muslims have been subjected to discriminatory behavior and profiled on the sole basis of their racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds when traveling to or through the U.S. in the past couple of decades (ACLU, 2008; CAIR, 2018a; Harvard, 2016; L. A. Khan, 2017; Mehta, 2017). In 1997, the Arab American Institute, CAIR, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, and the American Muslim Council were deeply concerned about increased incidents of prejudice and unjust profiling against Muslims, Arabs, and females with Islamic head coverings at
airports (Arab American Institute, 1997). Two decades later, this issue has become even more prominent and concerning to the Arab and Muslim communities where Muslims have been denied air travel or entrance to the U.S. despite having valid visas (Khaleeli, 2016; Mehta, 2017) as well as subjected to long hours of detentions and interrogations (Adely, 2018; L. A. Khan, 2017) and humiliating treatment at airports and road crossings (L. A. Khan, 2017). They have been treated differently (CAIR Massachusetts, 2018; Vissar, 2015) and removed from airplanes (Barnett, 2011; CAIR, 2015; Harvard, 2016; Lee, 2017; Stack, 2016b), been targeted for additional security check even after having boarded (Araiza, 2015; Rana, 2015), been profiled based on their spoken language (e.g., Arabic; Harvard, 2016) and appearances (Barnett, 2011; CAIR Ohio, 2009; Harvard, 2016), and even made to change their clothes to be allowed to be boarded for no justified reason (Luongo, 2016).

There is a common phrase used—traveling while Muslim—as a result of the extra level of scrutiny and harassment many Muslims and Middle Easterners receive and the higher level of hassle and stress they endure when traveling simply based on their origin, name, ethnicity, how they look and dress, and their perceived religious beliefs. In an interview with the New York Times, Nafees Syed, who practices the hijab and frequently travels for her work, said “I don’t want them [my non-Muslim colleagues] to see the humiliation I am going to go through” (as cited in Luongo, 2016, para. 7), so she intentionally secludes herself from them at security checkpoints in order to protect her dignity. Syed, a Yale Law School graduate and commercial litigator for a prestigious firm, also points out she, “has not applied for the Transportation Security Administration’s PreCheck [TSA Pre] program” (Luongo, 2016, para. 7) because “word
on the Muslim street is that if you’re Muslim[,] it’s either really hard to get that or it doesn’t necessarily help anyway” (para. 7). TSA Pre is designed to expedite security screening for travelers who are deemed low-risk and eligible. TSA denies discriminating against any type of religious groups and claims the extra scrutiny is rather because of malfunctioning scanners to get clear images through certain garments (Luongo, 2016).

Nevertheless, Arabs, Middle Easterners, Muslims, and those perceived to be Muslims continue allegations of anti-Islamic bias and targeting victimization through the TSA, CBP, FBI, and airlines. TSA, which is responsible for the travelers’ safety screening, has been featured in a series of headlines and involved in lawsuits because of some of its controversial practices, treatment, and ways of handling certain situations that could have potentially violated the individuals’ privacy and civil rights, instigating a public outrage. Such incidents include racial and religious profiling (Stanley, 2017), invasive patting down of children (Welch, 2017) and adults (C. Elliott, 2017), and scrutiny of travelers’ bookings and keeping a record of them in their Department of Homeland Security’s permanent files (Stanley, 2017). Middle Easterners and Muslims are regularly targeted and discriminated against by the TSA and Department of Homeland Security officials. For instance, a Muslim woman wearing a hijab and a long dress was pulled out of the screening line at Dayton International Airport and was taken to a private room by three female TSA agents to be searched (CAIR Ohio, 2009). Then she was forced to reveal her full body by lifting her dress up where she received an invasive pat down, including her private areas (CAIR Ohio, 2009). In another case, in December 2017, 14 Muslim women, who were all wearing a hijab and traveling separately through Newark Liberty International Airport, were pulled out of security lines
for a more extensive screening and questioning (Associated Press, 2018). CAIR filed a lawsuit on behalf of the women; all 14 women missed their flights as a result of their ordeal and believed they were profiled and harassed based on their appearance (Associated Press, 2018).

CAIR’s 2018 annual civil rights report suggested, “Federal government agencies have instigated more than a third of all anti-Muslim bias incidents in 2017” (CAIR, 2018b, para. 3) with the Customs and Border Protections (CBP) constituting 13 percent of biased and harassment incidents. The CAIR-California incident report for 2016 also showed a high volume of biased and harassment by governmental agencies within California; “immigration (38.8%), [and] law enforcement interactions (17%)” (CAIR, 2017b, para. 5). The CAIR report for the first three months of 2017 also pointed CBP was responsible for 23% of all biased incidents reported to them (Nimer, 2017). CBP has a history of controversial policies and actions; however, it has recently been involved in some highly controversial actions such as detaining travelers for hours (averaging between two to eight hours), confiscating and snooping into American citizens’ and legal immigrants and travelers’ personal electronic devices such as phones and computers while entering or exiting the U.S. (CAIR-Florida, 2017). In last couple of years, CBP agents have held travelers in custody for hours and interrogating them with intrusive questions such as political views and religious practices while also confiscating their electronic devices and demanding passwords to the devices as well as e-mail and social media accounts (CAIR-Florida, 2017; McFadden, Cauchi, Arkin, & Monahan, 2017). Regardless of their citizenship or visa status, many of those travelers, men and women, who were allegedly harassed and mistreated by CBP have been Muslims (CAIR-Florida,
At least on one occasion, when an American-Muslim man, Akram Shibly, refused to give his password to his phone, he was choked and handcuffed (CAIR-Florida, 2017; McFadden et al., 2017). He refused because the CBP agents had already gone through his phone during his earlier trip a few days before the incident (CAIR-Florida, 2017; McFadden et al., 2017). A Canadian-Muslim man was also denied entry when CBP agents learned he prays five times a day during their questioning. CAIR-Florida has filed a complaint against CBP, Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Justice on behalf of 10 American-Muslims who were targeted and subjected to enhanced screening (CAIR-Florida, 2017). The CBP also repeatedly ignored and violated court orders during the implementation of the first Muslim ban by continuing with illegal deportation and detention of travelers with valid visas (Waheed, 2018).

Besides the CBP, the FBI has been also fallen under criticism and faced lawsuits for harassing and targeting Muslims. As shown in Table 5, ranking fourth out of the five top most frequent types of anti-Muslim bias incidents, the FBI constituted 10% (270) of the incidents (CAIR, 2018a).

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harassment</td>
<td>359 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBP</td>
<td>348 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hate Crimes</td>
<td>300 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBI</td>
<td>270 (10%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A number of American-Muslim men and women around America have filed a lawsuit against the FBI, accusing it of wrongfully including their names on the terrorist watchlist (Maza, 2018). Though there is no easy or accurate way of finding out if one is on the list since this is a secret list, CAIR said those who are on the list repeatedly get harassed by the law enforcement, especially when traveling (Maza, 2018). Constantly receiving a stamp of SSSS on their boarding pass is one of the potential indications that the name of individual might be included in the watchlist (Maza, 2018). Among the lawsuits, one is attributed to a baby who was first stopped for a pat down and chemical testing when he was only seven months old (Devereaux, 2016). To many attorneys and human activists around the U.S., the practice of “secretly labeling individuals as known or suspected terrorists—‘KSTs’” (Devereaux, 2016, para. 5) is sheer “discriminatory against Muslims, arbitrary in execution, and devoid of acceptable means for legal challenge and redress” (para. 5).

However, as mentioned previously, it is not only the American government that is involved in discrimination and anti-Muslim incidents, but also the public and nongovernmental agencies that, in fact, are responsible for a large number of incidents. There are countless incidents of mistreatment and discrimination against Muslim and
Middle Eastern travelers that are religiously and racially charged with much more remaining unreported. For instance, Hakima Abdulle was removed from the plane when a flight attendant realized Abdulle was going to change her seat with another passenger (Kennedy, 2016). Abdulle, an observant Muslim, did not feel comfortable sitting between two men during her flight, so she found a volunteer with whom to change seats, but instead she was told she needed to leave the plane (Kennedy, 2016). The incident left her humiliated and in acute stress (Kennedy, 2016). A CAIR spokesperson, Zainab Chaudry, stressed her concerns over such incidents that she believed are, “part of an alarming trend of Muslim passengers being removed from U.S. flights without any reasonable explanation” (Kennedy, 2016, para. 4). Similarly, in Shebley v. United Continental Holdings Inc. (2019), a Lebanese-American couple filed a lawsuit against the United Airlines for its discriminatory actions and for being wrongfully removed from their flight after Shebley, wearing a hijab, requested assistance with her youngest child’s seat arrangement. In another incident, Tahera Ahmed, who was at the time “director of Interfaith Engagement and associate chaplain at Northwestern University” (Vissar, 2015, para. 2), triggered a social media campaign against United Airlines when she shared her Islamophobic encounter on her Facebook page. According to Ahmad, the flight attendant refused to serve her an unopened can of soda saying “I’m sorry I just can’t give you an unopened can so no diet coke for you” (Vissar, 2015, para. 3), despite serving the man next to her an unopened beer. When Ahmed later inquired about the unopened beer served to the man next to her, the flight attendant allegedly replied, “We are unauthorized to give unopened cans to people because they may use it as a WEAPON on the plane” (Vissar, 2015, para. 5). Ahmed, who wears the hijab, was also verbally insulted by a man.
on the flight when she asked others if they thought the incident was discriminatory (Vissar, 2015). While no one came to her defense, a man used vulgar language and shouted at her to be quiet by saying “You Moslem…yes you know you would use it as a WEAPON” (Vissar, 2015, para. 6). Ahmed said even though she has had other Islamophobic encounters, including being spat on and having her hijab ripped off, this incident specifically bothered her a great deal, “because she was ‘publicly targeted as a threat to people’” (Vissar, 2015, para. 10).

Though the problem is not restricted to airlines. Muslims and particularly Muslim women with the hijab suffer varying degrees of discrimination in their communities regardless of the place and time. According to CAIR’s (2018a) Civil Rights Report, while the highest percentage (20%) of all anti-Muslim bias incidents happened on air, bus, or train terminals in 2017, mostly because of the Muslim ban executive order, 6% of the incidents happened on highways, roads, alleyways, streets, or sidewalks. A new report in New York (New York City Commission on Human Rights, Frazer, & Howe, 2018) showed a higher likelihood of being pushed and shoved on a subway platform for Muslims (16.0% versus 11.7%), which becomes even more common for those who are Arab (20.4% versus 12.5%) and wear religious clothing (18.7% versus 9.4%). In fact, “More than one in four Muslim Arab women wearing a hijab had been pushed or shoved intentionally on a [New York City] subway platform (27.4%)” (New York City Commission on Human Rights, Frazer, & Howe, 2018, p. 11). Middle Eastern and Muslim drivers have also experienced various types of hate, harassment, and bias incidents while on the road and commuting. One of the participants in a research study exploring the lived experiences of the Arab Muslim women in America shared with the
researcher how she risked getting a ticket from police for having “double limo tint[ed]” (En-Nabut, 2007, p. 142) windows on her vehicle, so she can feel safe and protected while driving. In the interview, she mentioned a couple of her anti-Muslim encounters where she, wearing the Islamic head covering, could be seen through the windows of the car and had attracted hateful behavior and harassment toward her and other female relatives in the car (En-Nabut, 2007). She even articulated that one layer of tinting was not enough to prevent harassment, so she decided to add another layer, making it much harder to be seen and identified as a Muslim (En-Nabut, 2007). Nevertheless, Muslim women are discriminated against even when they are not driving. Ahlam Shehab, a student of Cal State Los Angeles, was removed from her Uber ride by the driver only a few minutes after sitting in the car, stating, “He wouldn’t give a ride to a Muslim wearing a hijab” (Bharath & Gazzar, 2018, para. 17). The incident occurred on a rainy day when Shahab was headed for her midterm exam (Bharath & Gazzar, 2018). Other than being late for her exam, she said, “The incident left her feeling ‘very unsafe and very unwanted’” (Bharath & Gazzar, 2018, para. 18).

Furthermore, ACLU (2008) reported:

Muslim women and girls have been denied the right to enter public buildings, shopping malls, and swimming pools, and amusement parks unless they submit to being searched by male guards or agree to remove their headcoverings and other garments that they wear for religious reasons. (p. 2)

In 2008, a Muslim woman in her 50s was asked by a Louisiana mall security officers to remove her hijab and Islamic garment; when she refused, he escorted her out of the mall (ACLU, 2008). In Hussein v. City of Omaha (2004), Hussein was denied entry to a
public swimming pool because of the city’s dress code policies regulating public pools. She filed a lawsuit against the discriminatory action (ACLU, 2005). As part of her settlement conditions, the City of Omaha changed its policy to allow people with religious beliefs and medical conditions wear the appropriate clothing instead of a traditional bathing suit (ACLU, 2005). Similarly, in 2005, a seventh-grade student of the Islamic faith, who was on a school trip at the Rolling Hills Water Park in Ypsilanti, Michigan, was not allowed to use some of the facilities because of her conservative attire that covered her full body (ACLU, 2008). After working with the Michigan ACLU, the facility changed its policy to accommodate its religious customers (ACLU, 2008).

Even dining outside could become very unpleasant to some veiled Muslim women, as they might be discriminated against or harassed by the employees (Hooper, 2018b) or other diners (Briscoe, Fabbre, & Pashman, 2017). For instance, in April 2016, a group of young Arab Muslim women, who, all but one, was wearing Islamic head coverings, was allegedly discriminated against and thrown out of a popular cafe chain, Urth Caffé, in Laguna Beach, California (Branson-Potts, 2018). After sitting at the Urth Caffé for about an hour, an employee informed the group of seven that they violated their 45-minute seating policy during peak time and asked them to leave (Branson-Potts, 2018). The victims claimed their order was brought to them in an unorganized and haphazard manner, with part of it being brought to them a few minutes prior to the conversation and part not yet being served (City News Service, 2016). Additionally, there were other non-Muslim patrons who were sitting there long before them and were not asked to leave (Branson-Potts, 2018); in fact, some of them approached the Muslim women to let them know they were sitting long before them, four hours for one group
(CAIR, 2016a). Shown a video that documented that there were plenty of empty seats and tables inside and outside at the time, which was also confirmed by the police, the Muslim women believed they were targeted because of “being ‘visibly Muslim’” (Branson-Potts, 2018, para. 1). The women were escorted out of the restaurant by the police after they refused to leave the restaurant upon the request (Branson-Potts, 2018). Police also noted that it was their first time being called out to the Urth Caffe to escort patrons for violating the seating policy (City News Service, 2016). Feeling humiliated and targeted by the Urth Caffe’s employees (City News Service, 2016), they filed a lawsuit that was met by a countersuit for trespassing (Branson-Potts, 2018). Urth Caffe argued most of its customers, especially at the Laguna Beach location, are Muslims and of Arab descent, and that the Urth Caffe welcomed Hijabi Muslim women to their place on a regular basis (American Freedom Law Center [AFLC], n.d.).

The case was concluded in June 2018, with a settlement a few days prior to the court trial and with no one admitting fault, no monetary compensation for the victims, and some changes to the Urth Caffe’s policies and procedures as well as conducting sensitivity and diversity training for a group of the Urth Caffe’s supervisors and employees (Branson-Potts, 2018). As part of the settlement, Urth Caffe also agreed to hold a special event on Eid al-Fitr in celebration of the conclusion of fasting month of Ramadan (Branson-Potts, 2018). ACLU of Southern California helped the victims with their legal case; their representative, Mohammad Tajsar, expressed the group’s contentment with the result of the case (Branson-Potts, 2018). Meanwhile, Urth Caffe, “hired the American Freedom Law Center, which describes itself on its website as the country’s ‘first truly authentic Judeo-Christian, public-interest law firm’” (Branson-Potts,
2018, para. 9). The news of this settlement on AFLC Web site (AFLC, n.d.) included, “a black-and-white photo of some of the Muslim plaintiffs with the word ‘FRAUD’ printed over it in red letters” (Branson-Potts, 2018, para. 10). Identifying the plaintiffs as “the seven litigious Muslim women, (AFLC, n.d., para. 8), David Yerushalmi, AFLC cofounder and senior counsel, attacked the plaintiffs, ACLU, and CAIR:

This lawsuit was a fraud and a hoax from the get-go. After two years of litigation and after Plaintiffs’ leftist/progressive lawyers, including the ACLU, spent tens of thousands of dollars trying to force a huge financial payoff for themselves and their clients at Urth Caffe’s expense, they have received no money whatsoever and have effectively dropped their claims only to run for the hills. (AFLC, n.d., para. 4)

In the article, Yerushalmi called CAIR, one of the most important and largest Muslim civil liberties and advocacy groups in Northern America, a terrorist organization (AFLC, n.d.). After using hateful and divisive language against Muslims, he alleged, “This lawsuit was being waged to use our anti-discrimination laws not for equal protection, but to attain special protection and rights for sharia-adherent Muslims who reject America and the Judeo-Christian values it stands for” (AFLC, n.d., para. 8). Yerushalmi concluded his attack by stating, “Let this be a lesson to all others. If you use lawfare as your jihad against an AFLC client, be prepared to spend tens of thousands of dollars and to get nothing in return!” (AFLC, n.d., para. 9). Yerushalmi, identified as an anti-Muslim activist by “the Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks extremist movements” (Branson-Potts, 2018, para. 13), called Western culture supreme while he said, “Islamic
culture is violent, it’s misogynist, it’s discriminatory and it’s backward, and all I have to do is point to the entire Muslim world” (SPLC, n.d., para. 3).

A different platform for prejudice against Muslim women is sports. Sports have been traditionally a male-dominated field, and women have generally struggled to become part of many sport activities and international games. However, participating and competing in different types of sports is a given right to many non-Muslim women, and yet veiled Muslim women are still struggling to find their place in sports and their right to be treated the same as their non-Muslim counterparts. Being able to swim and enjoy some water activities (ACLU, 2008; Bittermann et al., 2016) are not the only issue in sports for veiled Muslim women. Whether it is based on institutionalized bias, lack of education and awareness, or fear of the other, Muslim women have been banned from playing different sports while wearing a hijab and maintaining their religious obligations (Alvarez, 2017). Though discussion of hijabi Muslim women’s participation in sports might be new to some (Alvarez, 2017; Ayub, 2011), it has been an ongoing challenge for many Muslim women.

The problem usually lies with different sports federations’ policies that prohibit any type of headgear while playing that specific sport (Alvarez, 2017; Ayub, 2011). Even though their policies do not specifically ban hijab, federation officials often interpret and rule Islamic head coverings as headgear and cite safety issues as part of their reasoning for the ban (Alvarez, 2017; Ayub, 2011). The International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) had a ban on head coverings during soccer games, which directly affected Muslim women with hijab and Sikh men (Morales Gomez, 2017). One of FIFA’s controversial bans was on the Iranian girls’ youth national soccer team
when it attempted to participate at the Youth Olympic Games in Singapore 2010 (Ayub, 2011). The ban, which was also supported by the International Olympic Committee, was issued based on two rulings: prohibition of religious statements attached to players’ garment as well as safety concerns (Ayub, 2011). Iran’s team was finally able to participate at the games after making some changes to the players’ gear that satisfied FIFA at a time (Ayub, 2011). However, in protest to FIFA’s policies that banned hijab, “Iran’s women’s team withdrew from an Olympic qualification match against Jordan” (BBC, 2014b, para. 6) in 2011. In 2014, after a two-year trial, FIFA officially allowed men and women players to wear religious head coverings, as long as they followed certain requirements (BBC, 2014b). Similarly, in 2009, the International Basketball Federation banned hijab from any of its games after a Bahraini girls’ team at the Asian Youth Games was banned from playing while wearing the hijab (Ayub, 2011). This ban was finally overturned after reviewing proposed changes that were carefully designed to meet safety requirements; the previous International Basketball Federation rules also did not allow covering of the entire body (International Basketball Federation, 2017). A Pakistani champion weight lifter, Kulsoom Abdullah, was also initially denied participation in a game by an American weightlifting organization because of her hijab and sportswear that covered her full body (Alvarez, 2017). She was later allowed to participate when she announced the reason for the denial in a press release (Alvarez, 2017).

Islam is an important advocate for miniating health and participating in physical activities, and it encourages both men and women to be involved in sports (McGee & Hardman, 2012). Muslim scholars also echo the significance of maintaining a healthy
body and lifestyle by encouraging both Muslim men and women to be involved in physical activities on a regular basis (McGee & Hardman, 2012). However, culture, ethnicity, parental consent, dress codes, and the sports’ environment also greatly influence Muslim women’s participation in sports (Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation and Sporting Equals, 2010). Moreover, the ability to maintain religious guidelines in sports is a common cause for many of these struggles and concerns for both parents and Muslim women. Carroll and Hollinshead (1993) explained in their study the importance of maintaining Islamic guidelines and dress codes at all times, including during physical activities, and how it becomes a key factor in the level of Muslim women’s engagement in sports. In England, mandatory showers after school-based Physical Education practices in communal showers has led to many Muslim students skipping those classes; public nudity is strictly forbidden in Islam (McGee & Hardman, 2012). Elliott and Hoyle (2014) noted that there are still some issues regarding Physical Education uniforms and changing facilities even after passing of the Equality Act in 2006. Ayub (2011), Carroll and Hollinshead (1993), Elliott and Hoyle (2014), and McGee and Hardman (2012), all advised against discriminatory policies and practices and call for more cultural and religious awareness and accommodations for minority children when focusing on raising their level of engagement, as traditional Physical Education sport gears and practices do not conform to all religions and cultures.

Rise of Hate Crimes Against Muslim Women: A Striving Minority

The American government does not have an effective and accurate system of identifying and gathering information about crimes motivated by bias (Schwencke, 2017). However, from 2015 to 2017, ethnicity or national origin, being perceived as
Muslim regardless of the individuals’ type of attire, and women’s headscarf were the three most prevalent triggers for anti-Muslim bias incidents in America, with 32%, 14%, and 13% of such incidents reported respectively in 2017 (CAIR, 2018a). During 2017, a 17% increase in anti-Muslim bias incidents and a 15% increase in hate crimes against Muslims occurred compared to 2016 (CAIR, 2018a). Hate crimes and anti-Muslim incidents have been on the rise in the past several years (CAIR California, 2014, 2015, 2016; CAIR, 2016b, 2017a, 2018a), and the nature of crimes have been also increasingly more violent (CAIR, 2018a).

Muslim women in America have been targeted and victimized by racially and religiously charged incidents of hate crime, intimidation, and harassment regardless of their age, time, or place. A Muslim mother and daughter were at the West Rogers Park in Illinois when they were harassed and attacked by another woman who spat on them and continuously yelled obscenities and anti-Islamic slurs at them as they were going to their car (CAIR, 2017a). The derogatory screaming and attack continued as the victims sat down in their car. The attacker also tried to get into the vehicle, but since the doors were already locked, she started violently kicking the car and smashing the side-view mirrors. In another hate incident, a 61-year-old grandmother in Massachusetts was beaten and bruised as she was on her way to a mosque for prayers (CAIR, 2018a). She was repeatedly kicked and stabbed by the back with an umbrella by a White man when she left a train; the man had already intimidated and harassed the Muslim woman when she was still on the train, which resulted in a broken window where she was sitting. In Georgia, a 14-year-old Muslim girl was attacked in a mall parking lot by a White adult man who ripped her scarf off and shouted “terrorist” (CAIR, 2018a, p. 21) at her before
fleeing the scene. Furthurmore, a Muslim woman had to run to a store for safety when she received a long and threatening stare from a man while breastfeeding her baby in the car; he also pointed a rifle at her. There are many more incidents of hate, harassment, and intimidation that veiled Muslim women have endured throughout America from the public while traveling (Mathias, 2016b), shopping (Elmir, 2016), working (Rossman, 2017), spending time with their families, and just living their lives (CAIR, 2017a, 2018a).

Consequently, in response to the rising volume of hate incidents against Muslims and disappointment with the current policies and procedures when addressing such incidents, some students in the U.S. and UK have taken matters into their own hands by launching online hate-incident reporting systems. Project Mawla, created by Hamza Butler and “inspired by the work of figures like Ida B. Wells” (Lou, 2017, para. 5), was launched as a “counterpoint to the systemically supported notion that Islamophobia neither exists nor affects the livelihood of American Muslims” (para. 5). This web-based app, operated by the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Muslim Student Association, was released in December 2016 to help the “students and residents of Chapel Hill to document anti-Muslim incidents” (para. 5). Project Mawla’s objective is to create a safe space for the Muslim community to report anti-Islamic incidents to their community through this app since they believe many victims in their community do not report the incidents to the police for a variety of reasons (Lou, 2017). In addition, they believe generating a safe platform would also help the Muslim community to be more aware of the issues related to Islamophobia (Lou, 2017).

Another app called Islamophobia Reporting App was created with the purpose of enabling “individuals that have been subjected to Legal, social, religious, and political
discrimination, or on the receiving end of an anti-Muslim racist incident or hate crime, to document the situation and create a comprehensive statistical picture of the Islamophobia phenomenon” (Islamophobia Studies Center, n.d., Purpose Statement). This academic-based app released by the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project of the University of California, Berkeley’s Center for Race and Gender seeks to collect empirical data on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim discrimination not only to raise awareness in the community and governing bodies, but also to combat this phenomena (Islamophobia Studies Center, n.d.). The Islamophobia Reporting App is funded and facilitated by the educational-not-for-profit organization of the Islamophobia Studies Center in Berkeley, California, and was created after a survey in the San Francisco Bay Area proved Islamophobia to be a major challenge for the respondents (Islamophobia Studies Center, n.d.). The rise of Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslim women have additionally caused many Muslim women to take further cautionary measures such as taking self-defense classes or even removing or considering removing their hijab in order to protect themselves and their families from harm (Elmir, 2016).

As established throughout this study, being Arab and visibly Muslim raises the level of vulnerability of veiled Arab Muslim women to xenophobia and prejudice, a phenomenon that has a lasting effect. America is a country of opportunities that stands for freedom of speech, faith, and political point of views, and yet the life of Muslim women in America start with being bullied and harassed from their youth and childhood at school and continues to the personal and professional daily struggles in adulthood. In this chapter, examples of biased, anti-Muslim incidents are described in more detail, demonstrating regardless of the details and outcomes or whether there was a malicious
intent in the wrongful doings or the actions taken, Muslim women, particularly those with the hijab, continued to be victimized. Take for example an incident involving Jameelah Medina; she was harassed by the arresting deputy and was called a terrorist while her rights were further violated when her hijab was forcibly removed in the presence of other males while in the custody of San Bernardino County’s West Valley Detention Center. In another example, Tahera Ahmed was discriminated against when the flight attendant allegedly refused to serve her an unopened can of soda. She was not only victimized by the flight attendant, but also by another fellow passenger who shouted at her by using obscenities and Islamophobic language. In addition, Ahmed has been subjected to other incidents of hate and Islamophobia prior to this incident. Similarly, in the incident at the Urth Caffe where a group of Muslim women were allegedly kicked out of the Urth Caffe’s Laguna Beach location for violating the 45-minute peak-time seating policy, they were targeted and victimized by employees even as other non-Muslims who had stayed there much longer were not asked to leave. They were degraded once more, even after they had reached a settlement, when Urth Caffe’s representing attorney attacked the plaintiffs by calling them frauds and using anti-Islamic rhetoric in a press release.

This is a broad picture of the life of many veiled Muslim women in the U.S. where they are being frequently targeted and discriminated against—a cycle of victimizations and oppression referred to as spirit injury and spirit murder by some scholars. This is the dangerous phenomena about which scholars such as Williams (1987) and Wing (2000) warn. According to these Critical Race Feminism activists, victims are often victimized multiple times and in different ways, as seen in the examples provided, which leads to spirit injury first, and as the oppressions and victimizations
continue, it transforms to spirit murder (Williams, 1987; Wing, 2000). Williams and Wing warn that psychological, spiritual, and cultural oppression of individuals, specifically minority women, does not only hurt that individual but also the whole society. Through this perspective, any discriminatory and hurtful act that shatters an individual, in this case a Muslim woman, also shatters the society as a whole because it is these individuals who construct the society.

Many human rights activists argue and research studies indicate that the freedom to choose one’s clothing and whether to wear Islamic head coverings and garments without being worried about the stereotypes or tangible consequences is what real freedom is to women (Elmir, 2016; Jailani, 2016; Mogahed, 2018; Zempi, 2014). This is the opposite of what many Westerners believe and claim, which is that hijab and Islamic modesty are ways for Muslim men to oppress women. It is this type of freedom of thought and behavior that gives women agency. Banning hijab or marginalizing hijabi Muslim women in society is the complete opposite of freedom and a democratic country; such actions to many Muslim women and human rights activists are only oppressive and misogynistic by the White and non-Muslim men to Muslim women (Jailani, 2016; Zempi, 2014). Elmir (2016), the deputy director of Michigan’s ACLU and a lecturer “on issues related to Islamophobia, free speech, and the intersection of race, faith, and gender” (para. Author bio.) emphasized “discrimination in the name of women’ rights or religious tolerance is still discrimination” (para. 18).

Throughout the years and particularly in the last decade, Muslim women have worked very hard to ensure equality inside and outside their community and have been able to secure many accomplishments despite the stereotypes and string of challenges.
Many in the Muslim community dismiss the idea of hijab as a barrier to success and believe veiled Muslim women’s accomplishments are a testament to their empowerment and that they can accomplish anything in society as long as they conform to their personal, cultural, and religious values. In an effort to educate non-Muslims about the hijab and Muslim women and bring solidarity in the mist of hate crimes, veiled Muslim women have initiated different campaigns. One of these campaigns, #IStandWithHijabis, was held in Garden Grove, California, as the Orange County’s first World Hijab Day event, with more than 400 people participating, about twice as was expected, with many wearing pink scarves (Carcamo, 2017). This event was organized by Rida Hamida, “the first hijab-wearing Muslim woman to work in public office in orange County” (para. 5) and the “president of the Arab American Chamber of California Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice and the Islamic Society of Orange County” (para. 8). Believing “hijabi rights are women’s rights” (Bharath, 2017b, para. 3), Hamida organized this event in February 2017 to call non-Muslims help fight prejudice against Muslim women.

American politics and governmental entities have seen an increase in the involvement of Muslim women with Islamic head coverings. For instance, in December 2015, Carolyn Walker Diallo became a judge for the New York City Civil court while wearing a hijab and swearing in on the Quran (Fuseini, 2017). Ilhan Omar, a refugee, was elected as one of Minnesota’s U.S. Representatives in 2016 and is currently running for another term. Linda Sarsour, a Palestinian-American and civil rights activist, made sure her voice was heard and coorganized a massive woman’s march in Washington in 2017 to bring awareness to women’s rights (Fuseini, 2017). Furthermore, though many police departments in America still do not allow Muslim policewomen to wear a hijab or
simply do not yet have a clear policy on this, some have adopted policies that allow Muslim women to wear their hijab while on duty as uniformed police officers (Tolan, 2016). New York and Washington, D.C. Police Departments both have female officers who wear a hijab (Tolan, 2016).

Hijabi Muslim women have been also in the spotlight when it comes to sports. Ibtihaj Muhammad received a great deal of attention in the U.S. not only for seizing medals as a woman fencer for the country, but also for being the first Muslim woman to wear the Islamic head covering and competing on the American team in the Olympic Games (Elmir, 2016; Wharton, 2016). Muhammad has since become an inspiring role model to many other hijabi Muslim women and professional athletes around the world, including woman rights’ activist Dr. Hajar Abulfazl, a football (soccer) player and former captain for the National Women’s Football (soccer) team in Afghanistan, and Kulsoom Abdullah, a Pakistani champion weight lifter (Alvarez, 2017). Some even believe Muhammad and the attention she received during the Olympics played a key factor in Nike launching a Pro Hijab sportswear line for Muslim women (Alvarez, 2017).

However, even at the high point of success, veiled Muslim women such as Muhammad are still undermined and criticized for their choice of faith and beliefs. For instance, Muhammad’s accomplishment as a hijab-wearing, medal-winning fencer was criticized by some such as Rush Limbaugh, a conservative political commentator and radio host, who stated:

But why celebrate a woman wearing something that’s been forced on her by a religion, a religion run by men?…She may actively agree to do it, don’t
misunderstand, but it’s a religion run by men that subjugates and subordinates women. (Elmir, 2016, para. 15)

Meanwhile, although grateful for the opportunity to raise awareness about Muslim women, Muhammad and many other Muslim women and athletes wish the hijab and religion of Muhammad was not a focal point in her accomplishment, and that she was evaluated and praised solely on her skills just as other athletes from other religions (Alvarez, 2017). Shireen Ahmed, who is an activist and sport journalist specializing in Muslim women, is one of those who voiced her concern, stating, “The headlines that scream about the accomplishment of a ‘Hijabi American’ are unhelpful as they reduce an athlete to her outfit” (Alvarez, 2017, para. 19). While recognizing the important role Muhammad has played in raising awareness and normalizing hijab and Muslim women, she emphasized “that we don’t refer to any other athlete who observes a faith by a religious accessory, be it a necklace or tattoo featuring a cross, the Star of David, or a ‘Karma’ symbol” (para. 19). Similar to Ahmed, weight lifter Amna Al Haddad, from the United Arab Emirates who collaborated with Nike to create the Pro Hijab athletic wear, says the beauty of sport is that it does not know religion, gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, so everyone, including Muslim women athletes with a hijab, should be able to pursue freely their dreams in sports, and the only focus should be on their skills and performance (Dawling, 2018). Muhammad also wishes that she did not have to work so hard to be where she is athletically simply because of her religious background, but hopes now that she has endured the hardship and laid the groundwork, many other Muslim women follow in her footsteps (Alvarez, 2017). Expressing gratitude, Muhammad believed, “Having a Muslim woman, especially from the United States, who’s played on
Team USA, who’s medaled at the Olympics, it shows people in and outside of the Muslim communities that it can be done” (Alvarez, 2017, para. 21).

Veiled Muslim women also have been increasingly active in the fashion and entertainment industries. Halima Aden was 19 years old when she became the first hijab wearing contestant to compete for Miss Minnesota in 2016; she also appeared in a burkini in the competition’s swimwear segment (Shapiro, 2016). Aden, who came to America as a refugee at the age of seven, is an international model who features some of the most luxurious brands such as Dolce & Gabbana, walks the lavish runaways of New York and Milan, appears in major U.S. publication and on magazine covers such as Allure, British Vogue, Teen Vogue, and Vogue Arabia, and became a UNICEF ambassador (Fisher, 2018). Referring to “her hijab as her crown” (Sini, 2017, para. 8) Aden said in an interview with the BBC, “It’s almost surprising we haven’t seen a hijab-wearing model. It should be normal, it shouldn’t be any different to any other model” (para. 8). While reflecting on designers’ reactions, she highlighted, “Designers should be happy with it. It shows their company is empowering women from all different walks of life, different faiths, and that’s important” (para. 9).

Though controversial both within and outside the Muslim community, featuring hijab and modest clothing for Muslim women has become increasingly popular among some large and well-known brands worldwide in last couple of years. Many Muslim women endorse this move and believe Muslim women have been left out of the clothing and fashion industry for many years; however, at the same time, they realize this represents significant revenue for such companies (Dawling, 2018; Sago, 2016; Sini, 2017). A report shows, “Muslims around the world spent an estimated $244 billion in
clothing” (Sago, 2016, para. 14) in 2015 and predicts the spending “to reach more than $300 billion by 2020” (para. 14); other reports estimate that market to reach $5 trillion by 2020 (Alvarez, 2017, para. 2). Hijab is being commercialized (Sini, 2017) by many companies that realize how profitable their lines could be thanks to many Muslim women athletes, fashion, and social media influencers. There were about 150 modest clothing brands in 2016, most only a couple of years old, while other brands such as Dolce & Gabbana, H&M, Marks & Spencer (Sago, 2016), Gap, Nike (Sini, 2017), and Uniqlo actively took part in creating and featuring headscarves and modest clothing targeting Muslim women. Even cosmetic brands such as Mac have tried to benefit from this new trend by featuring hijabi models in their campaigns and social media channels.

Though many Muslim women do not like the fact that hijab is being commercialized, they believe this is an important step forward in catering to Muslim women, which ultimately also helps with empowerment through visibility and having a choice while encouraging Muslim women to participate in sports and other social engagements (Dawling, 2018; Sago, 2016). Thus, the Muslim community has generally responded positively to this movement even though there were always other smaller retailers that catered to Muslim women (Dawling, 2018). However, many non-Muslims have criticized such brands, particularly Nike, for creating hijab sportswear, saying this only helps to oppress women and normalizes this act (Dawling, 2018). Similarly, magazines such as Allure that have featured hijab-wearing Muslim women are condemned by many for glamorizing hijab, which, in their view, is a tool for oppressing women in Islam (Sini, 2017).
As for entertainment, hijbi Muslim women in the West have pushed through criticism from both Muslim and non-Muslim communities to follow their dreams and reach their goals. There are many YouTube vloggers, bloggers, and social media influencers who have thousands of followers that also include non-Muslims. Ascia Al Faraj (2.4 million), Dina Torkia (known as Tokio; 1.4 million), Basma K (425,000), and Hassanah El-Yacoubi (46,500) are only some of the most well-known Hijabi Muslim women influencers who have followers on their Instagram accounts only as of August 2018. While these women often share tips about makeup and modest fashion styling, they also share their life stories and talk about important topics such as discrimination against Muslim women inside and outside of the Muslim community, personal values, daily struggles, and issues around female body image. Social media influencers do not only influence their followers, but as mentioned, they also play a key role influencing well-known brands and companies to include veiled Muslim women in their campaigns and products.

However, these women are not always popular with audiences, whether it be Muslims or non-Muslims, and many disagree with their actions for different reasons. For instance, one of the most controversial is attributed to Noor Tagouri, who is a Libyan American journalist and was featured in Playboy magazine’s October 2016 edition (Sini, 2017). Tagouri, also the first hijabi anchor on commercial U.S. television, was heavily criticized by the Muslim community for being featured and associated with a magazine that is, at its core, against all Islamic values and objectifies women (Uddin & Younis, 2016). She believed this magazine would be a place to make a case for Muslim modesty, but it caused a significant backlash and condemnation from the Muslim community and
confused many non-Muslims (Uddin & Younis, 2016). Another highly controversial example of veiled Muslim women in entertainment is a rap video that was about wearing a hijab. The woman behind this video, released in 2017, is Mona Haydar, a Syrian American Muslim poet and activist, who was also noticeably pregnant at the time (Estatie, 2017). The lyrics reflect the daily struggles of a Muslim woman who wears the Islamic headscarf; however, there are also other Muslim women dancing in the video while wearing a hijab, which has upset many Muslims (Estatie, 2017). In both Tagouri and Haydar’s cases, while some Muslim women cheered for them and felt empowered, many in the Muslim community were offended because they believe hijab is not only a piece of clothing but an active way of living modestly and such actions contradict those values (Estatie, 2017; Uddin & Younis, 2016).

While celebrating the rise of veiled Muslim women in different aspects of society, the portrayal and coverage of their success remain daunting issues to the Muslim community at large. Whenever there is media coverage of successful hijab-wearing Muslim women, they are often distinguished from the Muslim community and are said to have broken stereotypes. While the media give credit to that individual, they discredit the all other Muslim women. Therefore, many Muslims find such coverage highly offensive since they believe the hidden and bigger message is that Muslims are not normal, they are separate from the rest of society, and that Muslim women are, in general, oppressed and unsuccessful.

Eltahir (2016), a writer based in Boston and Khartoum, Sudan, addressed the issue of Muslim normalcy in her article titled “Muslim Americans Should Reject the Politics of Normalcy.” In this article, published in The Atlantic, Eltahir stated that many
Muslims in America, especially Muslim women, feel the need to prove themselves normal to combat discrimination and stereotypes. In her view, the rise of Islamophobia and hate crimes have put a heavy burden on the Muslim community in America, which presses them to believe they need to prove “their all-American identity, whether by disguising their foreign-sounding names, changing their appearances, avoiding their native tongues, or obscuring their religious affiliations” (para. 2). For many, it is an effort to “appear as ‘normal’ as possible by white, Christian standards” (Eltahir, 2016, para. 2) since being visibly Muslim “has material consequences” (para. 2). However, she argued that American Muslims should not actively try to lose their own religious and cultural identity in the hopes of combating Islamophobia and receiving acceptance from the general society (Eltahir, 2016). Eltahir (2016) believed this issue is amplified for Muslim women who are being constantly undermined, leaving a hefty burden on them to “fit the Western image of a modern women” (para. 10); something that is reinforced by the media. Eltahir (2016) emphasized that American Muslims are just as entitled to their freedom of political and religious views as any other American. Thus, they must live their lives unapologetically and according to their values instead of actively trying to prove they do not fit the wrong and negative stereotype of Muslims; they do not need to go out of their way to prove their American identity or to be accepted (Eltahir, 2016). Comparing Black Americans’ situations to Muslims, Eltahir (2016) argued, “True acceptance for Muslims will only come when those Muslims who wear their religious differences openly are seen as being just as American as those whose choices hew closer to the norm” (para. 2), and that trying to blend in does not prevent discrimination. Black
Americans also make up a large percentage of American Muslims (Eltahir, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2017).

In line with Eltahir (2016), Asma Uddin, a writer and expert advisor on religious liberty, and Inas Younis, a freelance journalist and commentator, believe there is an extra pressure on veiled Muslim women to prove they are like other women, and that the hijab is not a barrier to anything they desire to achieve (Uddin & Younis, 2016). A testament to this phenomenon, Uddin and Younes (2016) explained why Playboy decided to publish a piece about Muslim women and modesty in its magazine, which is based on open sexuality, and they further explained why it is offensive to the Muslim women. They pointed out Playboy stands for open sexuality and unlimited boundaries and “believes that modesty and chastity [which is also at the very core of the hijab] are a product of a shaming and oppressive culture, which it condemns” (Uddin & Younis, 2016, para. 9). Thus, in their view, Uddin and Younis (2016) believed featuring a Muslim woman who wears the Islamic head covering “among overtly sexual content” (para.10) is a mockery and diminishing piece to hijab-wearing Muslim women and all the values they hold dear.

In their view, Playboy sexualized the hijab and turned it to another costume and mockery just as it has done with the roles of women in other valued professions and with their uniforms such as nurses (Uddin & Younis, 2016). They argued Playboy only presented this piece through its lens and not Muslim women’s while fully benefiting from them and the headlines they made (Uddin & Younis, 2016). Though this article by Amani Al-Khatahtbeh was written in 2015, and prior to the Playboy article, her argument applied to this case and resonated with many Muslims, sending a clear message to non-
Muslims: “If You Don’t Stand by Muslim Women Now Then Don’t Profit Off Us Later,” the article’s title stated in Forbes. Furthermore, Uddin and Younis (2016) warned that being too eager to be accepted and conforming to the politics of normalcy could eventually backfire, and “the Muslim community can and has fallen prey to the perversion of its beliefs in the guise of acceptance and celebration” (para. 13) as it did in this example. In their view, such involvement with hijab-wearing Muslim women does not help with eradicating misconceptions but rather creates more confusion (Uddin & Younis, 2016).

Mogahed (2018), the director of research at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, has similar views on the place of Muslims and Muslim women, particularly in America, based on her personal experiences and research. Different polls and studies have shown that though Republicans have the most negative views toward Muslims compared to Democrats who are more open minded and friendly toward minority groups, a large number of Democrats also share similar views (Cox & Jones, 2015; Lipka, 2017; Mogahed, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2014). Mogahed (2018) stated one of these common views is both parties’ perception of Muslim women and the belief that Muslims “have outdated views of women” (para. 4). Parallel to Elmir (2016), Jailani (2016), and Zempi (2014), Mogahed (2018) also believed what actually subjugates Muslim women is not “Islam or hijab, but instead racism and Islamophobia—assaults justified in part by a supposed desire to save them” (para. 10) a “patronizing prejudice” (para. 10) in addition to gender-based discrimination.

However, based on the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding’s data, Mogahed (2018) disputed the idea of Muslim women’s need to be saved by their non-
Muslim counterparts, as they “are among the most educated faith group in the country [USA], and outpace their male counterparts in higher education” (para. 10). Furthermore, according to the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding poll (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017) and many other studies (Bullock, 2011; Hasan, 2011; Jailani, 2016; Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; Zempi, 2014; Zimmerman, 2013), many Muslim women who wear the hijab, particularly in Western countries such as America, are proud and empowered by it. While hijab is a very personal matter and Muslim women wear them for a variety of reasons (Croucher, 2008; Jailani, 2016; Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; Zempi, 2014), the 2017 Institute for Social Policy and Understanding poll found “more than 40 percent of American women” (Mogahed, 2018, para. 10) who wear the hijab, “do so either as an act of piety (54 percent), to be identified as a Muslim (21 percent), or for modesty (12 percent)” (para. 10). Family requirements constituted only 1% of the poll (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017); something that Mogahed (2018) used in her argument. She argued Muslim women do not need pity or to be saved but require respect to their personal decisions even if they do not fit the common image of Western’s liberty and moderation (Mogahed, 2018). Nonetheless, she accentuated Muslim women’s need for saving from discriminative policies such as the Trump Muslim ban, which was unpled by the Supreme Court and affected a large group of American citizens, despite the pain and suffering of many, including Muslim women (Mogahed, 2018).

Various researchers such as Ayub (2011), Das and Shirvani (2013), Hannan (2011), Litchmore and Safdar (2016), Zainal and Wong (2017), and Zempi (2014) suggested bias and restrictions on Muslim women only isolate them and deprive them of identity, autonomy, and agency. Instead, they suggested Muslim women’s decision to
wear their religious garment should be respected. This way, they can be free from biases related to their faith, appearance, and gender and have the ability to be fully engaged in society and their preferred activities while being empowered by their individually crafted autonomy instead of social forces. These researchers unanimously believed Muslim women should not compromise or be forced to choose between their faith and being engaged in society, and they should enjoy the same rights as women of other faiths; otherwise, this group will be marginalized and oppressed even further.

**Summary**

In this chapter, a brief historical and political background of Islam and Muslims in America was presented. A review of the literature formed a theoretical foundation and framework on prejudice and hate crime. The causes of prejudice against minority groups were discussed through a sociological perspective and its three main theories: functional, conflict, and interactions. In addition, to construct the theoretical framework on prejudice, the three major approaches of personality-centered, cultural-based, and power conflict were briefly discussed. Then, the issues of prejudice and hate crimes against Muslims in America, pre- and post-September 11, were summarized. Discrimination and hate crimes against Muslims have been on the rise since the terrorist attacks in 2015 and the 2016 presidential election. Many argue President Trump’s policies and use of inflammatory language against Muslims, immigrants, and minorities has a direct connection to the spike. Furthermore, scholars and Muslims argue Western media and mass news reports have continuously had a negative impact on creating a negative stereotypical image of Muslims and Arabs. To conclude this chapter, a multidimensional perspective on the important historical and contemporary elements relevant to veiled
Muslim women, including prejudice and hate crimes as well as their life and struggles in America and how they are striving despite them, were broadly reviewed.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the methodology of this study. After restating the purpose statement and research questions, the research design, population, and sample are provided. The instruments, process of data collection, and analysis of data are described in detail. Last, the research limitations are outlined.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old) in the contemporary era.

**Research Questions**

This study was guided by one central research question and two subquestions designed to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges experienced by Southern California female Arab Muslims (18–40 years old). Research questions were as follows.

**Central Question**

What are the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old)?

**Subquestions**

1. What work or education challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) experience?
2. What social or public challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) experience?
The phenomenological method is rooted in philosophy and focuses on revealing a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday life experiences (Patton, 2002). Considered to be an “inductive qualitative research tradition” (Reiners, 2012, p. 1), this methodology is “rooted in the 20th century philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl (descriptive) and Martin Heidegger (interpretive)” (p. 1). The foundation of the phenomenological framework is based on the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a phenomenon for a certain group of individuals or people (Patton, 2002). A phenomenological study empowers the researcher to understand a phenomenon or an event, particularly through the lens of its participants and their experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). As with any other qualitative method, experiences are subject to interpretations in a phenomenological framework, and the reality is the participants’ perceived experience (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In other words, a phenomenological study specifically and heavily relies on the human beings’ perceived world experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2002).

Unlike a positivist paradigm that views reality as “ordered, rational, and logical” (Reiners, 2012, p. 1) and coherent with the naturalistic paradigm, a phenomenological framework deems reality as subjective and based on individuals’ perceptions. Key to the phenomenological research are the interactions between the researcher and the participants that lead to knowledge; this dynamic and inductive approach creates a unique perspective to a phenomenon that is otherwise not feasible (Reiners, 2012). In this study, the researcher is interested in exploring the lived experiences of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) in the contemporary era.
Though experiences are diverse and unique to each individual (Eichelberger, 1989; Patton, 2002), living reality for this minority population is not wholly portrayed if its lived experiences are not described and understood. As Patton (2002) described, a phenomenological study “focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (p. 117). Phillips and Bowling (2003) also emphasized the importance of giving voice to minority groups and learning about their experiences and perspectives. The lived experiences of veiled Muslim women who are easy targets for discrimination are often overlooked in academic studies and mainstream society (Zempi, 2014); thus, a phenomenology framework was an ideal methodology to learn about this minority group’s perspective.

**Population**

According to Creswell (2012), a population is “a group of individuals who comprise the same characteristics” (p. 625). This population shares the same characteristics, and the researcher planned to generalize the results of the study to that group of “individuals, objects, or events” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). In other words, the population of the study, also “referred to as the target population or universe” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129), encompasses the entire set of a group to which the data would be generalized.

The population in this study also shares a few key characteristics that are the same. They are being Arab, Muslim, female, between the ages of 18 and 40, wearing the Islamic head covering, and living in Southern California. The Islamic head covering, also known as hijab, is the practice of covering the hair with some type of clothing for Muslim women, which also makes them visibly Muslim. An Islamic head covering,
veiling, and hijab might carry a different meaning to different individuals or in different contexts. However, this study utilized these words interchangeably throughout, and all words are used as a reference to the covering of the hair by Muslim women for religious purposes. Muslim women who cover their hair also wear modest clothing.

Specific data about the number of individuals who fit the population category do not exist, thus, an overview of general statistics about Muslims in America is provided. Islam is the fastest growing religion and the second largest religion in the world (Lipka, 2017). The population of Muslims around the world was estimated to be 1.8 billion in 2015 (Lipka, 2017). Muslims in the U.S. were estimated to be about 3.45 million (Lipka, 2017) to 12 million (Sullivan et al., 2015). Based on a Pew Research Center (2017) report, 2.05 million of 3.35 Muslims in America are adults (Lipka, 2017). Arabs and Middle Easterners make up 41% of the American Muslim population, though they are not evenly distributed throughout the U.S. and most live in large metropolitan cities such as Los Angeles and New York (Lipka, 2017).

**Target Population**

A target population or sampling framework consists of all individuals chosen from an entire population from which to draw samples (Creswell, 2012). The outcome data from the study would be generalized to the target population (Creswell, 2012). There are usually some limitations to sampling a large target population, which also affect its generalizability (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Thus, it is important to ensure the target population and the sampling framework are clearly defined (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
The target population of this study is the Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) and live in Southern California. Many factors such as time and cost constraints affect the ability of a researcher to study large groups. Thus, a small population within Southern California was chosen for this study. However, because of the lack of demographic information about this particular population and available statistics, the following information is provided to help draw a better picture of the size of this group.

There was approximately 390,300 Muslims in California in 2014 (Pew Research Center, n.d.). Reports from the American Religious Bodies shows an estimated 120,868 Muslims live in the following Southern California counties: Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura (Mendelson, 2015; see APPENDIX A).

Furthermore, in 2002, the ratio of Muslim men to Muslim women was 2 to 1 (Pipes & Duran, 2002); however, this statistic could not be verified in 2017. When referring and extrapolating the data, there are approximately about 25,312 Muslim adult females living in Southern California. According to Pew Research Center (2017), 38% of American Muslim women always, and another 5% most of the time, wear the hijab. Considering these numbers, there are more than 10,000 adult Muslim females who consistently wear the hijab in Southern California, with a large portion being of Arab heritage. Based on current trends in American Muslim society, this number is steadily and rapidly growing.

Sample

The sample is a group of participants from which data are collected and are to be generalized to an intended larger group (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Similarly
defined by Creswell (2012) and Patton (2015), a sample is a smaller size of the target population. Flick (2007) emphasized, “Constructing a research design successfully means to define who or what shall be studied (and who or what shall not)” (p. 44). Gay and Airasian (1996) explained, “Sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals for a study in such a way that the individuals represent the larger group from which they were selected” (p. 111).

The anticipated sample size for this study was 12 participants who were living in Southern California and were female, Arab, Muslim, between the ages of 18 and 40, and who wear the Islamic head covering. The participants of this study were chosen using purposeful sampling, also known as purposive sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In a purposeful sampling, the researcher selects participants who can provide the best insight and information about the research question and address the purpose of study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher makes that judgment based on the knowledge that she has about the population of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

To recruit the participants, the researcher contacted various Islamic centers and associations within Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside counties for referrals. One individual, who then became the first participant, contacted the researcher and connected her to other potential participants. Once possible participants were identified, they were contacted individually for the initial screening to confirm they fit the sampling criteria for this research and to ensure they were still interested in participation after the purpose of the study and the process of data gathering were fully explained to them via e-mail.
Finally, participants were interviewed individually using in-depth semistructured interview questions that met the expectations of a phenomenological study to reveal the essence and lived experience of young Arab American veiled Muslim women in Southern California. A phenomenological approach is heavily reliant on interviews as a single data collection method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Furthermore, all participants were rewarded a $25 gift card at the end of initial interview session as a gesture of gratitude for their willingness to participate in this study and allocating their time.

**Instrumentation**

To collect data, researchers use variety of tools and instruments, referred to as instrumentation (Roberts, 2010). Qualitative researchers are identified as instruments, and they play an important role in such studies, as their personal experiences, backgrounds, and biases could influence the data collection and data analysis process (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). This becomes particularly crucial in phenomenological studies since they heavily rely on one single method of data collection, in-depth interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010), and the researcher acts as the primary instrument (Creswell, 2014). A phenomenological approach is chosen when the researcher’s goal is to capture “the essence of the experience as perceived by the participants” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 346).

Therefore, because of the researcher being the instrument in this qualitative, phenomenological study, and that the researcher’s personal characteristics and experiences may influence the data collection process, it is imperative to identify clearly the potential biases the researcher might bring to this study and its outcome. This study’s researcher has very similar characteristics to the participants. She is an American
Muslim woman who practices the hijab. She has been living, working, and going to school in couple different cities in Southern California and in various settings of public, private, nonprofits, and governmental institutions. She also fits within the same age group as the participants. However, though she is Middle Eastern, she is not Arab and does not speak Arabic. The researcher is Persian, is originally from Iran, and speaks Farsi or Persian. She was born and raised in Iran and immigrated to the U.S. in her early adulthood. She has been subjected to various degrees of prejudice and hateful acts as a result of her religious and racial background both by the public and government officials throughout her life in America. Though she has noticed some changes as a result of the current political climate, and despite her negative experiences, overall, she finds Southern California a relatively safe place to live as a Muslim female.

It is imperative to note, many researchers do not believe knowledge is “definite and univocal” (Creswell, 2014, p. 99) as it “fundamentally involves issues of power” (p. 99) and “research report is not transparent but rather it is authored by a raced, gendered, classed, and politically oriented individual” (p. 99). Researchers believe besides those factors and in addition to many others, sexual orientation, first language, and physical ability (health) play key roles in understanding experiences (Creswell, 2014). Nevertheless, ethical issues regarding the potential researcher’s bias as a result of her background and a procedure to ensure a maintenance of her objectivity are discussed in the limitation section.

To collect data for this study, the researcher employed in-depth, phenomenological, semistructured, and face-to-face interviews while digitally recording the data. Interview questions for this study were inspired by the following studies: En-
Nabut (2007), Khosrojerdi (2015), Zempi (2014), and Zimmerman (2013). Nevertheless, an expert in this topic reviewed and ensured the appropriateness and effectiveness of the questions (APPENDIX B).

**Interview Procedure**

A distinctive feature of a phenomenological interview in social science studies is that it involves “subjects” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 97) who have “consciousness and agency” (p. 97). This is to point out that both the interviewer and the interviewee have, in fact, the capability of “producing accounts of themselves and their worlds, [and] interact together in an ever-developing conversation” (p. 97). However, to benefit from the interview and to generate information that interests the study, the focus of the interviewer must be on the interviewees’ account (Høffding & Martiny, 2015).

Furthermore, when a researcher is interested in sensitive issues and studying “hard to access groups” (Zempi, 2014, p. 72), it is most appropriate to conduct the interviews individually compared to group interviews or focus groups. This way the researcher can offer a more intimate setting to the interviewees, elevate the level of confidentiality, and focus on one individual at a time while also building a stronger rapport with the participant (Zempi, 2014). Thus, all interviews for this study were conducted separately.

In-depth interviews require open-response questions to develop data that can truly reflect the participants’ experiences and their perspectives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The interview questions for this study were semistructured. This limited the researcher’s influence over the participants’ responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010), and at the same time, it gave the researcher some flexibility to diverge or ask further
questions for clarification and more details (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Open-ended questions prevent the researcher from favorably designing questions in a manner that cater to predetermined data and desired responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The researcher anticipated employing interview questions in a chronological manner for all participants; having an order and structure to the interview questions make the process of interviewing move more smoothly and increase reliability. However, having flexibility is as important. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) indicated more than having any particular format for a qualitative interview, the researcher needs to pay close attention to the “probes and pauses” (p. 357). This means “establishing trust, being genuine, maintaining eye contact, and conveying through phrasing, cadence, and voice tone that the researcher hears and connects with the person elicit more valid data than a rigid approach” (p. 357).

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), one of the characteristics of a phenomenological interview is that it allows “an explicit focus on the researcher’s personal experiences combined with the experiences of the interviewees” (p. 356). In addition, Van Maanen (1990) suggested phenomenological researchers may use and take advantage of their own personal experiences when gathering data; having knowledge and experiences with the same phenomenon could help them better engage with the participants. Thus, the researcher’s background and experiences likely helped her when engaging with her participants and building a rapport. However, he also warns researchers that knowing too much about the subject of study may blind them to the true interpretation of the participants’ experiences and meaning by jumping to conclusions.
and overlooking the collected data (Van Maanen, 1990). Hence, the researcher constantly reflected on her own biases to ensure they did not interfere with the process of data collection or analysis (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) and asked for details and explanations to limit her own judgments and premature conclusions.

**Pilot Interview**

A pilot interview was conducted prior to the formal participant interviews. The participant for the pilot interview had similar characteristics as the main participants (Roberts, 2010). Such interviews are only to help the researcher become acquainted with the process of interviews, to reflect on her interview questions and skills, and to ensure the effectiveness of interview procedures. It also helps with evaluating the validity of the instrument (Roberts, 2010). Therefore, the pilot interview was not transcribed, and the collected data were not used as part of the study (Roberts, 2010). However, the interview was conducted the same way as the formal interviews; therefore, all required steps, including audio recording the interview, were carefully followed. At the end of the pilot interview, the interviewee completed a feedback questionnaire to evaluate the process of interview and the questions asked (APPENDIX C). She had the option to answer them orally or in writing.

An interview observer was not used in this study at any point because of the sensitive subject matter and to limit outside effects, distractions and stress on the participants; create a more comfortable setting; and build a trusting relationship between the interviewees and the researcher. Because of the current social and political circumstances, many Muslims who live in America fear public exposure and may avoid public interactions with strangers. Based on published reports of being under
surveillance (Devereaux, 2016; Scahill & Devereaux, 2014; Senzai, 2004; Shams & Arastu, 2013), many Muslims may find individuals approaching them for the purpose of interviewing as suspicious. This issue may be amplified if, as in this study, the individual feels as if her social or political opinions are solicited and recorded. As described in Chapter II, the U.S. Patriot Act and similar policies and procedures in the aftermath of September 11 have particularly targeted and impacted the Arab, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Muslim communities in America (Senzai, 2004). Such practices have disregarded due process, privacy, and equal protections and altered the mind-set of security services and law enforcement, directly and indirectly, toward the Muslim community (Senzai, 2004). Reports suggest many Muslims in America are under surveillance and on the terrorist watchlist despite having “concrete facts” (Devereaux, 2016, para. 7) or “irrefutable evidence” (para. 7). A 2013 report showed how the New York Police Department’s secret surveillance of the Muslim community resulted in “a striking self-censorship of political speech and activism” (Shams & Arastu, 2013, p. 4) and “conversations relating to foreign policy, civil rights and activism are all deemed off-limits as interviewees fear such conversations would draw greater NYPD scrutiny” (p. 4). Knowing law enforcement and security services utilize members of the same community as “informants or undercover officers to spy on their communities” (p. 5) have created “an atmosphere of mistrust” (p.5), hyper vigilance in regard to one’s behavior and social interactions, and a “particular hesitation with regards to new faces” (p. 5). Many Muslims are, as a result, suspicious of their own community members as well as unknown individuals, yet they also tend to avoid relationships and interactions with non-Muslims, fearing they might be viewed as suspicious and potentially harmful because of
the labels given to them by law enforcement (Shams & Arastu, 2013) and the mass media.

Furthermore, to avoid and minimize key elements of self-censorship and mistrust and to be able to build a positive rapport, the researcher employed McMillan and Schumacher’s (2010) suggestions for establishing trust by “being genuine [and] maintaining eye contact” (p. 357). Establishing a positive tone and taking time in building a rapport as well as going through the interview questions patiently assisted with reducing some of the anxiety the participant might have experienced. Explaining the study, the data collection, and its analysis as well as demonstrating genuinity and maintaining an open line of communication and transparency were also imperative in building trust between the researcher and the participants.

**Pilot interview feedback.** In her feedback, the pilot interviewee said she felt very comfortable during the interview, as if she was speaking to her sister. The interview was completed at the researcher’s house, so she thought the comfort of the house, the quiet, and privacy were probably key to creating this experience. Thus, the interviewee suggested the interviews be held where the participants feel comfortable, where it is relatively quiet, and where privacy is provided. However, the interviewee had difficulty remembering examples and certain points, as it was her first time hearing the interview questions. The interviewee suggested the interview questions be sent to the participants prior to the interview session, so that they could prepare for the interview and take note of any examples or points they would like to discuss. The interviewee also thought the duration of the interview and the sequence of the questions were fine; she suggested keeping the interview to an hour unless a participant needed more time. The interviewee
recommended breaking down the interview questions to make it easier for the participant. She, further, suggested asking participants about how they thought of hijab and if they had any suggestions to share. All of her suggestions were taken into the consideration while conducting the interviews.

**Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability in a qualitative study work differently than in a quantitative study (Creswell, 2014). The purpose of validity in a qualitative study is to ensure the “accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures” (Creswell, 2014, p. 251) and reliability means “the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects” (p. 251). In other words, validity in a qualitative study inquires about the level of similarities between the researcher’s interpretation of the data and the participants’ real experiences during the events and their perspectives on the studied phenomena (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). That is why the findings must be “accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account” (Creswell, 2014, p. 251); That is, a mutual agreement between the researcher and the participants over the meaning and understanding of the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

To ensure the validity of the study, the researcher used multiple and mixed strategies suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) as well as Creswell (2014); for the most part, the researchers offer very similar methods but used different labels.

**Mechanically recorded data.** All interviews were audio recorded for accuracy of the transcripts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
**Member checking.** All participants received a printed copy of their transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the data collected and had a chance to add or edit the information if they wished. However, Creswell (2014) emphasized that checking a raw transcription does not meet the requirement of member checking. Therefore, the researcher also checked some of the findings such as themes and patterns with the participants (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This was accomplished through an informal setting and conversation or as a follow-up interview to confirm the participants’ meaning (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). However, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) introduced member checking as informally checking with the participants for the accuracy of the data and participants’ meaning. McMillan and Schumacher offered a separate strategy, participant review, for reviewing the “researcher’s synthesis of interviews” (p. 332) and transcripts for modification of any information to ensure accuracy. Creswell (2014) summed up both strategies as member checking.

**Rich, thick description.** The researcher used detailed descriptions of the interviews and quotations from the participants when appropriate. This way the readers can resonate more with the study, and “the results become more realistic and richer” (Creswell, 2014, p. 251) adding to “the validity of findings” (p. 251).

**Peer debriefing.** This method, also referred to as intercoder reliability, is the process of analyzing, verifying, and evaluating the data for the level of similarities in the conclusions by a third-party researcher (Patton, 2015). Intercoder reliability adds to the validity and enhances “the accuracy of the account” (Creswell, 2014, p. 252). The role of a peer briefer is to review the study and ensure “the account will resonate with people
other than the researcher” (Creswell, 2014, p. 252). When cross-checking the data with a third-party researcher, a level of reliability is established (Patton, 2015).

Once the researcher collected, transcribed, and coded the data and was in the process of validating the data, she obtained assistance from a peer researcher who was a Brandman Ed.D. graduate for intercoder reliability. To code 10% of the data for this study, the peer researcher was randomly provided with one of the 12 interview transcriptions to evaluate the intercoder reliability. An acceptable level of intercoder reliability according to Lombard, Synder-Duch, and Bracken (2004) is described as, “coefficients of .90 or greater are nearly always acceptable, .80 or greater is acceptable in most situations, and .70 may be appropriate in some exploratory studies for some indices” (p. 3). The peer researcher for this study looked for a minimum of 80% accuracy.

To ensure reliability of a qualitative study, all the steps and strategies used by the researcher must be recorded, so that other researchers can imitate the same protocol (Creswell, 2014). Other than the validity, the reliability of the study raises when member checking the transcripts for accuracy (Creswell, 2014). In addition, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) highlighted the importance of maintaining reflexivity throughout the entire process of conducting the study to ensure reliability and establish credibility. Reflexivity forces the researcher to have a, “rigorous examination of one’s personal and theoretical commitments to see how they serve as resources for selecting a qualitative approach, framing the research problem, generating particular data, relating to participants, and developing specific interpretation” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 332). From this perspective, subjectivity is an undeniable element of a qualitative
research, thus, researchers embrace this matter by actively and constantly employing “rigorous self-scrutiny” (p. 332) strategies throughout this process to limit own’s influence. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) recommended researchers take the following measures into the consideration when working on a qualitative study: increasing self-awareness, acknowledging the participants’ voices and points of view, seeking the truth and accuracy, and recognizing and declaring one’s own cultural background and biases. These strategies, along with a reflex journal, enhanced reflexivity of this qualitative study. A reflex journal is a journaling platform that allows the researcher to reflect on her personal ideas and biases as well as emotional reactions and decision-making processes in the field and during the data collection and analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A reflective journal does not only add to the reliability of a study, but it also provides an opportunity for the researcher to record her reasoning for any subsequent decision making in cases of ethical dilemmas or major changes within the research design (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Last, it is important to note that the only data used for this study were the phenomenological interviews with the participants. This limits the triangulation of the data, as there is only one source of data collection. Though the findings of the research were in line with previous studies for the most part, no other artifacts were used to support further the findings and triangulate the data other than the articles and information provided in the literature review.

**Data Collection**

Though, as in any study, there may be a minimal risk of personal intrusion or emotional issues, the researcher ensured all ethical guidelines for qualitative studies were
carefully followed. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) believed, “Qualitative research is more likely to be personally intrusive than quantitative research” (p. 338). Therefore, several measures were taken to ensure an ethical and safe study was conducted while also in-depth interviews were administrated.

First, this research went through the Brandman University Institutional Review Board and was approved on October 19, 2018 and prior to any data collection (APPENDIX D). According to Brandman University’s Version 2 Dissertation Handbook (2019), “The central aim of the BUIRB [Brandman University Institutional Review Board] is to protect the rights of human participants in research studies, including their rights to give informed consent and to have their safety protected from undue risk” (p. 22), thus only studies that “conform to the professional standards as understood within the relevant discipline” are approved (p. 22).

Several Islamic sites and organizations throughout certain Southern California counties were contacted to recruit participants. Since the researcher resides in Orange County, and the interviews were conducted face-to-face, there were several logistical constraints. Therefore, in addition to Orange County, she chose to recruit her participants from the neighboring counties of Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino. Though, almost all participants resided, worked, and/or went to school in different areas in Orange County.

A formal, well informed, and voluntarily consent letter was obtained from the Islamic center or organization that agreed to connect the researcher with potential participants. For safety and confidentiality concerns, the name of the involved Islamic center is not included in this study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). After learning
about potential candidates as participants, each was contacted by the researcher via e-mail. The e-mail messages were identical in format and content and introduced the researcher as well as the purpose of the study, research design, data collection and interview process, and data analysis procedure (APPENDIX E). Deception or its perception is a research ethical dilemma that “violates informed consent and privacy” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 339). That is why the researcher did her best to create an open line of communication and clearly explained different aspects of the study such as the purpose of the study, the data collection procedure, storage of the data, and confidentiality issues. These important points were included in the initial e-mail, and the participants were encouraged to ask questions throughout the process of data collection. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) emphasized the power participants have on the research and believed this needs to be communicated with them.

However, prior to the researcher’s introductory e-mail, all candidates were already contacted through an intermediary and had shown interest in participating in the research. Almost all participants were introduced to the researcher by or through the first participant, who only looked for those who met the study’s criteria. However, it was the researcher’s responsibility to fully inform the candidates about the purpose and procedures of the study, to ensure potential participants fit the sample’s requirements, and to confirm their willingness to participate in the study. If the candidates agreed to participate in the study after reading the introductory e-mail and met the study’s requirements, the researcher, then, scheduled a face-to-face meeting to interview them.

Communications with all potential participants were done in good faith and honesty so as to build a trusting rapport; deception and manipulation are not only
unethical but also detectable by most participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Also, to show respect and appreciation for the participants’ time and their willingness to partake in this study, and as part of putting forth an effort to build a rapport, the times and locations of the interviews were selected by the interviewees (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It was important to ensure the participants felt safe and comfortable in the interview location. However, the researcher advised the interviewees to choose a place that was also relatively quiet, so the interviews could be done with the least amount of interference and distraction.

To preserve privacy and confidentiality of the participants and to avoid any data breach, the researcher did not ask participants to share any specific demographic information or consent forms via e-mail or any other Internet-based applications. After overviewing the interview procedure as well as addressing the confidentiality and anonymity concerns, and prior to administrating the interview, the participants were asked to read and sign a consent form (APPENDIX F). The consent form worked as a contract between the researcher and the interviewees; it was to ask formally for their permission to be interviewed for this study and to assure them of the confidentiality and anonymity of their participation. The consent form was signed knowingly and willfully. However, the consent form did not commit the participants to any mandatory involvement in any form. Hence, they could refuse or withdraw from the interview at any time, and their decision would have been fully respected. No names of participants were used or included in this research or any publications. All participants remain anonymous, and only coded names were used. Participants were offered a list of Persian names to choose from as an alias, which are the names used in this study. Participants’
privacy and confidentiality are the utmost important duties of the researcher. Since almost all participants somehow knew each other, and to ensure their privacy among each other, at times, where potentially identifying characteristics of a participant is described, she is identified by her participation number instead of her alias. Participants’ names and information will not be shared with any third party, and only researcher will have access to the data collected. Field notes and consent forms are stored in a secured place and will be destroyed upon completion of this study.

Last but not least, prior to the interview, participants were reminded of the researcher’s neutral stance, and that it was not her role or the role of this research to make any judgments or have biases (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). All participants were treated with care and fairness (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Even though the researcher did not anticipate any risks to the participants based on the experiences of many other researchers who have studied the same population and similar topics, scholars such as Malone (2003) as well as McMillan and Schumacher (2010) cautioned researcher intrusion is subjective, as each person differs from the other. Thus, the researcher took some cautionary steps such as dedicating a few minutes at the end of interview for debriefing and, if necessary, checking on the participants’ mental and emotional being once more on the phone after the interview was conducted. Fortunately, the researcher did not face any issues during this study, but if any of the participants would have expressed that she were not well or had some difficulties because of the interview, the researcher would have immediately contacted her chair for mentorship while respecting the individual’s privacy and anonymity. One participant was particularly concerned about her anonymity, so she requested for part of her interview to be excluded from this
study. In addition, she was given a draft of Chapter IV prior to the submission of study, so she could request further changes or omissions in areas where she was cited. Being a Middle Eastern Muslim woman who wears the hijab, who is in the same age category, and who resides in Southern California, the researcher was potentially able to build a more constructive rapport with the participants and treat them with higher care than those who do not share such commonalities. Therefore, her background might have been a factor in preventing or limiting any emotional damage.

All interviews were recorded on two different iPhones and two different applications. The audio recordings were sent to a professional transcription company through a secured phone application. The transcriptions were then returned to the researcher via the same application and e-mail. The researcher explained the procedure to the interviewees and sought their permission for the audio recording and transcription of the content through a third party as part of the consent form (APPENDIX F). A confidentiality form was also initially obtained from the manager at the transcription company prior to sending the audio recordings (APPENDIX G). All interviewees received a printed copy of their transcriptions for reference and also to ensure the accuracy of the content. If they wished to add or omit any information, they were welcomed to do so. NVivo, a qualitative coding software, and an Excel spreadsheet were used for emerging themes.

**Data Analysis**

Unlike a quantitative study where data collection, data analysis, and report of findings are completed in consecutive order, data analysis in a qualitative study is an emerging and simultaneous process (Creswell, 2014); an “interwoven” (McMillan &
Schumacher, 2010, p. 329) process that “occur[s] in overlapping cycles” (p. 329). Rather than “procedures” (p. 329) dependent “strategies” (p. 329) are used to complete this phase (p. 329). Creswell (2014) explained even though there is an order to collecting the data, analyzing the data, and writing the findings in a qualitative study, it is common for the researchers to naturally and concurrently analyze the data as they are being collected (e.g., during the interviews) and structure or write parts of the findings (e.g., when writing field notes and memos). However, the researcher still followed the order and payed attention to each stage as the research was being developed so as to evaluate and complete each section comprehensively.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described qualitative data analysis as, “primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among the categories” (p. 367). In their view, any qualitative analysis incorporates three important components: “a relatively systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting data to provide explanations of a single phenomenon of interest” (p. 367). Each step is necessary to produce a valid, reliable, and meaningful data analysis.

Qualitative research requires both an inductive process and deductive thinking to generate a robust set of themes and a comprehensive analysis (Creswell, 2014). It starts inductively as the researcher continuously looks for “patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information” (Creswell, 2014, p. 234) while constantly “working back and forth between the themes and the database” (p. 234). Once the themes have emerged, the researcher needs deductive thinking to evaluate the data for more evidence and to ensure they
include all the necessary information (Creswell, 2014). An inductive process involves generation of categories and themes organically from the collected data as opposed to implementing predetermined categories and themes prior to data collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

This study’s data analysis was based on Creswell’s (2014) six-step strategy. As stated, Creswell (2014) believed in an interactive process of data analysis and flexibility in qualitative research even though his analytical methodology “suggests a linear, hierarchical approach” (p. 246). Therefore, the following stages might not be visited as they are all connected to each other (Creswell, 2014; Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Data Analysis in Qualitative Research: This figure is an illustration of the process of data analysis in a qualitative study. Reprinted from Research Design:](image-url)

Creswell’s Data Analysis Stages in Qualitative Research

**Step 1.** Preparation and organization of all the materials and collected data that involves transcribing the interviews and digitalizing the field notes (e.g., typing and scanning; Creswell, 2014).

**Step 2.** Reading through all the data; to get acquainted with the data, looking at the bigger picture, reflecting on the overall meaning, and examining the depth, credibility, and usefulness of the data (Creswell, 2014).

**Step 3.** Strat coding the data; “the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks (or text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category in the margins” (Creswell, 2014, p. 247). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described the process of coding as “identifying small pieces of data that stand alone” (p. 370); they are called segments, and each represents a comprehensive idea. Codes are names or labels that are given by the researcher to the segments to give them meanings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Once all segments are coded, codes are compared for duplications (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Recoding the data might be necessary (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative studies of social sciences traditionally require the researcher to generate the codes based on collected data and during data analysis instead of using predetermined codes, which are typically used in health sciences (Creswell, 2014).

**Step 4.** Generating descriptions and themes based on developed codes; themes or categories are used to group codes and provide meaning (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Codes could be used in different categories; “the categories represent major ideas
that are used to describe the meaning of similarly coded data” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 376). Categories are also considered to be the first stage of induction (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

**Step 5.** Interrelating themes and descriptions; choosing a method for delivering the findings (using narratives is a common method); tables and figures could be used; various themes and their connection to one another are introduced. Findings are presented (Creswell, 2014).

**Step 6.** The last step is interpreting the findings. The researcher interprets the findings and their meanings appropriate to the subject matter and interest of the study. The new findings might confirm or negate previous studies’ outcomes. New questions are asked, and new action plans might be suggested. This step could be presented in many ways, and researcher has the freedom to choose the method she believes is best for her study. It is essential to note the researcher’s interpretation is also affected by her “personal culture, history, and experiences” (Creswell, 2014, p. 249).

**Theoretical framework application.** This study does not employ any “explicit theoretical orientation” (Creswell, 2014, p. 100) since this is a phenomenological study in which the researcher “attempt[s] to build the essence of experience from participants” (p. 100).

**Limitations**

It is important to note there are always some type of limitations within any study (Roberts, 2010). However, even though limitations are indications of potential weaknesses in a study (Creswell, 2012), the researcher must closely examine the research setting and truthfully identify all the potential variables (Roberts, 2010). This way, the
reader would have a fair chance to evaluate the role each variable might have in the study (Roberts, 2010). Moreover, although the researcher usually does not have any control over the limitations (Roberts, 2010), she would take certain steps to eliminate or minimize such effects on the study.

One of the most common limitations to a study is a sample size that prevents the findings from generalizing (Roberts, 2010); this is true about this study as well. The findings can only be applied to the sample that was studied. Moreover, the data for this study were not triangulated. The data collection and data analysis were through the phenomenological interviews only. As aforementioned, an interview observer was not used in this study at any point in order to limit censorship and provide a more trusting and comforting environment for the participants.

Another limitation to this study was the researcher’s background. The researcher shares several important characteristics with the population of this study. Similar to the participants of the study, she is a Muslim American woman who wears the hijab, resides in Southern California, and is in the same age category. Having been discriminated against on different occasions, the personal experiences and feelings the researcher holds could have influenced the study. However, to omit this factor and maintain objectivity of the study, the researcher went through all means necessary to distance herself from this study and eliminate any potential biases. In doing so, she was working closely and actively with her chair and committee to limit and address any potential biases. In addition, she was taking extra measures such as consulting with the committee while crafting the interview questions and utilizing an external reviewer to verify the accuracy
of the data collected. A reflective journal was also used for a constant reflection on the researcher’s feelings and potential biases.

It is equally important to note that these shared characteristics were also ultimately helpful to this study and the researcher to have a better understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. Studies that are done by an outsider, someone strange to the participants’ background and experiences, often face criticism for “failing to comprehend and accurately represent the experiences of members of minority groups” (Zempi, 2014, p. 79). When researchers are part of the same minority group as the participants in their studies, they can provide a more comprehensive and genuine description and interpretation of the participants’ lived experiences (Zempi, 2014).

Although the researcher shared some of the main characteristics of the participants, she was still considered to be an outsider to some extent. In this context, an outsider refers to a researcher who holds a different racial, cultural, or religious background than the participants (Zempi, 2014). The focus of this study was on the Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab, and though the researcher is also a female Muslim who wears the hijab and is somewhat familiar with the Arab culture, she is not Arab. Although this difference might have helped to maintain objectivity, the researcher was concerned that it might also cause the participants to distance themselves from the researcher and allow their personal biases influence their responses or relationship with the researcher. This did not seem to be the case with the participants in this study; they were all very welcoming and open. This point could be also considered a potential limitation because, first, almost all the participants knew each other in one way or another, and they learned about the study and researcher from an acquaintance who had
already met the researcher and gone through the interview. That is why most of participants had an indirect exposure to the study and the researcher and had a level of assurance and trust that also ultimately helped the researcher in the recruitment process and building a rapport with the participants. Second, though they had different personalities and backgrounds, they all seemed to be very intelligent, brave, confident, and outspoken ladies who were very accomplished in their educations and their fields of interest such as in art and sports, or if they were working professionally, in their work. Thus, these characteristics might have affected their lived experiences, and as a result, this study.

Last, some vital aspects of the participants’ lived experiences associated to their religious and ethnic positions might be missed by researcher who holds a different racial, religious, or cultural background (Spalek, 2005; Zempi, 2014). However, in this case, despite the differences in racial and potentially some religious points of view, the researcher still had the privilege of being part of the same religious and similar cultural minority group. This minority status garnered the researcher the advantage of still being able to build a trusting rapport and being more sensitive about the cultural aspects of the participants’ lived experiences (Spalek, 2005; Zempi, 2014).

Summary

Chapter III was an overview of the methodology used in this study. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old) in the contemporary era. This was an inductive qualitative research study from a phenomenological perspective. The targeted population of this study was California Arab Muslim women who wear the
hijab (18–40 years old). There were 12 participants for this study; each was subjected to an in-depth, individual, face-to-face interview. A pilot test was conducted prior to the main interviews. The primary instrument in this study was the researcher. All interviews were coded after being audio recorded and transcribed. Data analysis and findings were a continuous and simultaneous process as data were being collected. The background and potential biases of the researcher as well research limitations were outlined. Chapter IV describes the major findings of this study.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Chapter IV focuses on the major findings of this study. Chronologically, this chapter presents the purpose statement and research questions followed by a summary of the research methods and the data collection procedure. Then, a brief description of the population and sample are provided, and the demographics are detailed followed by the presentation and analysis of the data. A summary of the findings concludes this chapter.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old) in the contemporary era.

**Research Questions**

This study was guided by one central research question and two subquestions designed to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges experienced by Southern California female Arab Muslims (18–40 years old). The research questions were as follows.

**Central Question**

What are the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old)?

**Subquestions**

1. What work or education challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) experience?

2. What social or public challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) experience?
Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

A phenomenological approach was chosen for this study when inquiring about the essence of life experiences and challenges faced by the young Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab and live in Southern California (18–40 years old). Phenomenology allows the researcher to view the world through the lenses of his or her participants, creating an opportunity for a deeper understanding of their experiences individually and collectively (Creswell, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2002, 2015). Realizing experiences are distinctive to each individual and appreciating their uniqueness, a collective portrayal of the lived experiences of this understudied population is required to describe their living reality (Eichelberger, 1989; Patton, 2002). Meanwhile, the focus on individuals’ experiences and life perspectives in a phenomenological study humanizes its participants, which is vital to this study, as this minority group is often dehumanized in the mainstream Western media and movies and is shown as a stereotyped homogenous group (Shaheen, 2003; Wilkins, 1995).

To recruit eligible participants, the researcher contacted 15 to 20 different Islamic centers and organizations in the Southern California area. Upon finding the first participant, a formal permission letter was obtained from the associated Islamic center to conduct the data collection. For safety concerns and confidentiality purposes, the Islamic center is not identified and the letter is not included in this paper. This study had a sample group of 12, 10 of which were referred to the researcher by or through the first participant. A purposeful sampling was used to ensure participants could provide insightful information about the subject matter while a convenience sampling eased the process of recruiting.
A phenomenological study is heavily reliant on in-depth qualitative interviews as a single data collection method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) while the researcher becomes the instrument (Creswell, 2014), and reality is viewed as subjective and based on individuals’ perceptions (Reiners, 2012). Thus, the interactions between the researcher and participants in such studies becomes particularly imperative (Reiners, 2012).

A semistructured interview consisting of six questions was used as the guide for the interview. Prior to conducting the data collection process, questions were reviewed by an expert in the field to ensure their quality and effectiveness required for this study. A pilot interview was then completed to ensure the effectiveness of the interview techniques and to help the researcher become acquainted with the process of interviewing. The researcher chose to work with an acquaintance for the pilot interview to simulate a semiformal interview setting she would have when meeting with participants for the first time. The setting was such that it was comfortable enough to receive honest feedback. The pilot test was not included as part of the collected data. To create a welcoming and trusting environment for the interviewees, an observer was not used for this study.

The researcher scheduled a one-on-one, in-person interview with the participants based on their availability and at locations convenient to them. Prior to each interview, participants were advised about their rights and conditions, which were included in the consent form, and were assured about the anonymity and confidentiality of their participation. Then, each participant voluntarily signed the consent form, and an in-depth interview ensued. An average interview time was approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The
semistructured nature of the interview questions allowed the researcher to use the main interview questions as a guide while it enabled her to ask follow-up questions during each session based on the conversation, as they formed organically and allowed participants to approach questions in their own unique way. A face-to-face follow-up meeting was also held to deliver a hard copy of the transcript to the participant and review the main points and themes together. Each participant was given a chance to review the transcript at her leisure and notify the researcher with any dissatisfaction or edits. As a gesture of gratitude, each participant received a thank you card along with a $25 gift card.

The researcher used journaling when collecting data to reflect on her biases and the interactions with the participants. Some field notes were also taken when necessary to incorporate them when analyzing the data. To safeguard the anonymity of the participants, no names or identifiable information were attached to the notes other than their pseudonyms and number.

**Population**

Population refers to an entire group of “individuals, objects, or events” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129) where they all share a set of similar characteristics (Creswell, 2012), and the researcher plans to generalize the study’s results to that group (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The key shared characteristics for this studied group are being Arab, Muslim, female, between the ages of 18 and 40, wear the Islamic head covering, and live in Southern California. Utilizing the words hijab, veil, and Islamic head covering interchangeably throughout this study refer to the modest practice of covering one’s hair by many Muslim females because of their religious beliefs.
However, these words might be used differently among Muslims and outside of this study.

Though Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world with an estimate of 1.8 billion in 2015 (Lipka, 2017), Muslims remain a minority in the U.S., with an estimated 3.45 million (Lipka, 2017) to 12 million (Sullivan et al., 2015) living there, and 41% of them being Arabs and Middle Easterners (Lipka, 2017). Southern California has a large population of Arabs and Muslims; however, there is a lack of accurate data on this minority group. Therefore, extrapolated data based on some factors and statistics had to be made to estimate an approximate number for the population in this study, which is explained in Chapter III in more detail. Considering the limitations and based on the extrapolated data, an estimate of more than 10,000 adult Muslim females who consistently wear the hijab live in Southern California, with a large portion of them being of Arab heritage. Because of the many limitations such as time and financial constraints, it is usually not feasible for the researcher to include a large target population such as this one as a whole in the data collection process. Thus, a much smaller sample group of 12 was chosen for this study.

**Sample**

A smaller target population from which the data is collected is identified as the sample group (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Being a phenomenological study, the researcher interviewed 12 participants for this study. A sufficient number of interviews for such studies is recommended as five to 25 by Creswell and at least six by Morse (as cited in Mason, 2010). All participants met the required criteria for this study; they were all Arab, Muslim, females, between the ages of
18 and 40 years old, wear the Islamic head coverings, and live in the Southern California area. Almost all of the participants were recruited by or through the help of the first participant. Not knowing the participants’ backgrounds and life stories helped reduce any possible bias.

**Demographic Data**

To have a better understanding of the participants’ life experiences and perspectives, some demographic data were collected: age, marital status, number of children, country of origin, level of education, employment status, county of residence and work or school, length of time living in the U.S., length of time living in Southern California, and length of time wearing the hijab as well as age of which they started to wear the hijab. The sample group for this study included 12 participants. The age group for this study was 18 to 40 years old; however, the majority of participants 10 (83%) were between 20 to 30 years old with the other two participants between 31 to 35 years old. This might be because of the method of recruitment; almost all participants (83%) were recruited by or through the first participant. Furthermore, the majority of participants 9 (75%) were also single while one participant (8%) was married and two others (17%) were divorced. The married participant was the only one with children. The participants were originally from five countries: Syria (4), Jordan (1), Palestine (2), Lebanon (3), and Yemen (1). One of the participants had a mixed Arab nationality: Iraq and Lebanon.

Depending on their age, the participants were also at different levels of education. One of the participants had some college, one had an associate’s degree and was transferring to a four-year university, three were in their third or fourth year of a
bachelor’s degree, and two had graduated with their bachelor’s degrees. One of the participants was near graduating with her master’s degree, and two others had already obtained their master’s degrees. Last, one was completing her doctoral degree while the other participant had her doctoral degree and was working in her studied profession. As for employment status, one of the participants was currently unemployed, so she could care for her child. However, she used to work with nonprofit organizations and was hoping to get back to the workforce soon. Two participants were full-time students, another student was working as a paid intern, and four other students were working part-time. As for the out-of-school participants, two were employed full-time and the other two were full-time self-employed.

Almost all participants lived in, attended a school in, or worked in Orange County with one participant residing in Riverside County and one participant working in Los Angeles County. Many participants, eight (67%), have lived in the U.S. since birth. Of the four foreign born participants, two immigrated to the U.S. when they were between 1 and 5 years old, one when she was 9 years old, and the other at the age of 25. As for the length of time living in Southern California, seven have lived there since birth, two since they were 1 to 5 years old, two since they were 6 to 17 years old, and one as an adult for the prior five years.

Last, the participants started wearing the hijab at different ages, and therefore, they had varied lengths of time wearing the hijab. Half of the participants started wearing the hijab between the ages of 7 and 10 years old. Three of the participants fell into the category of 11 to 15 years old, two between the ages of 16 to 20 years old, and one as a young adult between the age of 21 and 25 years old. The shortest period of time wearing
the hijab by one of the participants was one to two years, and the longest period of time for two participants was 21 to 25 years. Table 7 contains detailed demographics about the participants.

Table 7

Participants’ Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18–20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
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<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
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<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Arab Nationality</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Level of Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some College Units</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
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<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing Master’s Degree</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
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<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing a Doctoral Degree</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
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**Employment Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Currently Unemployed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Student</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid Internship</td>
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<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time Employed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Employed</td>
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<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Self-Employed</td>
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<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**County of Residence and Work or School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside</td>
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<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Work or School**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
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<td>8%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Length of Time Living in the U.S.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Since Birth</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Since Birth</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5 Years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 15 Years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 26 Years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Length of Time Living in Southern California

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Since Birth</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Since Birth</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Since</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5 Years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 17 Years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since Adulthood</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Length of Time Wearing the Hijab

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–2 Years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–5 Years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–10 Years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–15 Years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–20 Years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–25 Years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Length of Time Wearing the Hijab

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7–10 Years Old</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–15 Years Old</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–20 Years Old</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note. \( N = 12. \)

**Presentation of Data**

The researcher recruited 12 participants and administered semistructured phenomenological interviews when inquiring about the contemporary lived experiences and perceived challenges veiled Arab Muslim females (18–40 years old) face in the Southern California region. Conducting face-to-face, individual interviews, the data collection process started on November 5, 2018 and ended on January 13, 2019. Individual interviews provided privacy and comfort to the participants and allowed the researcher to focus on one person at a time.

There were six initial and guiding interview questions; however, the semistructured nature of the data collection helped the researcher tailor the follow-up questions based on the conversations. Embracing a phenomenological approach to an interview, the researcher allowed participants to speak their minds freely and organically, though she did her best to ask the questions sequentially when possible. Part of a phenomenological study is that each participant would have a different understanding of a question, thus, answers are based on their unique perspectives.

To allow this uniqueness of perspectives but also to collect somewhat uniform data that allows for a qualitative data analysis, the interview questions designed for this study overlapped. The overlap, furthermore, helped the participants focus on what mattered to them the most at the time but also it gave them an opportunity to reflect on other aspects of their lives that might have been missed in one of the prior questions. Each interview was consensually audio recorded, transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy. The data were then evaluated for themes and underwent data analysis. Encompassing the
central research question and the subquestions, the major, minor, and surprising findings are presented below.

**The Overall Lived Experiences and Challenges**

The central research question guiding this study was: What are the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old)? Interview questions one, two, and three addressed this question in a more general way. Each question led to different themes.

**First interview question.** The first interview question asked was: How would you describe the current state of living in Southern California as an Arab Hijabi woman? The following themes emerged from this question. Table 8 provides common themes on the participants’ overall lived experiences and challenges generated from the first interview question.

Table 8

*The Overall Lived Experiences and Challenges*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A generally and relatively positive living environment but locality matters</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalization of a level of alertness and microaggression</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microaggression</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumed as oppressed</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seen as the other</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being the recipient of backlash and the impact of the political</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
climate

Role of Media

Western media responsible for spreading Islamophobia  5  
Media’s impact on the level of consciousness, sense of  4  
alertness, and perception danger

Note. N = 12

A generally and relatively positive living environment but locality matters.  

Despite the daily challenges and struggles, all participants described living in Southern California as a generally positive and tolerant environment for Arab Hijabi women. Many participants believe the large pool of minorities and wide-spread diversity in Southern California are key to this relative acceptance and tolerance. Donya, who was born and raised in Southern California, said, “I think in general, it’s relatively more positive than other areas. I think because it’s such a diverse place in Southern California, there’s a lot more acceptance than in other places.” She added, “I don’t feel unwelcome. I don’t feel scared or threatened. This is home for me.” When comparing Southern California to her conservative, Muslim majority home country, Assal replied:

Honestly, I love it. You know, I feel I am more myself in SoCal [Southern California]. I can wear whatever I want. I can walk however I want. Nobody is judging me. And I think, mainly, because, you know, I wear…I don’t let go of my values. But, I wear my values.

Emphasizing on the importance of diversity, Assal explained she moved to Orange County five years ago from Colorado, where it was not as much diverse, and she “felt strange,” but she does not feel strange anymore in her new home because she sees “a
lot of people from different nationalities.” She also said why she appreciates diversity so much, “From where I come from, you know, it’s one language. One Religion. So, if you look different, you will appear.” Anita, Mellissa, and Mina shared similar views as well.

However, while agreeing Southern California is generally a safe place to live as an Arab Hijabi woman, some participants argued not all cities in that region or even in Orange County, where almost all participants were from, are as diverse, safe, or tolerable. For instance, Mandana said “I think it depends on what region you visit.” She expressed her negative experiences in a city where she lived for one year saying, “I hated living in *** [her city of residence].” She continued in a frustrated tone:

It’s so White, and it’s very upscale. They don’t have a Walmart or a Stater Brothers within a 10-mile radius. It’s so freaking upscale. So, there you really felt like people stare at you, people made comments, just like kinda almost like, “Why are you in my town?” So I didn’t like that.

Other participants such as Melika, Anya, Mina, and Ziba shared similar beliefs. Anya described her experiences as “difficult sometimes” because of lack of diversity in some cities. Melika used to live in the Southeast when she was younger. When addressing living in Southern California, she said, “Overall, it is a little bit more welcoming than other areas, compared to like in the South and stuff like that, [but] overall, it just depends on the person and the situation.”

Furthermore, Roya and Setareh added Southern California living experiences as a hijabi woman could be also “mixed” and “very in between.” Setareh explained:

The current state of living in California’s quite interesting. You have both extremes where you go unnoticed as a normal person, and then at the same time
or in the same place, you also experience the looks, the stares, the negative body language that people will give you, so, it’s kind of like a juxtaposition between both extremes at all times, so it’s confusing. I would say it’s very confusing because as a person that grew up here and lived here my whole life, you find people that are very kind and just see you as a human being, as an intellectual, as just another woman or just a contributor to society, but at the same time, you see people that look at you as though you’re oppressed, offensive, do not belong. And so, it’s always a mixed emotional environment.

To illustrate her point, Setareh shared one of her experiences where she went to a gym with her sister as a guest and was confronted with a racist manager who bombarded her with stereotypical, racist questions and comments such as, “Are you allowed outside without the men?” making her feel very unwelcome and “not belong[ing].” While she had “a very harsh experience” at the gym as a result of the unwelcome conversation, which was “very degrading” and “disrespectful,” she had a good time at the end of her visit in a Zumba class:

But at the same time though, I’m in the Zumba class, and everybody’s like having a good time, they’re giving me a hi five, they’re encouraging me, they’re proud of the work that I’m doing even though I was being very lazy and trying to push through. That’s what I talk about, like the mixed emotions at all times. You have this one person that the minute from the get-go greeted me very negatively and made me feel like I shouldn’t belong, and then at the same time, you have other individuals that just see me as another person working out, that’s trying to have a good time, and get in shape, and so on and so forth.
Normalization of a level of alertness and microaggression. The emergence of this prominent theme revealed a trend throughout the interviews in which all participants undoubtedly factored in a sense of alertness and microaggression in their lives. All participants, except one who had her hijab almost pulled off, mentioned at least once during the interview they had been lucky not to be physically attacked or have had an overtly aggressive harassment incident. In addition, when talking about Southern California and their experiences as an Arab hijabi woman, all participants compared their lives to unfortunate events that happened to other veiled Muslim women in California and throughout the U.S., with the perception that it might be worse to be a Muslim outside of California or any other coastal or predominantly Democratic Party state.

Furthermore, a sense of alertness and some level of microaggression have become part of all participants’ lives, and for the most part, they have learned how to cope with their daily struggles. Finally, based on the collected data, experiencing a level of alertness and microaggression has been normalized in the outlook of 10 of 12 participants. Thus, it is vital to keep these points in mind when reading this chapter. The following statements from a few participants display some of these factors. For instance, Mina talked about some of the microaggressions she has experienced, stating:

I’ve never had experiences where somebody was harassing me in the streets, or harassing me in class, or physically trying to assault me or take off my hijab. I’ve never had instances like that. So, I think I have it pretty good compared to some of the other folks I’ve read and heard about.

In another segment, when speaking about her negative experiences and some of the daily struggles, Mina also said:
I think it [microaggression incidents] mostly just makes me…it’s kind of like a moment where I feel frustrated a little bit, a little bit hurt, targeted, but it ultimately doesn’t change me. If anything, I think about how struggle is a part of the world that we live in, and I think that from a religious perspective, I think there’s wisdom in the fact that I’m here right now at this time and place during this presidency that I’m in college, that my parents are immigrants, and I’m a first-generation student. All these things, there’s wisdom to it. This is my strife in this world. You know what I mean? Everybody has something they deal with. They have tribulations and trials, and I feel like, okay, me as a young Muslim hijabi woman living in this time and place, 2018, with the Trump presidency, I feel like it’s a culmination of my life’s struggle. That’s not the only thing, but it’s one of those things that I deal with, and I continue to deal with, and I feel like it’s making me stronger,…[praising God in Arabic].

Describing Southern California as a relatively safe and accepting place, Ziba asserted she might not have decided to wear her headscarf if she were living “in some midwestern” state because she does not feel “unsafe” in Southern California, and even though there is “discrimination” she does not feel her life is in danger because of her hijab. Assuming their experiences could be worse, Donya and Roya also shared their feelings. Roya said:

For me, I thank God [in Arabic], I’ve never gotten much. I’ve never gotten it…based on what I hear from people and the news that you see in the stories, like girls getting killed, that girl that got killed.

Donya shared a part of being a hijabi is, “People always stare when we wear a
hijab, that’s just normal, people will always stare.” On a similar note, Elmira explained she could not remember many discriminatory incidents that happened to her because they are part of her daily life. Then, she talked about an incident where she was at a grocery store, and an old White lady became visibly scared after seeing her in hijab and moved away from her quickly. She remembered this incident because it was out of her ordinary daily microaggressions she usually receives, and hurt her feelings; “That’s such a bad feeling. I feel like I scared her.” She said:

> All of it, it’s all microaggressions. It’s all…it’s daily life though, so you don’t really think about it much. You don’t really take note of it until it’s something that surpasses what your normal is…what normal life is. That lady that was scared, that’s not normal…not the scared part, but a weird look would be okay. But yeah, when something happens that’s a little bit extra than normal, then you remember it, but other stuff you don’t really remember.

Last, though she later described two particular incidents that caused her great concern, Donya commented:

> Personally, I have not experienced any discrimination or hate crimes that were unbearable and intolerable. I’ve had people say things to me or try to talk to me and say things, but it’s never been anything that was traumatic or that really scare me.

**Microaggression.** Experiencing almost daily microaggressive comments and behaviors in different settings was a reemerging theme throughout the interviews with all participants. While all participants described Southern California as generally a more tolerant and diverse region for women with a hijab, they also talked about an inescapable
part of living as a veiled Muslim woman in a Western Christian majority country where they are seen and treated differently by many. Elmira relayed this feeling by saying, “I just feel like in general, your day-to-day interactions are met with so much more microaggressions.” She, then, described microaggressions:

Things like the way somebody looks at you, the way…backhanded compliments, the way some people, they’re not outright aggressive toward you for being Muslim, but there’s little things that you see and that you notice, and you know that if you weren’t Muslim and wearing a hijab, you know that they wouldn’t treat you that way. You see the difference. You see the difference in…When I’m out with my friends and my friends are White, and they don’t wear hijabs, they don’t wear…they don’t have any identifiers, then how they’re treated and how I’m treated is completely different.

In addition, Mina explained, “though they may not express it. They may not be like, well I don’t think you deserve to be here. It’s just in the way that they treat you, and the way that they talk to you.” For instance, Donya shared she was walking one day in her city where there is an annual airshow, and the fighter jets were practicing. When the loud flying jets got the attention of a very young boy walking past her, he asked his mom “What are those planes?” When his mom saw Donya, she replied to her son “Those are our American fighter jets, and they’re going to go bomb the hell out of Syria,” while looking directly at Donya. Roya also shared one of her microaggression experiences where she was enjoying a ride with her friends at Disneyland, and in the middle of the ride, she was told by the lady sitting in front of her to lower her voice. She said “Keep in mind, I was the only hijabi, [and] she said it towards me.” Also, it is Disneyland, and
everyone was “laughing, yelling,” and “screaming,” including the aggressor’s children. In another example, Mellissa was traveling with her mother and sisters all wearing the hijab, and this time they did not get “randomly selected” at the airport, but the White lady behind them did, and she loudly complained, “Oh that’s funny that I’m getting selected!” Mellissa, was also surprised that this time they were not selected because her experience has always been different, and she believes, “usually random selection randomly falls on people that look different.” Though, she was bothered by the passenger’s behavior and assumption that since they are visibly Muslim, they should have been checked instead.

Mandana said when she is shopping, she has noticed many times people move away from her or switch isles. Similarly, Ziba said she was once at a coffee shop and was having a conversation about her hijab with the man working there since he knew her as a regular customer at the time. As soon as the lady behind Ziba overheard the conversation and realized her headscarf, worn like a turban, was a hijab, she became visibly scared and started moving away as Ziba walked through the coffee shop and waited for her drink. Setareh and Mellissa also talked about their experiences in shopping places. Setareh said:

There’s always little experiences, like when you’re in a store and you need somebody to assist you, to get you a shoe, and they give you a dirty look, and they walk away because they don’t want to help you.

Additionally, Mellissa said she does not feel like she gets the same customer service and treatment as she sees other non-Arab or visibly Muslims receive. For instance, if the cashier makes a mistake, she would be very apologetic to the non-Muslim customer, whereas in Mellissa’s case, the cashier just fixes the issue without any apologies or
showing extra care. Nevertheless, based on the data in this study, two main types of microaggressions the participants’ experienced were an assumption of their oppression and being seen and treated as the other. However, because of the importance of each phenomenon, they are presented as main themes separate from microaggressions.

**Assumed as oppressed.** Eight of the 12 participants said many people view veiled Muslim women as oppressed and believe they are forced to wear their hijab. While Assal also shared the same sentiment, she said this mostly happened in Colorado where she used to live. She recalled her colleagues telling her, “We have different opinions about what Muslims are. The women are oppressed…but, you are very elegant.” She added: They were so surprised to have an open-minded Muslim lady, who is not oppressed, who loves her husband….They know my husband. That he’s very cooperative. They would see him coming to work and give a cup of coffee. They would see him come to work and ask me if I’m hungry or not.

Donya, Elmira, and Mellissa shared their experiences of strangers trying to tell them what to do. Donya indicated many do not see the potentials of a hijabi Muslim woman and see hijab as a “restriction.” She detailed an incident where a man asked her, “Why are you still oppressing yourself by wearing that? You’re in America now. You don’t have to wear it anymore,” to which she responded, “But, I’m in America, I can choose whether or not I want to wear it and I have chosen to wear it.” Similar to Donya’s incident, Elmira complained about strangers telling her what to do and automatically assuming she is forced to wear her hijab, “that this should be staying in the Middle East,” and she should not wear it anymore since she lives in America. People convey this feeling by saying phrases such as, “You don’t have to wear this here,” or “Don’t wear
this here; You’re American.” Melika also shared an encounter where she and her friends were leaving a Walmart when a screaming lady approached them shouting Islamophobic comments mostly focused on how hijabi women are oppressed. Melika and one of her friends were wearing a hijab but the other friend was not. She explained:

This person was mumbling and screaming and saying racial comments to the girl that wasn't hijabi she was saying...“How come you're not oppressed? How come you're not forced to wear it? How come you're not...” She just kept indicating stuff that was very specific to her because she wasn't wearing the scarf. She was like, “How did you escape oppression?”

Melika said her competency as a health professional is often undermined, and she has to work harder to prove herself in her profession because “there is that stigma” and “perception that Muslim women are uneducated and oppressed.” Other participants such as Setareh, Elmira, Ziba, and Mina also felt the same challenge in their educational and work fields. For instance, when Ziba was accepted to a competitive and prestigious law school with a scholarship, her colleague who had repeatedly displayed racist and anti-Muslim behavior tried to undermine her ability and accomplishment by saying negative and demeaning comments such as, “Oh, law schools are really dumming down, like the type of people that they accept.”

Mina shared people ask her loaded questions with bias and a presumption of what they think hijab or Islam is “framing it as well, it’s oppressive, and it’s anti-woman and it’s misogynistic. How do you respond?” Besides, others, even her friends and teachers, sometimes make her feel she is “somehow inferior” that she “cannot do” and “say certain things,” or “be certain ways.” This type of mind-set and microaggressions always make
her “feel weary or hyper conscious of the fact that” her hijab might be a contributing factor in preventing her from further accomplishments and having equal opportunities in her educational and professional life. Elmira also gave some examples of a subtle but derogatory mind-set she deals with as a result of wearing her hijab and being perceived as oppressed:

People underestimating you and looking at you and saying, oh, this poor girl.
She’s probably never left the house. She probably doesn’t…whatever. She’s not gonna do well in this. She’s not gonna do well in that. She’s gonna get married. She’s gonna go live in a house and raise children. And that’s what they think!
It’s like that part, you always feel the need to prove yourself because you feel it.
You feel the discriminatory expectations. You feel the discriminatory way of talking…the way they talk to you, the way…all of these things.

*Seen as the other.* Eight of the 12 participants shared how they are seen as foreign and the other, even though they have been living in the U.S. since their birth or before the age of five and America is home to them. Six of those said people are usually surprised to see them speak perfect English because they assume they either do not speak English or are not proficient in speaking the language. They see the scarf and automatically have this presumption that they are not American. When talking about the people who think Elmira should not be wearing her hijab in America or are surprised to hear her speak perfect English, she says, “They don’t understand that being American is a mix of multiple things, and that your identity is a crossroads between… it’s an intersection between so many different things.” Donya was also recently told by a White American man, “If you want to be a true American, you’re not supposed to wear that.”
His comment made her laugh, and she replied to him, “Do you think America’s a White Christian country? It’s not. America’s a completely different place than what you’re thinking.” In addition, Elmira shared she was once at a restaurant with her typical looking White American friend, and she had lost her voice, so she was only pointing at the menu, and her friend was ordering for her. She said the waiter and neighboring dinners were surprised to see her and her friend together; “They looked at me like, ‘Oh my God! She’s with her?’ It was just like this weird look.” After having some warm tea, Elmira’s voice started coming back, so she started speaking, which made those people even more surprised. Elmira used this experience to show how many Americans view Muslims, saying “things like that really open your eyes to where… what’s the word?… what we’re predisposed to thinking naturally or automatically in this kind of condition in our society.” She believed if the situation were flipped, and her blue eyes, red haired friend had lost her voice, people would not have automatically assumed she was foreign and did not speak English.

Roya also said she usually does not want to engage with people who are rude to her or harass her. However, sometimes she stands up for herself, and when she does, “people get shocked” she speaks English like that; “Oh, a girl with a scarf on speaks like this? So, I’m like, ‘No, I’m an American, and I’m going to talk to you the way I want. Do not talk to me like that.’” Mandana has had her share of experiences with the language as well, whether it was at a work setting or in public. She also shared an incident where she was intentionally targeted and mistreated only because she looked visibly different. She explained:
Recently, I was at Target and this woman cut me in line. I was like, okay, so I went to another line, and then when I was checking out, I rolled by her; I didn't even touch her, but she was like, “um, excuse me lady or whatever you are, you ran over my foot.” I didn't say anything, and I kept going and she chased [me]. She checked out and then came out to my car. She's like, “did you hear me talking earlier or do you not speak English?”

The aggressor was still talking and harassing Mandana even after she got into her car and was leaving the scene. She added, “I kind of try to block the feelings or the stares and whatnot,” but it is not always easy.

Setareh also shared one of her experiences she thought was funny yet important because it shows how much foreign and un-American Muslims are to many others in America. She detailed the incident:

There was a protest on campus, and we are on one side, and they’re on another. And he was Filipino. He didn’t speak English well, and I speak English perfectly, and he’s like, “You go back to your country.” And I just wanted to be…I stood there, and I paused, and I looked at him. I was like, have you looked in the mirror? You don’t look like you belong either. If I don’t look like I belong, you don’t look like you belong. And on top of that, your English isn’t that great! Well, my English is perfect! Do you hear the English that is coming out of my mouth? And it was funny because my friends were like, “Oh, don’t waste your time with him.” But I was like, I had to say it. I had to say, did you look in the mirror? I’m no different, more different than what you are different. And that’s the whole point of being in this country, everybody’s different. And for you to
single me out and to tell me to go back to my country like, sorry buddy I was born here; this is technically my country.

Furthermore, Anita expressed her disappointment in continually being seen as the other and her frustration with being asked by strangers where she is from:

I wouldn’t know if I could categorize it as discrimination, but a lot of times at work, I work in a really White shopping center, so a lot of White women always come up to me and are always asking me where I’m from, and then I think to myself, why are you asking where I’m from? I’m American. What…Why do I have to be something else? I’m working; I’m just like everybody else. Just because I wear a scarf, you’re thinking that I’m different? So, when they ask me where I’m from, I’m like, I’m from Southern California. And they’re like, “No, but where are you from?” So, it’s like, you don’t see me asking anybody else that, and it’s none of my business where you’re from unless I’m close to you. But I’m having a one-minute conversation with you, and you just want to know where I’m from and that’s it. I don’t think that’s acceptable because you’re going to have generalizations based off of where I am from… I think that they just want to put me in a box. They just can’t put me in an American box. They have to put me in something else, so that’s why they’re always like, “No, but where are you from?”…I can’t be American to them.

Ziba also provided some insightful information about this phenomenon. She started wearing her hijab as an adult, and she has been living in Southern California her whole life, so she has experienced being an Arab Muslim woman with a hijab on and
without. Describing some of the differences in her experiences and some of the discriminatory incidents that had happened to her, she explained:

Obviously being in college and stuff, there were people that would make general comments [about Islam and Muslims] in class, or you would encounter it sometimes, but it was never directed at me [before wearing a hijab]. But these [discriminatory incidents] were directed at me specifically as a person [wearing the hijab], so… I think the difference between discrimination before hijab and discrimination after, it’s like, when you’re not wearing it, you’re seen as kind of separate from all of it or that you’re more, or that like you’re somehow dissenting or just not a part of it because if you’re not veiled there’s obviously like people see it as like, “Oh, she’s like Muslim but she probably doesn’t associate, you know she’s not like those women that wear it in Afghanistan or whatever.” But when you’re veiled, you’re seen as foreign like, I’ve lived here my whole life, and somebody literally on that cruise I just mentioned came up to me and asked if I spoke English, and I was like I used to be an English major, but I didn’t say that because I knew that if I had to spend the rest of the cruise with this really big White Texan looking guy, I didn’t want to get on his bad side.

It is important to note almost all of the participants in this study mentioned they would blend in completely as main stream Americans if they do not wear their headscarves because of their physical characteristics, their American accent, and knowledge of the culture since they have lived in the U.S. for their whole lives or most of their lives. Thus, if it was not for their practice of hijab, people would not acknowledge them as Arab or Muslim to be able to treat them with prejudice.
Being the recipient of backlash and the impact of the political climate. Of 12 participants, 10 mentioned something in this regard. When political stakes are high such as the latest presidential election and the anti-Muslim rhetoric or a tragic event happens reportedly under the name of Islam such as the September 11 or the San Bernardino shootings, participants felt the tension, and their lives have been impacted. For instance, Donya revealed probably “the most difficult time” for her “was right after the San Bernardino shootings” because she was working in that county. She remembers particularly the first week or so right after the incident, “There was a lot more tension.” She said the situation “kind of went back to normal” after that. This is one of the most impactful incidents she remembers after the San Bernardino shootings:

So, after the San Bernardino one, there was a driver in front of me that was purposefully trying to slam into me, and so every time I switched lanes, he’d switch to come back and get in front so that I could hit, and it was very obvious that he was trying and when I finally moved away from him, he made gestures to me through his window. So, it was very obvious to me that he was trying to create some sort of issue.

She also remembers some of the insults she would get after September 11 such as “Go back to your country,” or, “Where’s your uncle Osama Bin Laden?” She also had a terrifying incident post-9/11 where a bottle of beer was thrown at her and her friends while driving on a freeway; they were covered in broken pieces of glass and beer. However, one intimidating encounter stands out with her in which a truck with an American flag, Israeli flag, and print on the body of the vehicle reading “a Muslim Butcher” would circle around her turning up the music really loud whenever he would
see her. She had several encounters with him before reporting it to the Orange County Human Relations; she did not see him again after that.

Though not in Southern California, Melika briefly explained why her family moved there from the Southeast. She said she was still very young when September 11 happened and was not wearing the hijab at the time, but she remembers the tension and harassment her family received even though she could not really understand the reasoning behind it. Their house got egged once post-9/11, and some of her aunts also “took off their scarves because they were getting death threats.” Her mom also stopped wearing “more cultural clothing,” “longer dresses,” and skirts. Ultimately, her family decided to leave there for California, “especially Southern California, where there’s more Arabs, and more integration, and more understanding,” “because the environment in Southeast was too toxic,” and they did not think it was “very conducive” to raising their children there.

Roya also believed the aftermath of September 11 has been the worst for American Muslims. She was a baby then, but she said “it was dangerous to be here…it was very bad because everyone blamed us.” Fearing the backlash, her father sent her, her mom, and siblings to their originating country on the same day right after the attack. Separated from their father, they lived there for about six months before they returned to the U.S.; “What are you going to do? Not be here?” She stated with sadness “but…many of them [the victims of 9/11] were Muslims too!”

The participants also talked about the impact of political discourse on their lives, specifically currently when there is so much division in the U.S. Elmira believed the living currently as an Arab hijabi woman is “challenging because we’re at a time where
there’s so much political discourse out there and so much hate and negativity towards people of color and Muslims.” She believed, “being a Hijabi, in particular,” makes her visibly Muslim and more vulnerable to becoming the recipient of the hate and negativity. She said, “People see you, they see that you’re Muslim, and they know. And people are more likely to act out to you…act out their feelings toward you because of that.” Being a political science student at the time of the election and the first year of Trump’s presidency, Elmira has followed the current political climate closely, and this is partly how she described it:

I think post-9/11, it’s been really bad, but for a period of time between 9/11 and Trump, it died down a little bit. It wasn’t as hateful, but I feel like now, with Trump, Trump gave people the sort of like permission to act upon their hate or act upon whatever ignorance that they have inside of them…and anger. Whereas before that, it wasn’t socially acceptable, but now, if they see the most powerful man in the world telling you it’s okay to speak this way about people and not just keep it inside of yourself, then that gives permission to everybody to go ahead and do that, even though it’s wrong, even though it’s not okay….It has changed significantly since Trump, and I think that is really bad, but it also highlights all the hidden hate and all the hidden ignorance and racism that I think has been in the country but maybe has been silenced or has been, like I said, hidden. People are racist behind closed doors. Trump told them, “Open the doors. Be racist.”

Similar to Elmira, Mandana and Melika believed recently there has been a lot more tension because of the current American political climate. They think President Trump and his anti-Muslim, anti-immigration rhetoric and policies have emboldened
people with racist and ignorant beliefs to act openly upon them. In Mandana’s view, President Trump confirmed and accelerated the hidden “prejudice and racism” many people already had “…’cause when you have the president saying it’s okay to believe in this certain thing, you’re gonna believe in it more.” She used legalization of same-sex marriage by President Obama to illustrate how impactful the president’s actions and policies could be. She said President Obama “changed a lot,” adding:

He changed the way people view it, so people before who might have been thinking that or thinking against it, now they have to talk about it, and they have to think about it, and they have to decide, they have to make an opinion.

Confirming the situation has been tenser recently, Melika complained in disappointment, “It’s still the same racial institutions that we’re exposed to, and still the same hate, still the same ignorance. Recently, it’s been way more escalated since our president is who he is.” She reasoned the current tension is a result of the current political environment:

Because nowadays it’s okay to be racist. Back then it was, “No, don’t be racist.” But nowadays because our president is verbally racist to multiple types of minorities, and obviously Muslims with this ban and stuff like that, it’s even more racist towards us. The fact that we elected him as a democratic nation, and that we told people that it’s okay to behave the way he does, and he sets an example for millions of people, it’s pretty unfortunate.

She also referred to the recent government shut down that took place at the end of 2018 early 2019 because of the funding of a border wall “to prevent people that are crossing, that are trying to escape persecution and violence.” She said not only this issue
created a complete government shut down, but also because it was not funded, “someone created a GoFundMe that has raised almost $20 million by the general U.S. citizen who wants to build the wall!” She further stated:

    So, there is so many people that are okay being racist. It just further proves our point. Being in an area where the wall would be built in our state, because of our contact with Mexico, it further proves that we live in…Southern California is exposed to racism more than people think it is.

Melika also pointed to the Trump’s voting percentage (31.6%) in California, known to be a Democratic state (California Secretary of State, 2016), to say “You’re still likely to meet [a racist].” In addition, Ziba said though she feels very comfortable in Orange County and thinks it is a “tight-knit community,” it is also very Republican, and she has definitely felt the new climate. Her father was also very concerned when she decided she wanted to start wearing her hijab. Setareh, Mandana, and Ziba clarified that being a Republican or voting for Trump is not equivalent to being a racist, and it depends on their reasoning behind their beliefs and actions. Mandana explained:

    I have friends that voted for Trump that I would say are not intentionally racist and do not necessarily think of themselves as superior to others, but they’re complacent, so they don’t have a problem with the fact that he has immigration ban or a Muslim ban or doesn’t like undocumented people, so they’re neutral and that contributes, right? When you’re neutral you contribute the oppressed or not oppressed.

    Mellissa also shared she becomes extra cautious with her behavior “when certain things happen like when Trump becomes president or there’s like attack or something
that happens and people assume it’s based on a certain race or culture something like that.” She said even though she knows neither her nor her people accused of doing something terrible like a terrorist attack are responsible for the wrongdoing, she “always feels like you have to extra behave now…[because] people are looking at you.” Moreover, Assal stated she knows a lot of harassment has happened, many of her friends have been harassed, and there has been a lot of judgement, especially since the last administration was installed.

Meanwhile, Anita said she does not think the state has “dramatically” changed since President Trump’s administration, and that she has not had “a lot of negative interactions with people.” Mina also said she thinks hijab has been more politicized in recent years. Compared with her younger years, she remembers she was the only hijabi many people, even Muslims, had ever met, particularly in her school. In her experience, people then did not have much knowledge about Muslims or hijab and did not know what her headscarf meant and that “it was tied to a religion.” If they knew anything, it was what they had heard from the media but had not seen it in person. However, she thinks more people know about hijab and Muslim women, and they associate the headscarf with Islam. She thought hijab and Muslim women have been in media much more, particularly in the last couple of years. She said:

I don’t want to say it’s been in a bad way or in a positive way, but it’s just there….Some of them have positive connotation. Some of them have negative connotation. I also think it depends on the level of education of the person who is consuming that media, but I just think it’s more politicized….Now, people I don’t even know are familiar with the language, so it’s just more visible now.
She said now sometimes strangers complement her hijab when she is in public, and they use the phrase “hijab” like, “Oh, I really like your hijab,” whereas before people would ask her what it was or called.

*Positive outcomes from the new climate and Trump’s presidency.* A subtheme emerged when the participants discussed the new political climate and Trump’s presidency. Four of the 10 participants who discussed the backlash and impact of the political climate also had something positive to say. For instance, after Donya shared her negative and, at some points, terrifying encounters right after the terrorist attacks, she said:

But then there’s also the positive side where after every attack, there will be so many people that will see me in the mall or at Disneyland or in a café or whatever, and they’ll come up to me and say, “I hope you feel at home here. We have your back.” And they’ll be a random stranger who doesn’t know me, and they’ll never see again, but they just want me to know this is home for me too, so there’s a lot of positive things that have come out of it too.

However, she also believed these types of positive experiences are probably exclusive to “Southern California or places that are more urban.” She said even though she cannot say that with certainty because she has never lived in any other region or state, she thinks she would not have had such pleasant encounters in maybe “mid-Southwest, Midwest, or mideast states.”

Anita also shared her positive experience when she worked at a cosmetics store as her first job, and a lady who was excited to see her told her, “You’re an inspiration. It’s so amazing to see a hijabi working and being proud of….Just being out there in such a
dangerous political environment.” She said, “That was one of my favorite interactions,” and that encouraged her and “gave [her] a little boost of confidence.”

Interestingly, Elmira indicated, “I think it’s challenging, but it also does come with really good things because you’re having really interesting and insightful conversations with people about all these different things.” She said her hijab, which makes her visibly Muslim, causes some curious people to approach her and ask her questions, and she sees that as positive, saying, “You get to hear different opinions, and you get to bring people together and open up people’s minds toward information they didn’t know before.” She said she always “feel[s] good” about such positive and constructive conversations because she is “able to educate them, and they walk away from that conversation knowing more than what they knew before.” However, it is important to note not all participants felt this way or liked the unwanted conversations and questions from strangers. Also, all participants were able to spot quickly malicious individuals and ill-intended questions and did not welcome such interactions. Returning to the positive outcomes Elmira shared, she pointed out she “went to university and studied political science at a time when Trump was elected,” and this was happening when she was in her second year. She added:

That was exactly the most pivotal time of all the hate crimes, of all the rhetoric, of everything that happened due to Trump. I feel like I…especially being in the political field is like…The conversations we have at school, at the university, with the professors, with other students, is very centered on this topic. I feel like that was really challenging, but it’s also very empowering because you’re on the front lines to answer questions…to fight the fight!
Last, Roya also shared, “it’s been very easier” especially after Trump because “a lot of people have been aware of Muslim rights, [and] they want to give Muslims rights.” She explained:

Because now everyone just wants to help everyone. Everyone’s fighting for everyone. Black rights matter, Hispanic rights matter, Muslim rights matter. Everyone’s now being more educated and aware, so I feel like it’s actually easier, as in within the people. Now everyone’s helping one another.

Adding there is always negativity from ignorant people or those who judge Muslims based on how the media portray them, she believed before people were less educated of Muslims and did not have much understanding of them and their rights. In her view, Trump’s xenophobic rhetoric and policies have brought people of different color and ethnicity together. She thought Muslims had it worst during the Bush administration and September 11, but it has been “way easier” during the Obama and Trump administrations.

**Role of media.** Looking at the data, the Western media was discussed in two different forms by several participants. One highlights on the role Western media have played in negative portrayal of Muslims and the dissemination of Islamophobia, and the other points to the fear created among some of the participants as a result of hearing of Islamophobic incidents through media. While the first one is very negative and blames media, the second one is somewhat neutral. Each is discussed separately in more detail.

*Western media responsible for spreading Islamophobia.* Five participants made remarks about the role of mainstream Western media in the creation and dissemination of fear, misinformation, and Islamophobia in the general public and called out their biased
reporting. They thought Western mass media are accountable for many Americans’
ignorance and bigotry toward Muslims and the separation between them based on fear
and misrepresentations. This is summarized in Donya’s remark:

I feel like it’s sad that a lot of people, number one, really trust the media way too
much, so they’re taking in this information that’s feeding the hate, and number
two, that a lot of people are allowing this fear to prevent them from building
relationships.

As for misinformation, Ziba mentioned there is a lot of ignorance, but “you can’t
fight everybody that has something ignorant to say because most of the time you realize
that it’s just because of the media.” Mandana described Western media’s account of
Muslims as “bull****,” and touched upon the misrepresentation of Muslims saying,
Arabs are statistically “a smaller number compared to African American and Asian
Muslims,” and yet they are shown as the dominant. She added:

We are the ones that are portrayed mainstream as Muslims and yes, I think
Western media does that a lot. They try to paint like, oh if you’re Arab you must
be Muslim, if you’re Muslim you must be Arab.…

The role of Western media and the government in the misrepresentation and
mistreatment of Muslims was a main theme in Roya’s account. She repeatedly talked
about ignorance and lack of proper education among non-Muslim Americans about Islam
and its followers, believing people’s hate and wrongdoings toward Muslims are because
of “ignorance and the news, how they portray” Muslims. She said, “It all affect us.” She,
then, reaffirmed, “It’s all the news. That’s it. It’s all that people think.” Referring to the
role of media and the government in discrimination against Muslims, she said, “It’s the
only reason why we face this every single day; the government.” Highlighting on the importance of social media and urging Muslims proactivity in countering the dissemination of false information about Muslims by Western mainstream media in fulfillment of the government’s propaganda, she stated:

We try….Social media is all over the news; the TV, they put whatever they want, what the government [wants]. They do that, so they can take over our country, you know? They’re terrorists [Muslim nations], we’re going to go….But in reality, they’re going to go take our oil. We’re not bad people. We don’t do anything, but what we can do is we keep talking. We keep speaking. We keep showing our faces to people. We keep going….We just have to be more outspoken to spread the news, so people start questioning because people are not questioning. They don’t get it because if all the news is this, this, and this, they’re not going to see. They’re not going to understand.

She also added, “Social media is very strong now and very dangerous,…[it] has made people see things more and gain knowledge through social media. It has changed a lot of people, for sure.”

Mina also pointed out Western media show Muslims as “intolerant,” and talked about the hijab and Muslim women being more in the media, especially in the last couple of years, and that the hijab has been very politicized. She could not say whether this increase of visibility in media is necessarily positive or negative, but she said the materials presented carry both positive and negative connotations. She stressed the takeaway from the media “depends on the level of education of the person who is consuming” it.
Media’s impact on the level of consciousness, sense of alertness, and perception
danger. Media’s treatment of news has a double effect; while it creates fear and bias among non-Muslims about Muslims, according to the participants, it also creates a sense of fear and alertness among some Muslims. Four of 12 participants’ behavior was somewhat affected by the media. For instance, Assal shared she consciously does not speak Arabic or wear her hijab while traveling by air because of the negative and discriminatory stories she has heard happened to other Arabs and Muslims in the media. She said, “especially at the airports, there is a lot of bad experience that I don’t want to go through.” Meanwhile, Anya said hearing about the recent backlash against Muslims and specifically rise of hate crimes against Muslim women who wear the headscarf from the media made her very scared that “something would happen” to her. She thought of taking her hijab off because of it.

Moreover, Roya said hearing some stories on the news makes her scared sometimes, especially at night when she is outside alone and not only because of racism but also because of her gender. Nonetheless, she added, “sometimes, a little bit racism, when I think about what happened on the news, like how that girl got killed and thrown in the pond, so that’s scary.” Last, Mina said her relatively higher level of consciousness is because of different factors, including her experiences with “microaggressions, and the way I’ve been treated by others in class, and in school, and then mostly, mostly, I think, the media.” She then continued:

But I do try to take things with a grain of salt because I feel like the media romanticizes and exaggerates some things. At the same time, we hear about the hate crimes specifically against women, and women who have been kidnapped.
and have been killed, who have been abused. It definitely takes an impact on your psyche and how you think about yourself in relation to other people.

**Second interview question.** The second interview question asked: Do you think being a Muslim makes your experience of living in the Southern California any different from the non-Muslims? In what ways and why? Other than Roya, all other participants said being a Muslim hijabi woman definitely makes their experiences of living in Southern California different than the non-Muslims and Muslim women who do not veil. Acknowledging there is racism and incidents of prejudice, Roya said, “I have a job. I go to school. We have a house. Like Orange County, they’re very open-minded…because it’s a big diversity. There’s a lot of Hijabi women…a lot of everything.” She thinks the large pool of minorities and wide-spread diversity have helped reduce racism and prejudice, making life much easier for her. Similar to Roya, all other participants also clarified that their day-to-day life such as going to school, working, driving, having fun, having friends, et cetera are similar to other people, but it is their interactions and other factors that emerged from this question that are different. Additionally, Mandana explained:

> It depends when you say Muslim versus non-Muslim because I think there’s other communities who are experiencing prejudice too, so…I think it’s hard to be religious in general in Southern California. We’re very liberal out here and atheism is on the rise, which is fine, but I think people view religion in general as something that’s like old fashioned, so I think if you are very religious Jewish, if you are a very religious Christian, you kind of also…even I would say a religious Christian or Catholic might feel a little left out just because what’s mainstream is
to just YOLO, like you only live once and like party and just do things however and not think twice. And that’s fine too; I’m not criticizing, but that’s the norm, so I think when I say Muslim versus non-Muslim, I think it depends on which non-Muslim, but I know drinking is one that’s in particular, like we don’t do that, even on a social level.

Keeping these comments in mind, the following themes emerged from this question (Table 9).

Table 9

*Different Experiences as a Hijabi Woman Living in Southern California*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wearing a hijab equals visibility and that changes the experiences</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher degree of alertness</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pressure to be the perfect Muslim and citizen</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in needs and lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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*Note. N = 12*

*Wearing a hijab equals visibility and that changes the experiences.* All participants believed wearing a headscarf for religious purposes makes them visibly Muslim, and their visibility is more prominent if they wear their headscarves more traditionally or conservatively. All participants had a similar sentiment as Melika’s, “You’re drawing attention to yourself by wearing the scarf, even though you wear the scarf to stop attention, in the United States it draws more attention.” This visibility distinguishes hijabi women from the general public and even the Muslim women who do
not practice veiling, as they are immediately recognizable as Muslims. For instance, Donya said it is the hijab that makes her experiences different than others because even her Muslim friends who do not wear the hijab have similar experiences as other people for the most part unless another part of their identity stands out such as having a very complicated name or an accent. Similarly, Mandana said she believed,

…but in non-hijabi privilege [because] you can mask your Muslim identity a little more. You have the ability to leave that out of conversations. When I walk up to someone meeting them for the first time, they know my religion before they know my name. I don’t say anything, they just look at me, oh, it’s a Muslim!

This visibility also means people would have certain perceptions and presumptions about these individuals just by seeing their scarves and without knowing them. As mentioned earlier, in her encounter with an old White lady she had at the grocery store where the woman got scared of her and left quickly after seeing her in hijab, Elmira described it as if “people already made up their mind about who you are without you even interacting with them yet.” Melika and Setareh also talked about being anxious before meeting a new patient or client, and that there is a lot more pressure on them only because they wear the hijab. They said they have to work harder to break that question of competency that comes to the mind for many based on their stereotypical thoughts and false presumptions of Muslim women.

Being visibly Muslim draws people’s attention, and that attention has underlying perceptions and presumptions behind it, which, many times, lead to unwanted or distinctive interactions. For example, Mellissa said, “People are really curious, so they’ll come, and they don’t really ask, they kind of jump to conclusions, and they start
confronting me in a way, like, why do you wear that? Or, what is that about?” Ziba also
compared her life as a hijab wearing Muslim to the nonhijab-wearing version of herself,
noting other than adding a piece of cloth to her wardrobe, she is and feels as the same
person, but her interactions with the public have changed. She explained:

From before I used to wear it, I never really thought about my Muslim identity,
but now that I do wear it, it’s constant, so it’s a lot more staring. I don’t know I
feel like people do interact with me differently, like non-Muslims, not my peers,
but people like, let’s say I’m going out to dinner with a group of people I don’t
really know or…like I get treated differently even coming in to *** school, I feel
like there was a separation between me and the rest of the students, or like maybe
the professors were more willing to speak with students that weren’t wearing it,
or…But it’s just like there is a definitely more of a divide that I feel between me
and the rest of the people that I’m going to school with, or interact with, like
people interact with women that don’t wear it a lot differently.

Nevertheless, Ziba believed people’s staring is “more [a result of] curiosity than it
is anything else.” According to almost all participants, wearing a hijab works as an open
invitation to some to engage in unwanted or odd interactions. Ziba simply said it is as if
some people “just don’t know how to navigate around people that are veiled which is so
weird to” her because she is just like any other person. Mandana also shared an example
to help understand this matter:

For a lot of Americans, religion is something personal and private. You don’t
know if someone is Christian or Catholic. Sometimes, they don’t want to talk
about it and like, oh, I respect that, but for me, it’s like, because I have it so
explicitly expressed, people think they have a right to ask questions and engage in that conversation, but you know Islam and hijab can be private for me too if I wanted it, but it’s almost like I don’t have that choice because of the way people make me feel, and the way people act. As much as I wanna say it’s hard to be Muslim period, regardless of how you dress, I think it’s harder when you’re hijabi. I think it needs to be acknowledged; hate crimes and all of those other ugly things.

Higher degree of alertness. Another factor that makes the experiences of these participants different from the non-Muslims and many Muslims who are not visibly recognizable as Muslim is their relatively higher degree of alertness. Though this study did not scientifically measure and compare the level of alertness of its participants to the general public living in Southern California, it revealed all participants are very conscious of their behavior and surroundings. All participants also did mention they feel relatively safe living in Southern California and generally do not feel scared or threatened. However, they also shared they are usually very aware of their surroundings and themselves in relation to other individuals, time, and location. Furthermore, all participants either know someone or have heard of someone being physically attacked because of their religious or ethnic background, and while they are grateful they have not experienced a physical or violent attack, that is a factor in their consciousness. For instance, Setareh shared:

Quite frankly, sometimes you’re in an environment where you don’t know how people are going to react to you. You really don’t, and even though nine times out of 10 it doesn’t cross my mind, but that one percent is there, and you don’t
know if you’re going to have to defend yourself. You don’t know if you’re going to get in a physical altercation. You don’t know [if] you’re going to argue with a person.

Mina also indicated if she is out of her comfort zone, the cities she lives in or goes to school in, based on the city and their diversity level, she becomes more “vigilant” about her “surroundings.” She said in such situations where she thinks she is even more visible and “stick[s] out more,”

I’m more vigilant of who I’m talking to, and who’s looking at me, and what I need. So, in general, I just try to be more vigilant of the area that I’m in. If I feel like the area that I’m in is threatening just based off of the fact that there’s nobody who looks like me or nobody who sounds like me, I get a little bit more hyper conscious of my surroundings.

**Pressure to be the perfect Muslim and citizen.** As well as being conscious of their surroundings, all participants, except Anita, mentioned they were also highly conscious of their behavior and presentation while in public. According to Melika:

Other than the fact that there’s that safety idea, you’re a walking example of Islam, so not only do you have to worry about other people, you have to worry about how they perceive you, and if they interact with you, they’re going to be like, oh, I met this Muslim person that represents Islam this way, and that’s how all Muslims should be, which is why we face such difficulty in the States is that they hear a story of a very, very rare minority doing something that is prohibited in the Quran, and then they feel like that’s the accurate representation of what
Islam is. So, we constantly have to strive harder to prove ourselves, to make up for outcasts, essentially.

Melika also emphasized it is the hijab that makes some of the living experiences, particularly professionally, different than those of non-veiled Muslims because “it puts you on the center, like that light, and you have to know how to act. You have to be a good representation for yourself, for your family, and for your religion, so it’s a lot of pressure.” All subjects felt this pressure that they have to present themselves in a way that non-Muslims specifically would not be able to say anything bad about them. This pressure comes from Western society where an individual who is Muslim is held to a different standard than a non-Muslim doing the same exact wrong or even routine act. The participants explained a Muslim is judged by his or her religion, and not only Islam but the whole Muslim community is undermined and receives backlash while a non-Muslim is judged as an individual and separate from his or her religion or community. However, some participants mentioned that some other minority groups are also treated the same way where an individual becomes the face of that group. Participants spoke about the impact this pressure has on their daily lives. With frustration, Elmira argued other religious items such as wearing a cross as a necklace do not have any effect on the person wearing it, and people still look at her as an individual and not necessarily as a Christian; it is just “normal.” On the other hand, a person who wears a hijab suddenly becomes “the hijabi in the room.” She explained:

She’s not just whatever my name is, or, she’s not a young twenty-something lady, or, she’s not…. That’s the first thing that people see about you. That’s the first thing that people are gonna judge you for. That’s the first thing that people are
gonna want to say something to you about, and they expect you to be held accountable for the actions of other people who wear hijab or who are Muslim. And that’s a lot because I can’t just live my life. What if the actions or the thoughts and decisions that I make are because of another part of my identity that’s not Muslim? But people take it and say, oh, well the Muslim, most of them did that, so that’s what Muslims will do. That’s what Muslims are like.

Participants were frustrated that there is an inherent extrapolation of their personal and daily issues to the larger Muslim community such as one’s personal mistakes are blamed on the whole group; not only are they not given the benefit of a doubt, but the whole Muslim community gets the blame for an individual’s mistake or human emotional variations. Mellissa displayed her dislikes for the pressure that is put on her by the society, saying she feels the “tension,” and that there are “more eyes on” her, but it is not fair for her to “have to act a certain way” just because she wears a scarf. She said, “I have to like always be smiling, or always, because if I’m not smiling, maybe it means something or something like that. It’s not just she’s having a bad day or something like that.” Furthermore, Ziba said even though she had strict limitations for herself based on Islamic guidelines prior to wearing a hijab, she did not put too much thought into doing certain thing in her daily life. However, she said that has changed since she started wearing her hijab, and she has found herself “more conscious of what” she does “because I know that it sucks, but the climate is so that if I’m wearing the hijab, whatever I do, they’re going to think about all Muslims.” Whereas before, she “didn’t think twice about it because” her Muslim identity was not on a display, so she would think to herself, “If I mess up, it’s on me, but now it’s like okay if I do that it’s going to look bad on Muslims.”
However, Ziba revealed this societal judgment and scrutiny has also brought a positive side to her life, as “it’s kind of helps keep me in check and like keep me closer to my own religion.” Roya also shared a prejudicial incident that happened at her work, detailing how she tried to act as calm, collected, and professional as possible, emphasizing the importance of how a hijabi woman should carry herself in the West. She suggested, “People are judging you all the time. You have to set an example of who Muslims are, especially us as Muslim women, we have to set an example because we’re wearing the hijab. We’re the walking face of Muslims.”

Meanwhile, Setareh realized putting so much pressure on herself to be a perfect Muslim was driving her away from who she really was. She said, “I slowly realized I was losing myself, my personality, I couldn’t recognize myself anymore, and the hijab isn’t supposed to overpower your personality; it’s supposed to compliment your personality.”

In addition, some participants talked about the pressure they feel whenever answering people’s questions about Islam because they are not Muslim scholars and do not know all the correct answers. Though they feel like they have to be knowledgeable enough to ensure they have the right answers to prevent any more misconceptions and misinformation about their religion. Nevertheless, many times these questions are also more extensive than the scope of hijab or Islam and entail geopolitical issues such as terrorism. Some participants remembered having to answer such questions from adults when they were still very young and going to school, and when they clearly did not have a good understanding of such information. For instance, Mina said she was occasionally asked by her teachers to speak about her religion or share her experiences in the class.
when there was a discussion about culture or religion. She thinks the only reason they knew she was Muslim was because of her hijab. Recalling her experiences, she said, “It’s like you become the spokesperson for the entire community.” She expanded on her experience:

So, it was like times where you had to represent the community, and the teachers would put that pressure on you…I didn’t think it was fair to put all the pressure on a young student who herself doesn’t really understand and was still young. I’m still learning. I go to Sunday school [referring to an Islamic program] or whatever. Then it’s like anything that you say, you’re held accountable for it. So, if I’d say something, and they don’t believe me, or something else happens in the news, they’ll be like, well I thought you said Islam was a religion of peace, but there they go blowing up I don’t know what. So, it’s like there’s this disconnect, and you have to suddenly the 12-year-old is the spokesperson for every billions of Muslims there are in the world.

Even though Mina does not think there was any malicious intention and thinks maybe her teachers thought they were being inclusive, she does not think “it’s appropriate” to put all this pressure on a child especially when she was already experiencing bullying because of her faith. Being one of the only hijabies in school, Elmira had a very similar experience in her high school, which made it very difficult for her and put a lot of pressure on her.

As for adults, Elmira shared though it is a challenging time to be a Muslim hijabi, and it bothers her she is not seen as just another individual but the Muslim woman with the hijab on, she happily welcomes people’s questions and takes that as an opportunity to
educate them. However, she also shared the following account where it shows how having the need both to behave and answer correctly play a role in her persona:

At the same time, it can be a responsibility to answer correctly or a responsibility to behave correctly. If you’re angry at someone, let’s say at work or something, you always have to keep in mind that you’re not just yourself, you’re also the Hijabi woman at work. You’re also the Muslim woman at work. You’re also the Arab woman at work. The way that you act, the way you interact with people, says a lot about those groups, too, and that’s a lot of pressure.

Donya also acknowledged this pressure and said a lot of times she hears her fellow hijabi friends say, “I’m so tired of people asking me questions about Islam. I’m so tired that people see me as a hijabi, so they automatically assume I’m the encyclopedia, and they can ask me.” However, she thinks many say that “because they’re scared they don’t have the answers, and they need to know that it’s okay.” She suggested they can take away some of this pressure by acknowledging they might not know the right answer at the moment, but they can find out and deliver it to the person by exchanging e-mail. However, she cautioned this can only happen in a safe environment, and when the person is genuinely curious to learn not when the intention is to harm and attack. Though, not all participants agree with this invitation, with some simply wanting to be able to appear in public without being bothered because they want to be seen just as another individual and because it becomes very tiring after a while.

**Differences in needs and lifestyle.** Last, other than the factors discussed earlier, being a hijab-wearing Muslim in America means having a slightly different lifestyle than
the general non-Muslim public. These differences in needs and lifestyle might seem very minor to some but more important to others. According to Setareh:

It’s just simple things like not having halal restaurants around, or if you’re invited somewhere, you have to caution them that you don’t eat pork, or you don’t drink, or this or that, which also limits your ability to experience certain things because in Southern California or in the U.S., as a general, what my experience has said is that you can’t have the experience without alcohol.

Not feeling comfortable around drunk people and such environments, she believes in Southern California, particularly around where she lives, “there isn’t a lot that is conducive to” the environment where she can just have “goodhearted fun, just somewhere to go hang out with my [her] friends, play games, read a book, [or] have a cup of coffee” because a lot of such places are “closed at nine o’clock.” However, depending on their city of residence, some participants had different experiences. For instance, the City of Anaheim is known among many Southern California Muslims as “little Arabia,” where there are many halal restaurants and shops that close later, so participants who are closer to this area have a slightly different experience.

Half of the participants shared having some sort of social issues because they do not consume alcohol for religious reasons. They thought their relationship with alcohol makes their experiences of living in Southern California different from those who do not mind alcoholic beverages or such environments. However, since this issue was a reemerging theme and overlapped with the social life, it is discussed under the social life section.
The other issue or difference brought up by three of 12 participants was swimming and water activities, specifically because they all live in coastal cities or near the ocean. This is a very common issue for many modest or hijab-wearing Muslim women outside of Muslim majority countries. For example, Assal said she loves the ocean, but that is probably the only place she feels awkward that she should not be there, or as if, “Oh, there is something wrong here! It’s not my place.” She said sometimes she thinks to herself, “Okay, just take it off and enjoy life, but I feel that it’s not going to be me.” She stated I need to “be one person” noting not wearing the “right clothes [traditional swimwear]” would make her “feel less” and as another person: “I can’t be in the beach another **** [her name] and go in real life another **** [her name].” This is a struggle for her whenever she goes there, and it is one of the only places in Southern California she feels like “I don’t belong.” Assal wears a brukini, a full-length swimsuit worn by many Muslim and modest women, and she does so when she also uses the pool in her community’s common area with her children. She said she looks different than others and gets many stares, with some feeling sorry for her, but she does not care because she has “thick skin.” Meanwhile, there are also non-Muslim women from other ethnicities who are excited to see her because her swimwear fully protects her skin from the sun, so they ask her where they can also buy one for themselves.

Ziba also wears a burkini and experiences the stares; she thinks it is “weird” to be fully covered when others in the jacuzzi are wearing a bikini. Even before wearing a hijab, she had never worn revealing clothes, but she thinks wearing “shorts and a like T-shirt” in a pool still looks “more normal” to others than when the hair is also covered.
Though she thinks many Westerners particularly find this abnormal because, to them, wearing a bikini “it’s so empowering.” She disagrees:

It’s empowering if a woman wears what she feels comfortable with, so I think that was my thing it was like okay, I’m sitting in a pool with like literally no one else is fully covered, but I was like you know what this is what I want to wear, and I was proud of it. I didn’t really feel self-conscious or anything.

On the same note, Setareh shared though she tries not to “limit” herself with anything, there are situations that need special catering to women like her such as having women-only pools or beaches. She explained even though she does wear a burkini and enjoys the ocean, she still has that desire to enjoy herself in a bikini; “You still have this desire, and you still have this need, or want to be able to be in a swimsuit without your hijab on and just enjoy that.” Comparing Southern California to the Middle East, she said options are very limited if one does not have “a pool in their backyard.” Whereas, in the Middle East, there are private or females-only pools and spas that provide that opportunity to the modest women, so she thinks her “experiences can be a little bit limiting than non-Muslims, or non-conservative people, or non-hijabi people.”

**Third interview question.** The third interview question asked: Have you ever felt you have been discriminated against? What do you think triggered the incident? What were the causes for the incident in your opinion? How has that impacted your life? When answering this question, participants pointed to many factors related to education, work, social, and public aspects of their lives. To avoid repetition, themes specifically related to these factors are discussed under the appropriate sections. The following themes were generated based on more general accounts (Table 10).
Table 10

**Discrimination**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labeling it discrimination with caution</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detecting discrimination is complicated</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discrimination within the Muslim community</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feelings of being worn out</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thinking of taking off the hijab</td>
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*Note. N = 12*

**Labeling it discrimination with caution.** During the data collection and then data analysis, it was evident all participants were very cautious about identifying an event discriminatory. Even though all said they have been treated unjustly at least more than once in their lives, and their characters and behaviors are continuously being scrutinized by many in the general public, they were extremely cautious about identifying and labeling something or someone biased. Unless something or someone were absolutely and clearly prejudiced, they were hesitant to label it as such and tried to recognize the positive side of people more than their negatives and gave them the benefit of the doubt. For example, Mellissa said if she did not pass an interview or get a job, discrimination is not her initial thought, but that “there’s probably somebody more qualified than” her; discrimination comes third on her list. Similarly, Anya said she would not consider a rejection after a job interview discriminatory unless they had clearly asked her about her hijab, religion, or a prohibited discriminatory question.
Even when it was obvious to them someone had mistreated them based on their biases, some participants tried to be understanding of their circumstances. For instance, after talking about an incident she had at Disneyland, which had also upset her, Roya said about the aggressor, “Who knows, maybe she knew someone in 9/11, and she thinks it’s because of me they died. I don’t know.” Again, later in the interview, she pointed to some of her experiences and said:

I’m outgoing, and I’m very loud, as you can see. I talk to anyone I sit next to. Sometimes, I’ve had people in class that don’t want to talk to me, I felt. Again, I’m not sure if they’re being racist, or they literally don’t want to talk to anyone. I don’t know. Sometimes, that’s very confusing. It’s very sad. Sometimes, I can’t tell if they’re having a bad day, or they really don’t want to talk to me. I don’t know. Also, we need to be careful; we can’t call everything racist….What if that guy at ** [naming a restaurant] was being mean to me because he was having a bad day? Or what if he’s literally racist? Or what if I’m annoying? I am annoying. I’m very annoying, so what if I’m an annoying customer, and he doesn’t want to talk to me? I don’t know. Sometimes, it’s very difficult to distinguish if I’m annoying, or he’s being racist, or he’s having a bad day. I can’t tell.

Donya also stated she does not really get “insulted or offended” when people make abrasive comments to her because she thinks, “In general, people these days are saying ugly things to a lot of people, not just Muslim women.” She said, “I don’t take it personally; I just realize that society’s morals have changed a lot in the last 10 years.”
This account from Assal also shows how she tries to focus on a positive part of an unfavorable incident or interaction:

I take it as positive as I can, and this is my mentality. I take it as positive. I never take people’s intentions in a bad way. That’s why I skip a lot of bad things. I skip a lot of negativity, and I, in my mind, I just process it this way. I process it positively, and I think, oh, that’s a chance to talk to them about this.

She said she does not get offended when people ask her ignorant questions such as, “Do you take a bath with your scarf?” because she thinks of it as an opportunity to educate them about her culture and religion. In fact, she goes out of her way by inviting ignorant individuals such as classmates or colleagues to her house, passionately explaining:

I think it is a chance to talk to them about how…to educate them in a, not an offensive way, not to tell them that you guys are ignorant. Just telling them…to give them nice…good information about what Muslim women are, and I had this responsibility to invite them over, to my house, and to talk them about my culture, my things. At the end of the day, they get their buy ins, and they love the diversity, and they feel that they’ve traveled to another country.

**Detecting discrimination is complicated.** According to all 12 participants in this study, detecting bias and discrimination is confusing and complicated. Not only is it always difficult to recognize bias and discrimination for what they are as discussed earlier, particularly when they are subtle or some key elements are unknown to the target, but also it is difficult to distinguish on what that bias or prejudice is based. A few participants, including Elmira, Mina, Mandana, and Setareh, elaborated on this
complexity, noting they are at an intersection of different identities such as being young, a female, an Arab, a Muslim, a hijabi, et cetera. Thus, it would be difficult for them to distinguish if for one an incident or interaction were based on someone’s biases, and two if it were, then what parts of their identities triggered it. That is why, in many cases, it is also difficult for them to decide whether a discriminatory event or interaction is xenophobic and based on their religion, ethnicity, country of origin, or a mix of all. In one example, Mandana said, “When someone’s staring at me, I’m like, are you racist, or do you think I’m pretty? I can’t tell.” Mina also said she would get inappropriate comments from some customers who sexualized her, but she could not tell if it was because she was a woman or because she was wearing a hijab. She could not separate the two “because they’re together.” In another example, Elmira referred to one of her cousin’s experiences as a medical professional who obtained her bachelor’s degree from Jordan before coming to the U.S. Her cousin, also an Arab veiled Muslim woman complained to Elmira, “The people who she works for really get surprised when she does something correct, or when she does a good job, or when she exceeds their expectations. They get really surprised.” Moreover, “They would always assign somebody to watch what she’s doing because they don’t trust that she would do it correctly.” Elmira shared this example to say there are “layers” to a discriminatory event or interaction, and that it is not always easy to pinpoint the cause of it:

It’s because you’re a Muslim, because you’re a Hijabi, because you’re a person of color, and because you’re a woman. Well, if you’re a woman, they’ll view you as like, oh, she probably doesn’t know, or here have a man help her or have a man show her how to do it…things like that.
Considering this point of view, the participants might be subjected to prejudice not only because of their religious identity, Muslim visibility, or ethnicity, but also because of other identities and characteristics such as their gender, age, color of skin, and body type.

Higher level of discrimination when a darker skin hijabi. At least three participants out of 12 mentioned comparing their experiences to those who have darker skin tone in addition to being a Muslim hijabi woman, they think they are treated with less prejudice. Mellissa, Anya, and Roya thought those with darker skin tones are subjected to more discrimination because of the color of their skin. As mentioned, all participants in this study had fair skin color with some having European bloodlines. For instance, Anay believes her friend who is Somali receives more discrimination than her because, “She has two struggles which is her color of skin and hijab…. Whereas me, I struggle with hijab, but she has to struggle with both, you know ’cause they have their own struggles.” Mellissa also said her circumstances could have been potentially worse if she had darker skin, and, “Even though I wear the scarf, it’s a lot harder for other people that wear the scarf, plus they are dark, plus something like that.” Finally, Roya believed her fair skin tone has worked in her favor, and even said that some other non-Muslim minorities such as Hispanics receive more racism. Nevertheless, all three participants also mentioned that this was based on their own experiences, and many factors such as where they live, work, or go to school have had a direct impact on their experiences. For instance, Roya, immediately after her statement about her skin tone and other minorities, said, “But again, that’s where I live. No way If I were to live, maybe
not even Orange County or maybe just my area,” but in another city where she lived for a year, she would have had the same relatively positive experience.

_Not all racists are White, and not all minorities are tolerant of Arabs and Muslims._ Though a majority of the perpetrators in racist and discriminatory incidents and interactions were White, not all of them were, and some participants pointed that out. Many participants said their discriminatory experiences have been caused by a variety of groups of people in terms of age, ethnic background, gender, religion, country of origin, and color of skin. Donya said she has had “very diverse experiences with different people.” For instance, she could not understand it when a man identified as Latino told her she should not go to the Muslim-ban protest and should let it go while she was on her way there. In shock, she replied to him, “Your people are suffering just as much as mine; I don’t understand.” Setareh, born and raised in Southern California, also had an incident where she was told to “go back to your country” in a protest by a Filipino man who clearly could not speak English very well. In addition, Mellissa felt a group of female customers from different ethnicities were trying to push her “away from her religion” and who she was by constantly telling her for months that she should take off her hijab because they feared she would be harmed. However, their persistence despite having heard Mellissa’s firm stance and repeated reasonings had turned to harassment and rather “hurtful” and bothersome encounters. Besides, their seemingly kind-hearted suggestion was framed in a microaggressive tone such as, “You don’t have to wear it, there’s no reason for it, things like that.” That is why Mellissa had become skeptical of the purity of their intentions. Mandana also shared her experience on this topic:
I actually used to think people of color or minorities were gonna be more accepting than White people, and I’ve been proven wrong over time, and I actually am starting to see just like less of a difference. Like I used to think I’ll be safer around other Brown people or other Black people than White people, but it really depends on who you’re talking to and that person’s level of judgment and that person’s willingness to learn and accept….Like let’s say they’re Latino and they’re super passionate about the Chicano Movement, but they still don’t understand my hijab, and they might even be somewhat Islamophobic. I’ve met other people who are in the LGBTQ community who are inherently Islamophobic even if they are part of community that’s also discriminated against.

She said being part of a “marginalized identity” does not necessarily make an individual more understanding and tolerable of other marginalized groups. She went even further and pointed out that there is also discrimination among Muslims and by Muslims against other minority groups, but “they just don’t see it as the same thing.”

*Discrimination within the Muslim community.* Eight out of 12 participants spoke about some sort of judgment, intolerance, or discrimination within the Muslim community. To them, criticism of an already marginalized community by its own members, where they are constantly being scrutinized, demonized, and dehumanized and are always seen through many false misconceptions, phony accusations, and with skepticism, is not an easy task but a necessary one. Despite being controversial, these participants believe the Muslim community, just as with any other community, has some problems that need to be discussed and addressed by its members. Mandana shed some light on why criticizing the Muslim community is a sensitive and controversial issue:
I think there’s just some cultural nuances that are hard to explain, and I think one of the biggest things that’s difficult, which other communities that are marginalized and being discriminated against might also relate to, but one of the things that’s hardest is when I want to criticize my community, I can’t do that to people who aren’t Muslim because they’re gonna take it and run with it. So, if I sit there and tell them like, yes, there’s a double standard with women and men, [they would respond,] well, I knew it! Don’t you stone women? Don’t you oppress women? It’s like, no, that’s not what I’m saying, and so it is hard to…it validates their assumptions and their negative perceptions of us, so I’m stuck sometimes feeling like I’m eating up all the negativity from my community and then eating up all this bull**** from the Western media and just like sitting in the middle and not really able to yell at anybody.

Nevertheless, these participants shared some of the shortcomings in the Muslim community in relation to discrimination.

*Being criticized, accepted, or rejected for wearing or not wearing the hijab in the Muslim community.* Donya, Elmira, Mina, Ziba, Assal, Setareh, and Mandana, seven out of 12 participants, touched upon this subject. They criticized the Muslim community for judging, criticizing, accepting, or rejecting Muslim women for wearing or not wearing the hijab. Veiling proudly by choice, they stressed hijab is women’s choice, and the community, particularly men, have to respect and support them either way. They were deeply frustrated and disappointed with some of their fellow community members’ mindset and behaviors, particularly when living in a Western country and considering the current societal and political climates.
Though they have chosen to wear a headscarf, Elmira, Mina, Ziba, and Mandana defended Muslim women who have chosen not to practice this part of their religion. Mina thinks despite the controversy of the hijab being mandatory in Islam or not, it “ultimately is a choice, and that there’s no compulsion in religion.” All seven participants who discussed this topic also emphasized a hijab-wearing Muslim woman is not necessarily a very religious person or a perfect Muslim, and wearing or not wearing a headscarf by itself does not make someone a good or bad individual. Thus, they condemned all the negativity created by some surrounding nonhijabi Muslim women solely based on their choice. Elmira said it is absolutely wrong to judge someone only based on their hijab,

…because we don’t know what their situation is, and we don’t know their character. We don’t know who they are as a person other than a person who chooses not to wear hijab; you know? We don’t know their life. Maybe they’re in a situation where they can’t wear hijab. Maybe they’re not ready to wear hijab. Maybe…so many different things.

In addition, Elmira said wearing a hijab does not mean she is better than someone who does not wear it “because maybe they pray five times a day, but maybe I don’t do that. Maybe I’m not as consistent as them. Maybe they donate so much money to the poor, and I don’t do that.” Similarly, Ziba defended nonhijabis saying she knows “a lot of nonhijabi women that are actually way more religious and spiritual and modest than hijabi women.” She said there are hijabis who do prohibited behaviors such “as smoking weed and doing whatever they want” while there are nonhijabi women who do not “wear immodest clothing” and abide with many Islamic rules. That is why she thinks hijab is
not “a determiner of a good or bad person,” and that “people have dimensions and everybody’s different. Everyone has their own personalities.”

However, Elmira thought many in the Muslim community, especially men and older women, put too much weight on the hijab and judge women based on that and their attire instead of the person’s character and morals. She feared the comparisons and remarks made such as, “You’re more modest, and she’s not, or you’re more this, and she’s not,” particularly by men “could pit us against each other, hijabis and nonhijabis.” Furthermore, after Ziba started wearing her hijab, she started to notice the difference in treatment, particularly from men, Muslim and non-Muslim. As for Muslim men, she realized many treat veiled Muslim women with much more respect and hold them “on a pedestal.” Being a nonhijabi, she was puzzled about where the “disconnect” is, and “What is it about this cloth that makes even Muslim men think that hijabi women are different in some way”; she does not think the answer is “simple.” Analyzing the situation, she thought Muslim men realize that most hijabi women have strict boundaries, and they need to respect that; otherwise, “it will look bad on them.” Nevertheless, she believed all Muslim women regardless of their hijab should be treated with the same respect because most of them share the same morals and values and would have the same boundaries; wearing a headscarf does not wholly change a person. Elmira also condemned any attempts, intentional or not, to separate hijabi and nonhijabi Muslim women by making degrading remarks about one group or the other and trying to “make it a competition of who’s the better Muslim.” She further suggested, “All Muslim women should be supportive of each other” regardless of wearing the hijab, and they need to be
“united.” All other participants responded to this topic shared the same sentiment as Elmira and Ziba.

However, hijabi women also have their own issues within the Muslim community. In part, they are criticized for wearing it while, at the same time, they are criticized for how they wear it. Participant 1 shared some of her experiences with some Muslims who questioned her about her hijab:

Are you going to take it off? Do you consider taking it off? Why not? You’re very liberal, you’re outspoken…you should really take it off. I’m like, no, I like that I’m…on stage in hijab. I like that I’m out there giving talks in my hijab. I don’t…I never see it as a problem, but I feel like a lot of times, community members make me feel like it’s a problem.

Elmira explained why she thinks both veiled and nonveiled Muslim women are criticized for wearing or not wearing the hijab. She thinks women who wear the hijab are criticized by nonreligious Muslims and men, who also try to blend in by changing their religious names such as Mohammad to Mo or Khalil to Kevin, compared with nonhijabi women who are criticized by “religious men, the moms, and the aunties.” However, hijab-wearing Muslim women are, in addition, “constantly” criticized for how they wear their hijabs because, as Elmira put it, they are not “wearing it good enough.” Elmira said:

It’s like, okay, you may have your hair covered, you may have whatever covered, but are your feet covered? Is your whatever covered? Okay, why are you wearing this? Why are you getting your eyebrows done?…things like that. I guess it’s a constant thing between people who are religious and who aren’t
religious, and they have a problem with everybody, so I feel like there’s no way to win.

Moreover, Assal noted the culture in her native country is very judgmental, and doing anything somewhat different than the norm gets people’s attention, “So, if you wear a scarf, they judge you. If you wear a niqab and abaya, they judge you. You show anything, they’ll judge. Anything.” Mandana also weighed in saying:

We can’t decide; some people think that hijab is fun, some people think it’s not. Some people think that if you don’t wear it the right way, don’t wear it at all, and some people are like, don’t judge her.

She added, “It’s good to have different perspectives. I don’t think there’s one right way to do it, but I think we need to have a message.”

However, sometimes such mentalities pass from the level of judgments and criticism and becomes clear discrimination. For instance, Donya was recently rejected from a job by a “Middle Easterner who was looking to hire a secretary that speaks Arabic and English,” and was told “We don’t want somebody wearing a hijab.” Similarly, participant 9 was working for a self-identified nonpracticing Iranian Muslim woman, and she was pulled out of a project given to her because of her hijab, despite her impeccable qualifications.

Donya, Elmira, Mina, and Mandana warned prejudice and unconstructive criticism within the community is a very important and alarming issue because it is hurting the community, especially at this time of societal and political discord. They believed the constant unnecessary judgments and mistreatments of one another because
of having a different perspective of Islam or a lifestyle is not only unconstructive but also toxic. Mina firmly believed this type of attitude is,

…kind of poisoning our own community because when we should be uniting and supporting each other, we’re kind of like diverging and creating schisms within our own community, and making each other feel unsafe and unwelcomed in our own community when that already exists in every other space.

Mina believed this is an important point to make in this study “because the way that you’re treated in your community reflects back in…how you search for support, so, if you’re not receiving support from your own community, you may go to different communities to get that support.” She also noted sometimes, interestingly enough, it feels more welcoming and accepting to be around some non-Muslims than one’s own community, which is “indicative of a bigger issue.” In her view, when someone does not feel safe and connected in her community, she would look for that support and connectedness in other communities, and that might lead to the person questioning her hijab if she wears one and ultimately her faith because a sense of skepticism and resentment might be built. Donya, Elmira, and Mandana had similar accounts.

Aligned with Mina’s point, when Donya was rejected for a secretarial position, or when her potential spouses say they do not wish to marry a woman wearing a hijab, or when her relatives tell her she should not wear a headscarf, it saddens her, and she thinks to herself, “My own community is making me feel like I’m a problem for wearing a hijab.” She also mentioned dealing with mistreatment from her own community is more unbearable to her than from non-Muslims because she expects more from them.

Likewise, participant 9 revealed:
I have more anxiety meeting with Muslims than I do with non-Muslims because I think with non-Muslims, your expectation, or at least my expectation, is anything goes, right? You don’t know what’s gonna be at the other side of that door, and you just kind of have to roll with the punches, but meeting with Muslims, it gives me more anxiety because they really do discredit your abilities at times, which is sad because they’re supposed to be people that are supposed to be encouraging of what you do as a person and your career choices. So yeah, I get more anxiety with them.

In addition, she was very hurt when she was pulled out of a project because of her hijab. Though she had so many different emotions and questions, she was very hurt and “offended” particularly because this was done to her by a Middle Eastern woman who “understands the challenges,” and she was “from a Muslim background.” She could not understand how her hijab could “overpower” her abilities in her profession despite her proven qualifications and experience.

Mina has very strong opinions about this, and she feels,

…like many Muslim women who wear hijab get pushed out of their community, so then they have to go elsewhere to find community support. Then it changes their own acceptance and interpretation of Islam, so it might turn them off from Islam.

For instance, Mandana used to be very active in the Muslim community and was working very hard to show others what the real Islam is. She was very passionate about her hijab and telling people about it when questioned, even to the point where many of her nonhijabi friends would tell her she inspired and empowered them to wear one.
However, she shied away from those groups and other Muslim groups at her college as a result of dismissive and judgmental behavior. She has a much more diverse group of friends with a limited number of Muslims, many of whom are nonpracticing. Though it is very complex because of many factors, including the pressure of having to deal with daily microaggressions from the non-Muslims, her experiences with her community and her support system became a contributing factor in her contemplating removing her hijab. She said when she feels pressure from the outside but also cannot communicate that with people or criticize her community’s shortcomings without being subjected to backlash, she feels “stuck in the middle” and as if “nobody likes me.” It is important to note neither of these participants thought having a diverse group of friends or support group was bad or led to changes in an individual’s religious views. In fact, as discussed earlier, they do want to be welcomed, accepted, and supported by other groups of people. Thus, it is not the diversity that they blame, but the lack of proper support from their own community.

To Mina, this is Islamophobia within the Muslim community. She believes though “we normally think of Islamophobia being Muslim people versus non-Muslim people,” it works in two ways, from the outside and the inside. She expanded on her view and used the hijab as an example:

If we see a woman dressed hijab a certain way, and then we say, oh that’s not hijab, how is that not Islamophobic? You’re rejecting her faith, and you’re rejecting the way she embraces and embodies and practices her faith. Just because it’s different from how you do it, doesn’t mean that it’s wrong or right…. [This] is a form of Islamophobia because when you’re taught to hate
yourself, and then you’re taught to hate others who look like you or don’t look like you, in the sense that I wear my hijab this way, and she wears her hijab that way she’s less Muslim than I am, that doesn’t actually exist. You’re either Muslim, or you’re not Muslim, and the only person who can judge you is God. So, it’s not your place to put checks on.

Mina thought judgments, rejections, and “being treated poorly” by one’s community while being accepted elsewhere, and when there is also already a toxic and hostile political environment around the religion and community, would only help to validate the stereotypes and misconceptions and thus further the alienation and Islamophobia because it is “turning people off of Islam and separating them.” Mina views this as “a psychological Islamophobia that kind of takes the way that we think about ourselves and our community, and it turns us against each other.” She believed “this is very frightening” because,

...people are so turned off by hijab; not because of hijab itself, but because of the way people talk about it, because of the way people embody it, and the way that they judge each other for it or for not having it.

Subsequently, this is a very important matter to the individuals who participated in this discussion, and they are hoping to see some positive changes in their community by raising this issue and starting a healthy conversation. Meanwhile, they shared some insights with their fellow Muslim community members. After becoming depressed and starting to lose herself and her personality, Setareh realized her hijab and religion were supposed to complement her and create parameters in her life and not to be a burden. She found out that “a true hijabi” is not one that needs to wear an abaya or long scarves and
avoids makeup, and that the “ideal image” for a Muslim woman she had created in her “mind isn’t necessarily true.” She stated:

I’m a human being, at the end of the day; I have desires; I have wants; I have needs. Just because I wear the hijab doesn’t mean I don’t want to take care of my hair, doesn’t mean that I don’t like makeup, doesn’t mean that I don’t like all these things. And also want to say that, although I wear the hijab, it does not make me a perfect Muslim. I have my own vices; I have my flaws. You don’t have to be perfect to wear the hijab; You can’t have all your T’s crossed and your I’s dotted in order to, okay, now you could wear the hijab, or wearing the hijab equals this, this, this, and this. And I think that’s one of the misconceptions a lot of people have is they’re like, well, you’re religious, but you curse a lot. And I’m like, I’m religious, but my cursing is…Yes, it’s not right, Yes, it’s wrong, but it doesn’t make me any less of an individual or any less of a Muslim. It just means that I have a bad habit that I have to correct.

Furthermore, Mandana thought “there’s no wining,” and this is a life lesson in general to “do things for you, and not other people anyway ’cause you’re never gonna please everybody.” Like Mandana, Elmira also believed, “There is no way to win…so just do what feels right to you and support everybody else around you, whether they choose to wear hijab, whether they don’t choose to wear hijab.” However, she added another message:

The people who try to separate themselves from parts of their identity, people who don’t want to be associated with Muslims, leave them alone. If you wanna be alone, be alone, but we’re here. We’re a community. We wanna support each
other. Yes, that comes with some bad things, but so does every other community. If you don’t like the way I wear my hijab, then close your eyes. If you don’t like that I wear a hijab or you don’t like the way I wear a hijab, close your eyes. I have a right to wear it, and I have the right to wear it the way that I wanna wear it, and at the same time, I have the right to take it off if I want to.

_Easier to be veiled in Southern California than some less conservative Muslim majority countries._ In relation to the previous section, Mellissa shared from her experience and what she heard from her relatives that it seems easier to wear a hijab in Southern California than in a less conservative Muslim majority country such as Lebanon because many judge women for wearing one. She explained Lebanon specifically is known to be a less religious Muslim majority country among many Arab Muslims; cosmetics, fashion, and plastic surgery are very common and important to many in Lebanon. Also, since many do not wear religious headscarves there, those who do, especially younger ones, feel as if they do not fit in even though they share the same culture and religion. Though, Mellissa said she never feels that way herself whenever she travels there, she said that is probably “because I’ve learned how to dress myself nicely, and I know how to present myself, and I’m confident with it on that people don’t look at me like that.” Nevertheless, she thought it is “a lot different” when someone is born and raised there.

_Feelings of superiority among some Arab Muslims toward non-Arab Muslims._ Mandana thinks some Arab Muslims feel superior to Muslims from other races. She thinks besides the Western media playing a key role in this perception by portraying Muslims as Arabs and Arabs as Muslims, the Quran is also in Arabic, which makes some
Arabs think of themselves as “the superior race.” She elaborated on her claim by comparing Arab Muslims to White Americans,

…especially Arabs, we think we’re everything. We are the White people of the Muslim community. Like we are statistically a minority in the Muslim community around the world, but we act like we’re the only ones that are Muslim, and everybody else is secondary….If you look at the United States of America, White people are becoming the minority statistically speaking, but not mainstream representation. Everybody is still White. We’ve only had one Black president out of the [45], so I think Arabs are the same way because in America, we are a smaller number compared to African Americans and Asian Muslims, but we are the dominant. We are the ones that are portrayed mainstream as Muslims, and yes, I think Western media does that a lot….but I also think that we bank on it.

Though she does not feel this way, neither does her family; when growing up, she had friends whose parents would only like to socialize with other Arabs. She also heard one of these parents criticizing a sheikh’s recitation of Quran because his accent was not Arabic, which she thinks is normal when Arabic is not one’s native language; in this context, a sheikh is an Arabic word referred to a religious leader. She opposed that idea stating, “From an Islamic perspective, Allah [God] doesn’t care, like you’re reading his book, and that’s all he wants to hear. All languages are beautiful to him.” She defended that sheikh and called such behaviors racism; “You can’t discriminate and say one sheik’s recitation is better because his native tongue is Arabic. That’s literally racism, and it’s like institutionalized racism because it’s okay to say that.”
**Feelings of being worn out.** All participants reported the constant judgment, microaggressions, and discrimination or fear of being targeted based on their ethnicity and religious beliefs have somewhat impacted them and have led to the feelings of being worn out. They self-described the effects ranging from relatively minimal to being greatly affected. For instance, Elmira used the word heartbreaking several times during the interview and even told the researcher that it should be one of the study’s themes. She said while not all incidents of prejudice are memorable “because you’re just kind of used to that every day” after wearing the hijab for some time, specific incidents that are out of ordinary are. In addition, even those smaller encounters and microaggressions consequently lead to feel worn out. The constant battle within one’s self and one’s state of awareness for having to deal with unwanted attention, questions, and comments are very demanding and exhausting even for those who would generally welcome and encourage such engagements such as Elmira.

While this urge and willingness to answer other’s unsolicited questions about hijab and Islam in different settings, as long as they are respectful, was still exciting and alive for some participants such as Donya and Assal, it has died down for some other participants such as Melika and Mandana. Mandana used to be a vocal and active advocate for the hijab and Muslims, inviting others to ask hard questions about the religion. However, this love and passion has been lost throughout the years after dealing with people’s negative perceptions and comments. She complained there are times she just wanted to be recognized as herself or seen as any other individual and not the Muslim hijabi woman and to be freely running errands without having to answer people’s questions or having to hear comments about her outfits or beliefs. The feeling of wanting
to be treated as an individual was echoed by all participants. Moreover, while all participants were very proud of their identity and wearing the hijab, and they believed it was their duty to represent Islam, hijabi women, and the Muslim community in a positive light and to welcome questions and educate people about Islam, they wished they did not have to carry this burden.

Thinking of taking off the hijab. All participants, except one, thought about not wearing the hijab at some point but for varying reasons, and for the most part, as a passing thought. The most common reason thinking that was fashion related; being young and wanting to look beautiful and fashionable at times when they wanted to attend a party or had difficulty finding trendy but modest clothing, they wished they did not have to meet certain requirements by Islam. However, they all said this was only a temporary thought, and at the end of the day, their true desire is to please God, and they are proud of their hijab and identity. Moreover, all participants, regardless of the severity of the circumstances surrounding the reasons they even considered removing the hijab, highlighted they struggled to wear the hijab or considered taking it off but never had the desire to do it. They also stressed the hijab is an added element but would not change their lifestyle or values.

However, some participants such as Mellissa and Mandana said sometimes they thought about not wearing their hijab only out of curiosity and to see how differently they might be treated. Almost all participants were fair skinned and spoke perfect English with American accents, so they would have looked like any other mainstream Americans who many xenophobes expect to see in the U.S. if it were not for their hijab. Something they acknowledged as well; that they wanted to know how life would have been different
if they were not immediately recognized as Muslims because of their head coverings. Mandana, for instance, said whenever she covers her hair in a less traditional way where she is not immediately recognizable as a Muslim woman such as in a turban or covers her hair with a beanie or a hoodie, she receives much less unwanted attention and comments from others, and that she is less concerned about the image of the Muslim community being ruined if she is not her best self at that moment.

Nevertheless, there have been much more difficult times when several participants considered removing their hijab as a result of fear for their safety and/or going through stressful situations. Anya, Melika, and Donya contemplated removing their hijab because of fear of backlash or having been harassed. Anya feared the recent rise in hate crimes against Muslims could also affect her personally, so she was not sure if she should continue wearing her hijab for some time for safety reasons. Melika was also afraid to wear her hijab after she was attacked on the way home from high school. She was attacked from behind and her scarf was aggressively pulled and almost removed from her head. Furthermore, Donya shared she has always worn her hijab with certainty and pride despite her father’s disapproval of the practice. However, for the first time, after the San Bernardino shootings, she had second thoughts about practicing her hijab and whether she should cover her hair with something less traditional such as a hat. She described her mother as “a very strong, faithful person,” who had always been the source of encouragement and strength for her by saying, “We’re proud of our faith. God is on our side. We’re going to keep doing what we’re going to do, and InshaAllah [Arabic for God willing], it will be okay.” However, even her mother told Donya for the first time in her life that maybe she should wear a hat instead to protect herself since she used to live
and work in the San Bernardino area. Hearing that from her mother, then avoiding someone intentionally trying to force her into a freeway crash for no apparent reason on the same day as her mother’s suggestion, and being followed and intimidated multiple times by a truck tagged with a sticker that read Muslim Butcher, impacted her. For the first time in her life after wearing her hijab for so many years, she thought to herself, “Do I have to protect myself by taking off the hijab or changing it?” However, after a week of contemplation, she decided she should not change anything about herself because, “This is my choice, and it’s my right. That’s what being an American is. I need to choose what I want to do.”

Participant 9 and Assal had the predicament of having to choose between finding a desired job or wearing their hijab. Participant 9 had become extremely depressed and devastated after she was dismissed from a project she had worked for very hard because of her hijab. Until that incident, she had never seen discrimination as an obstacle to her goals and dreams even though she had faced it many times along the way. She was too driven and optimistic to let anything or anyone affect her negatively and stop her from what she wanted to obtain. However, after learning it was her hijab that disqualified her from leading a project despite her proven competency, her whole world crumbled. She was torn between choosing her hijab and identity or her passion and dream job, something she had worked for very hard. She said, “I can tell you this truthfully and honestly,…[after] my previous loss, I kept telling myself, okay, I might have to just take off my hijab, but I couldn’t do it. Mentally, I couldn’t imagine it.” Though she struggled and debated, she said, “If I have to choose between my hijab and my career, I would be choosing my hijab even though it would make me very depressed because I’ve worked so
hard to get to this point.” She just could not pull herself “away from the hijab mentally.” She referred to her struggle as “only a mental exercise,” and added, “Every time I went back to that mental exercise, I was filled with anxiety and panic.”

Participant 9’s struggle with having to choose between her hijab or a career is over; however, Assal is currently going through a similar mental exercise. She gave herself a tight deadline for finding a job and is wondering whether she might have to choose between finding a good job or practicing her hijab. Even thinking about it made her sad, as she is deeply attached to her hijab. Assal also chose to remove her headscarf and only speak English while traveling, particularly by air, because she fears for her safety, and she does not want to experience what many other Muslims have experienced. Though temporary, every time she does not wear her hijab at the airport, she feels very sad and oppressed and that someone is dictating to her how to dress and behave. She tries her best to block the memories and feelings she experiences during those times, so that they do not affect her psyche. She strongly believes she needs to remove her hijab under such circumstances in order to protect herself and her family. That is the only time she allows herself to remove it and does not want to think about the sadness and guilt afterward, which is also why she is terrified of having to choose between a career and her hijab.

However, Participant 10 and Participant 11 were going though much more difficulties with keeping their headscarves at the time of interview. Participant 10 shared, “Unfortunately it’s been very difficult, and lately I feel like I’ve been kind of loosening up my scarf because I’m trying to fit in more.” She said, “It’s been kind of unfortunate” because she used to be very strict about wearing her head covering, but “nowadays I just
kind of wrap my scarf around because it’s like I’m trying to be less of...I’m trying to stand out less.” However, even by loosening up her hijab a little, she still feels the tension and has difficulty fitting in. She believes the harassment and discrimination will be always there as long as a Muslim woman covers her hair despite the style of it. She added:

I’ve recently been facing a lot more challenges with it, and I’m hoping that loosening it up is going to ease the situation, but it hasn’t. It’s still the same thing. It’s still the same racial institutions that we’re exposed to, and still the same hate, still the same ignorance. Recently, it’s been way more escalated since our president is who he is.

She shared the recent societal and political changes have “made me more scared, it’s made me less confident in my faith, less confident in my religion. In the last two years, I think I’ve thought about taking off my scarf more than 100 times.” Though at the same time, she is very scared of removing her hijab because it is part of her identity, and she believes she should not have to “sacrifice” her identity and a part of herself just “to make another person happy” and “for the sake of others to feel safe.” She believes it is a very difficult time for her where she has to evaluate everything and see what she values the most in her life: her comfort, religion, or safety.

Participant 11 was also going through a similar situation. She felt lost and desperate about continuing her life as a hijabi and experiencing isolation, unwanted attention, constant judgment, and having to carry the burden for millions of Muslims, or leaving all that behind by removing her hijab. She suffered greatly since wearing her hijab, and though she chose to wear it, she thinks it might have only been a spontaneous
and reactive decision to the bullying and isolation she experienced at that time. Back then, her parents thought it was too early for her to wear the hijab and wanted her to wait till she had grown older, and now she too thinks the same. She stated:

I really do wonder if I had grown into myself and been allowed to just be *** [her name] and not be the ambassador for 1.7 billion Muslims in the world, which I did not sign up for, then maybe I would have come out different.

She wondered, “Maybe I would have put it on later in life, and not had these repercussions. Maybe I would have at least just been more emotionally prepared.”

Though she is seriously struggling over such thoughts and considering removing her scarf, she still thinks she “could never take it off because of the backlash” she would receive from the Muslim and non-Muslim community. She is afraid she is going to disappoint her family and does not know how to face the Muslim community and the potential judgments and isolations. Furthermore, she is afraid of the non-Muslim community, and how her personal struggles and decisions could impact the Muslim community at large since she thinks, despite the hijab being a very personal and private matter, it has been highly politicized, which is also partly why she wants to remove it.

She fears her unveiling “would be giving into their negative ideas of hijab” even if “they don’t like the hijab.” She said, “I just feel like there’s no winning,…but…I’ve just been thinking about it a lot lately and debating it, and I have never doubted hijab this much ever.”

The Barriers or Struggles Related to Work and Education

The first subquestion guiding this study was: What work or education challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old)
experience? To address this question, the participants were asked: What barriers or struggles, if any, have you experienced or are experiencing as a veiled Arab Muslim woman related to your work or education? The question was broken into two sections: work and education. Several themes emerged from this question, which are presented separately. However, since the following theme emerged both for education and work, it is presented before those sections.

**Do not want to be tokenized.** Mina, Anita, and Mandana spoke about Muslim hijabi women being “tokenized” sometimes at school or work to showcase the image of diversity for their organizations, and they are very offended by that. They said they want to be seen for who they are, their intellect, and what they have to offer as an individual and not to be accepted for a position because they wear a piece of cloth on their head. While almost all participants shared their concerns about being rejected or having their qualifications overlooked because they wear a headscarf, these three participants were additionally concerned about being accepted only because of their hijab. For instance, at one point, Mina felt she was being tokenized when she was accepted to many different programs at her high school because her peers and other competitors would tell her so, and that she was just a “diverse point.” Though she realizes the comments might have come out of pure jealousy, that made her very concerned and conscious about her accomplishments. She also always gets “anxious” whenever she passes the initial screening for a position and is invited to a face-to-face interview because she never knows how they might feel about her hijab, and if that would have any effect on how they view her application. At the same time, she said she does not “want to be tokenized.”

This is how she described her feelings about this:
I don’t want to be tokenized. I don’t want people to accept me into a program or accept me as a job, like an employee for a job, or put me in part of their organization just to showcase their diversity or showcase the fact that they’re progressive and open minded or tolerant. I’m a Muslim, yeah, but that doesn’t mean that you can just use me for your poster child. Oh, look, we accept Muslims as well. She wears hijab, so she’s even “more Muslim.” You know quote and quote more Muslim. So, I want people to look at me through the quality of my character, and the quality of my intellect, the ideas that I bring forward, not the fact that I wear a piece of cloth on my head, or that I pray five times a day, or whatever. I want it to be for who I am and not how I look.

Anita also shared her excitement and joy of being active and having an opportunity to be involved in many special events and advocacy gatherings were temporarily shattered when she realized she might have been tokenized all along. She said many in the campus administration knew her and seemed happy to have her in their fund-raising galas and outreach events, and she really enjoyed the activities and the opportunities given to her. However, after a while, she realized it was always the same people who were invited to those events, and “there was one of each race or one of each ethnicity.” This made her to pause and question the situation; she wondered “for a second,…am I being tokenized right now? Are they just using me?…Why am I the only one?” Because she had become very concerned about this issue, she asked about it, and she was told, no other Muslim or hijabi on the campus was interested in participating in such activities, and she was “the only one who [had] reached out.” She felt better when
her other hijabi friends confirmed they were not interested and had never elected to be active in that capacity.

Mandana also had reason to be concerned about her future professional life; “I know that I’ll find a job, and I know I’m wanted places, but it’s just because of my hijab. It’s not because of me and my skill set. That’s how I feel sometimes.” She believed she has been tokenized as a student at her university, and that is partly why she is concerned about her future career as well. She eagerly provided a great deal of evidence to prove her point. She showed her photos taken and displayed in different newspapers and her college campus after she participated in certain events such as attending a candlelight vigil for the victims of a White supremacy attack. The events varied in their level of importance and context, but the photos were very similar to one another with her being the focus of the photographs. She said some of the newspapers she was featured in “weren’t even relevant.” Please note details of the events are intentionally left out to protect the identity of the participant. She believed her scarf was the reason for all these photos, and she received “the attention for the wrong reasons” because she was the only visibly Muslim at the events, and everyone wanted their “diversity quota for the year.” Hence, as much as these participants were concerned about being disqualified for a position, be it in education or work, because of their hijab, they did not want to acquire such a position because of it either. They wanted to be seen and respected as individuals and not to be judged or tokenized because of their clothing.

Work

It is important to note that nine out of 12 participants were between the ages of 20 and 23, with only three participants between 29 and 35 years old. Therefore, the work-
related experiences were limited for most participants, particularly since most of them were still pursuing their education. Table 11 contains major themes generated from work-related questions.

Table 11

*The Barriers or Struggles Related to Work*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not want to be tokenized</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bias and discrimination relating to work</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about job opportunities</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being underestimated</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 12*

**Bias and discrimination related to work.** All 12 participants have been discriminated against at work and/or when applying for a job at least once. Two out of 12 subjects, Donya and Anya, were denied a position, explicitly mentioning their hijab as a reason. As mentioned before, Donya was recently denied a position as a secretary for a Middle Eastern place looking for someone who could speak Arabic and English. She was told they did not want to hire someone with a hijab. In another incident, also recent, she said, “I went into a job interview and from the moment I walked into the man’s office, his face said everything; it was like, oh, I don’t want this.” Though “he was trying to be polite, and it was very obvious that he was trying way too hard. It was a difficult challenge for him,” she said. She did not get the job and had a strong feeling it was because of her hijab because the man even acknowledged her qualifications were just what they were seeking. She added, “I assumed it was most likely the hijab because
that’s the only thing that triggers any kind of recognition that I’m different. Even my name is not anything too exotic, now it’s becoming more common.” Anya was also asked during an interview for a position with a well-known ice-cream chain in Southern California, “Do you have to wear this [hijab]?…”’cause I don’t think you can do it with?” The interviewer also told her “they have a uniform” she has “to wear like a white shirt,” which she agreed to wear as long as it was long sleeves. She never heard from him.

Roya and Mellissa were also denied positions with different companies and industries, but they did not know the reasons for the denials. Roya said she has “no idea” why she was denied those positions, or if it had anything to do with her hijab, adding, “They didn’t seem racist at all, but you may never know. Maybe they didn’t want to tell me and then, in the back, they’re like, nah, I don’t think we should hire a girl with a scarf on.” She said they were very nice and respectful to her. Mellissa, similarly, said she does not know why she would get to the interview point but then not get the job, and she wondered if her scarf were a factor.

Furthermore, after being employed, nine out of 12 participants were discriminated against at work, mostly in the form of microaggressions. Another participant, Mina, was not sure if the comments she had received were because of her wearing a hijab or being a female, so she questioned whether it was xenophobic or sexual harassment. One participant, Melika, had only worked within different Islamic organizations, so she never experienced anything discriminatory. The other participant, Donya, did not mention anything in this regard.

It took participant 9 three years to find a full-time job in her field of study, and after a year of working there and being discriminated against because of her hijab, she
suddenly started to think her hijab was, in fact, the reason for her struggles. Referring to her hijab as a possible barrier, she said, “It was a question that lingered in my head, but it wasn’t something that was prominent.” She always thought she was struggling to find a full-time job because of other factors such as a recession. Even though her hijab “always loomed in the back of” her mind as a possible barrier, she never gave “it that much credit until” then. Her employer dismissed her from a much anticipated project, which she had prepared for weeks and had already achieved some results. She was told she would jeopardize the success of the project. In disbelief she asked, “What do you mean?” and the response was, “You know we are in Orange County, and it’s conservative.” When she asked if it was because of her scarf, she was told “yes,” so this incident gave her some clarity about her past struggles. This was a painful experience for her because it affected so many other aspects of her life. She also quit working there and is self-employed.

Beside this incident, Elmira, Anita, Ziba, Assal, Roya, Setareh, Mandana, and Mellissa shared they have all experienced microaggressions at work. Elmira, Assal, and Setareh experienced microaggressions from a supervisor or staff member. As discussed before, many participants have shared that they are assumed to be oppressed, and that is what Elmira has experienced at her work. She thinks people look at her as “oh, poor girl,” or that she is underestimated, which is discussed later. Though this happened in Colorado when Assal had first come to the U.S., she remembers the vice president at a site where she interned made a couple of stereotypical and derogatory statements. For instance, once she referred to some trainees as “a bunch of Muslim students.” Another time, she told Assal during a lunch break, “You are the first Yemeni woman who I
see…that is educated and fashionable. I always think that Yemeni woman are oppressed, and have a lot of kids, and they’re single moms.” As they continued the conversation, she admitted she had never known any other Yemeni woman. Assal worked there for about a week only, but after experiencing interactions like this, she did not feel comfortable working there anymore and stopped going to work there.

In addition, Setareh had a couple of discriminatory incidents that she felt the need to address. On one occasion, she was just hired by a major U.S. retail company, and on her first day of work was told by a manager, “You can’t work with that on.” Setareh responded “Well, they hired me with that on; What do you mean I can’t work?” He told her that her scarf was “a hat, and you’re not allowed to wear hats,” to which she replied, “No, it’s not a hat; it’s for religious purposes.” As the discussion unfolded, she felt proud standing up for her rights, but at the same time, she could not believe she had to have this conversation, especially since she was hired with her hijab. However, this matter was quickly resolved when he spoke to his supervisors and was clear about the matter. He apologized to her, and they became “very good friends” during her employment there. However, she had another manager toward the end of her employment there that made her life “a living hell.” She briefly described it:

I would have to refold…and it was just me. It was just me. I had to refold clothing over and over again. It was never nice enough for her. She would tell me to stack things, they would be too high, so they would slump over, and then she would get mad at me for stacking them too high, and I, I’m like, you just told me to stack everything even though I told you not to do this….And mind you, I had a really good sales experience and sales reputation. I would hit all my
numbers; I would exceed them. I would win competitions because of that, but she always had something to pick with me.

She thinks her first manager who told her about her hijab said that out of pure ignorance, but her last manager was just targeting her to the point where her colleagues noticed it and complained about her to upper management. She remembers an exchange with her coworker who told her, “I don’t know why she keeps picking on you? and I was like, so yeah, so it’s not my work ethic, right? and she’s like, no, she’s picking on you.”

She appreciated her coworkers’ support because,

…that allowed me to kinda open my eyes and see what the reality was of the situation, and yeah, it was definitely because of who I was as an individual because I practice fasting in Ramadan, and because I wear the hijab, and because I had dos and don’ts because of my religious beliefs. She did not wanna accept that. She did not wanna accept my boundaries.

Setareh had yet another similar experience with one of her managers when she used to work at a well-known eyewear chain store where she was “singling” her out. She explained:

It was very clear she was singling me out because of the hijab because even in Ramadan where my other managers would make sure my breaks were after I broke my fast, so that I could eat during that time, she would make sure it was the opposite and so on and so forth.

She found an opportunity to complain about her to the regional vice president when he was visiting their store despite the manager’s wish who wanted her to clean one of the rooms in the back to keep her out of sight; “they transferred her [manager] out” of
that store. She also wished some of her managers were more assertive and supportive of her when customers were discriminating against her saying, “Sometimes they would appease the clients, and sometimes they don’t.” Although she understands in a way they were trying to protect her from getting more hurt, especially when they would get verbally abusive or seemed physically aggressive, and appreciates it now, she wished they knew how to be more assertive and able to deescalate the situation by using their tone and mannerisms while also standing up against ignorance. She also added:

If I were to be punished, say maybe I had to work the stockroom, so I wouldn’t be around the customers because a few have voiced their dislike of me, that to me in my eyes is still considered a punishment, and if people are not willing to stand up to the ignorance, especially people that are not of the faith, that appreciate you for who you are as an individual, but then they cower in certain situations, that I think is unacceptable.

When talking about her colleagues, Setareh said her coworkers were very nice, open, and accepting for the most part. Though she’s also had “some that were a challenge,” and mostly in a microaggression form and by making insulting remarks such as, “Do guys find that [hijab] attractive?” or “Aren’t you hot in that?” or “It’s a shame that you can’t have pork.” She said these individuals would repeatedly make such remarks even after having discussed the matters. She believed, “It’s one thing to be completely ignorant of it, but it’s another thing to have things explained to an individual because they’re curious, and for that individual to continue down that path.” For instance, Setareh worked with someone whom she has known her for four years, but every time she sees her, she asks same question, “Are there things you can’t eat? Oh, so
you don’t eat meat outside?” or “So you don’t drink, and it must suck to not drink.” She believed when she had already answered her questions many times, and they have been continuously working together, she should remember, so at this point, “she chooses to be ignorant versus she truly is ignorant.”

As for other participants, Anita, Roya, and Anya mentioned they had never had any problems with their managers or colleagues and said they have been very nice and accepting. Anita said she have had very accommodating managers, and at her current job where almost everyone is White, they are very proud to have her. They also hired her friend who is a hijabi as well. She said, “They enjoy our presence.” Similarly, Roya has never had a bad manager or coworker at any of her three jobs, calling them “the best people.” She said her managers even let her pray in their offices and are very supportive of her, and her coworkers always tell her to teach them about hijab and Islam.

Furthermore, after a yearlong break, Anya was scared to search for a job and start working again since she had become a hijabi by then, and she had already been denied employment by a known ice-cream chain store. However, she was able to find a job at a retail store, and everything worked out well for her.

Ziba had only applied to Muslim-owned places, so she never had a problem when applying for different positions, and everyone was fine. However, there was a non-Muslim man at her most recent job who created a very toxic environment for her to the point that she left the job. Furthermore, Meliissa shared she has been the only Muslim or hijabi who usually worked at her different jobs, so people were not exposed to working with someone like her, “so it’s always new and something that people have to get used to
and adjust to.” However, she noted after passing the judgmental phase and having some
time interacting with each other:

I feel like a lot of people have gotten to know me. They act so different towards
me like they actually really like me, and they talk to me about personal things
because they see that I’m the same; I talk the same way as them; I think the same
way as them; I want the same things that they want; I have the same goals as they
do, so I feel like they stopped looking at me and seeing a scarf on my head kind
of. They see me as a person that oh she thinks the same way.

As for patrons and clients, eight out of 12 participants said their jobs involved
interacting with patrons or clients. Though she gets a lot of stares, Anya thinks people
have different mentalities and personalities, so sometimes they are happy to see a hijabi
working at the store, sometimes they are not. She also gets a lot of questions about her
hijab but mostly from children, which she thinks is cute and she likes to respond.

However, Anita, Roya, Setareh, Mandana, and Mellissa all experienced some type of
biased encounters with customers at their workplaces. For instance, once Antia was
helping a customer at the register, and he asked her, “You’re Muslim, right?” She
confirmed by replying, “Yes, I’m Muslim.” Then, she “rang him up, and he goes away,
and then comes back to” her again and asks her, “You’re the good kind, or the bad kind?”
She replied, “the good kind; What do you mean?” She was very confused and
embarrassed by what he said, and that her coworkers had heard him. She thought to
herself, “What are they thinking? Why does he have to put me on the spot like that?”

Also, both Roya and Setareh said they have had customers who did not want to
work with them and asked if their coworkers could help them instead. For instance, Roya
used to work at a shop in an amusement park. On a very busy day, a woman who wanted to pay at the register asked Roya to have her coworker to help her. Since she was very busy, she did not think anything of it and asked her colleague if she could help her instead but realized the register was under her name, and only she could assist the customer. At that point, the customer threw all the items and told her, “I’m sorry, I don’t purchase from Muslims. I’m a hardcore…I’m Catholic; I don’t purchase from Muslims.”

Roya was shocked and did not know how to react; it was the first time she had been treated that way. She said, “I was going to cry because I was mad. I wanted to yell at her, but I had to respect the customer…and people are watching me…what is this Muslim lady going to do?” Though she was only 16 at the time, she remained calm and did her best to be very collected because she did not want people to have a bad image from Muslims. Her manager did not realize what happened, but the supervisor of the area was there that day and noticed she was upset and asked her if she was okay. She asked him to talk in the back and told him what happened. She was very touched by her supervisor’s support:

He was so nice. He’s a Hispanic man. I’ll never forget him, my supervisor. He said, “If I was there, I would have told her to leave the store. We don’t tolerate racism or harmful acts that way towards any of our workers. I apologize that she did that to you.” Wow, I started crying because he was so nice. I started crying. He said, “you can take the day off if you want. You can go walk around, do whatever you want. Take your time.” Wow! My heart hurt. Wow, you’re so nice to me. I felt…because of him, I felt very powerful too. I felt very strong. I
was like, no, I’m going to come back and work. I don’t care. I went back, and I worked.

She said although that incident was very scary to her and shook her, it was nothing compared to other Muslim women who get physically assaulted, and that scares her. After that incident, she became very aware of her surroundings and customers’ or other people’s behavior around her. She evaluates customers interactions with her and looks for negative signals, so she is mentally prepared should something happen.

In addition, Mandana worked as a career counselor in her school, and she had some challenging students who would not respect her role or advice. She had changed her major from entertainment to education after facing some biased encounters, believing “education is more forgiving.” However, working with students made her question her major again. Some students would make hurtful remarks to her such as, “Can I have a real counselor to help me?” or “I don’t know how good your English is, but I need to get out of here in five minutes.” English is her native language, and one of the main skill sets for that position is to have an excellent reading and writing skills, as they had to edit students’ résumés, so she was very offended by that assumption made only because she wore the scarf, which also contributes to the theme of otherness. Other times, students would be rude to her, defensive, or dismissive of her advice, but they would take the same advice from her White blonde-haired coworker with great appreciation when Mandana would ask for her help. For example, once an Israeli student went to her to get help with her cover letter. She was an aspiring film producer, but her cover letter was “all about the Israeli military.” Being Palestinian and learning she is Israeli, Mandana became nervous because of the “added politics,” and felt the student was already judging
her because of her scarf and her ethnic background though she did not know she is from Palestine. She explained to her, “I think this is a good cover letter. I just think that you’re going into media, and this really focuses on the military, and I don’t see the connection.” Then, the student defensively replied, “Well, I was part of the IDF. That’s one of the most notable armies in the world.”

Mandana described the following exchange:

I was like, what’s the IDF? I know what the IDF is, but…why is she…She was like, the Israeli Defense Forces. And I was just like, okay, but we’re here [in the U.S.]. You know what I mean? And also, you’re not going into films about the military either, so you need to tie it…and she just got super defensive and was just like, I don’t understand why you have a problem with my military experience. And I was like, oh my god, I’m not trying to pick a fight with you, so I did the same thing. I got my coworker to come. She told her the same exact thing. She said, great life story. Awesome. I get it. You did the military. This has nothing to do with the position you’re going for. You need to change it. [the student said] okay, thank you so much!

Mandana was upset that some students did not have respect for her and her recommendations because of her hijab, and it hurt her. She expressed her feelings about such interactions stating, “I think that hurt a lot because they’re students, and you think students are nice. They need help. I’m here to counsel them. I’m going into education to serve students, and they’re…mean to me.” That is why it also made her question her own career choice in education.
Last, participants 1 and 9 both have had public speaking engagements where they spoke about sensitive issues, such as domestic violence and divorce. Though the nature of their performances is different, and they have had different experiences interacting with the audience. Participant 1 said her experience has been very positive. She felt “like a lot more people want to invite me or women like me because we end up showing them the full spectrum of what Muslim women are capable of.” She said they see that she can openly speak “about domestic violence, and relationship, and religion and things like that whilst still embracing her faith” and her passion at the same time. Her audiences also “really love” her performances and are “so supportive” of her. In addition, many of her Muslim audience members tell her they are “really inspired too.” On the contrary, participant 9 had more mixed feelings and experiences with her public engagements:

When I do have to give a public speech, it really embodies what it truly means to be a Muslim woman in Southern California because you’re proud of your accomplishments, you’re proud of being invited to these types of events, because you’re acknowledged for who you are as an individual, as a career-oriented person. It’s celebrating your accomplishment, but at the same time, when you’re standing up there, you could read the faces in the audience, and you could see the questioning, and if there is an open-question forum, some of the questions are not nice. They’re voiced in a very sweet manner, but you could read the underlying tones of what it is. As simple as well you’re divorced, so how do you understand the importance of a marriage, and it’s like it’s because I understand the importance of the marriage is that I chose to go through the divorce; things of that nature.
She also gets a lot of anxiety when she has such events because she thinks even though she wears the hijab and practices her faith, her “personality is atypical of what people would expect.” For instance, she said she might say a few curse words if she gets really comfortable with someone; she is into hip-hop and the latest fashion; she is bubbly and outspoken, so she thinks “it’s almost offensive to people when they see” her in her “element” referring to both her Muslim and non-Muslim audience.

**Minorities might be better at understanding biased incidents.** Mandana and Roya felt their supervisors or colleagues might have been more sympathetic with them if they were minorities. Even though they both praised their colleagues and supervisors for being supportive, they felt they might have received more personal treatment when they faced biased encounters. Mandana noted, “When I was at the career center, I had a hard time. I cried in my supervisor’s office a couple of times. It was hard.” She said her supervisor was “really nice” and tried to understand and help her, but she felt like because she was a White woman, “she just didn’t get it at the end of the day” and “that made it harder.” She felt “like even maybe a Black woman could understand me, even if she doesn’t wear hijab, just because she’s probably been made to feel weird before.” Roya also said after the incident at the amusement park shop, her colleagues who were all older White ladies were supportive of her and told her, “Oh, that’s very sad; that shouldn’t happen,” but “they weren’t passionate” about it. She said it is sad that people usually do not care unless it happens to them. Coming from a “political background, always trying to fight for people’s rights,” she said, “if someone did that to the White lady, I would flip out. [I would say] No, why’d you do that to her? No, no, no.”
Concerns about job opportunities. Seven out of 12 participants shared they have some concerns about their future career and job opportunities. Elmira, Assal, and Roya were concerned their ethnic background and religious or political views might hinder their career paths and job opportunities. Elmira was in the process of applying to a law school, and one of her concerns was whether to include that she raises money for Palestinian children. She did not want this to be a discriminatory factor if one of the decision makers were Israeli or anti-Palestine. Though she struggles morally saying, “I don’t wanna lose an opportunity because of this, but at the same time it makes me think, but if they don’t want me because I’m Palestinian, then I shouldn’t want to be there to begin with.” She was torn between wanting to be accepted in a good school and getting her degree or potentially being rejected because of her moral values and staying true to herself.

Other than her internship, which was coordinated by her university in Colorado, Assal has never worked or “applied for non-Muslim nonprofit organizations,” and it “scares” her that her hijab might become “a burden.” She believed she needs to be “very skilled and very knowledgeable about the place for them to accept” her. She believed her nonhijabi version of herself with the same portfolio, educational background, and job experiences would have a better chance of finding a job than her hijabi version. Currently unemployed, she set a deadline to get back to the workforce once her youngest child turns three, but she keeps thinking, “What if they don’t [to] accept me because I wear [the] hijab?” That is why she is trying to strengthen her network, so people get to know her and her qualifications and hire her because of her individuality and skill set instead of being prejudiced against her for wearing a headscarf. She thought applying
online and showing up to an interview with a hijab would work against her, thus, “the only way that’s going to help” her get a job is “through networking not the first impression.” However, she also thinks much of this fear and perception is because of all the stories she has heard from her friends who wear the hijab and wonders if it might, in reality, be different. Moreover, Assal believed finding a job that is not Muslim based or nonprofit might be easier in Southern California because of the existing diversity, and that many are used to seeing a hijabi woman. Meanwhile, she thinks there is still a lack of diversity in the workforce when it comes to seeing hijabi women, particularly in customer service because “they want to see you approachable, and this is something that would put questions in people’s mind.” She believed wearing a headscarf “gets the attention away from your job experiences, and who you are as a person.” That is why “I believe that I need to be very qualified for them to skip that and just look at my experience, and to intrigued them that I have more things [to offer] than the hijab.” She thought many Muslim women do not wear a headscarf because of such struggles.

Roya also said she prays she would not face racism once she finishes school and is searching for a job about which she is passionate. However, she believed she would face difficulties in the industry, event management, in which she is interested. She named a couple of well-known companies that she is thinking of applying for internships, adding, “If I remember, they had racist issues; they don’t like to hire people with a hijab on, so I am going to face difficulties. I’m not sure how that’s going to work.”

For Mandana, it is not the matter of being able to find a job, but rather whether she is hired for who she is and her expertise and whether she would be able to be promoted to her fullest potential. She shared, “When I was in undergrad and trying to go
into entertainment, I felt like I wasn’t going to find a job. Now, in my Masters, I feel confident because education is more forgiving.” However, she added:

You know what I feel like? If they want me because they want diversity, but I don’t know if they actually want me! So, I feel kind of like, yeah, we want a hijabi on the frontline, we want a hijabi doing whatever, but do they really want me? Because even when I start working there, I don’t want to stay on your frontline. I want to get promoted and work my way up, so is that gonna happen? Or am I gonna get stopped at certain points? And so that’s a fear I have.

As mentioned earlier, Mandana does not want to be tokenized. She wants to be seen and wanted for what she has to offer as an individual and professional and to have the opportunity to thrive fairly and based on her abilities.

Mellissa and Donya also have some concerns about their career lives, but they have a different perspective. Mellissa believed there are companies that might not think hijab would look good for their company, and there are places that are not “as open and accepting towards people wearing a scarf.” However, there are also many companies that “will hire you because they’re basing it on what your brain has to offer, and how you speak, and how you hold yourself, and how you answer the questions at the interview” instead of a face to represent their company. Reflecting on her struggles to find a “stable regular job” that provides an income compared to managing her nonprofit, Donya’s experience “has been a hindrance.” However, she believed:

I’m not the only one struggling to find a stable job, so I don’t blame the hijab, honestly. I know a lot of other friends who don’t wear hijab; they’re also
struggling to find a job, and I also know women who wear hijab that are
employed, and they’re doing great, so I don’t blame the hijab for that.

**Concerned but empowered and inspired by positive changes.** Mina, Ziba, and
Any had more mixed feelings about their career lives. Mina stated:

I used to be worried that I wouldn’t be able to, because I want to be a lawyer, so I
used to be concerned that I wouldn’t be taken seriously in law as a woman who
wears hijab. People either wouldn’t trust me as much, or they just wouldn’t take
me as seriously. As I’m getting older, I’m realizing I’ve worked in several
different positions, and I’ve been able to garner the respect that I want despite
wearing hijab. So, I think that it’s possible for me to do anything and not feel like
I have to change my appearance or be worried about the fact that I do wear hijab.
She also pointed out, socially, there has been changes that make her outlook even
more positive:

I feel like as we’re moving forward in life as well, like socially, now we just have
a congresswoman who wears hijab. So, it’s very very common, and people are
seeing hijabi women do things all the time everywhere. So, it doesn’t really
concern me because now that we have role models, it’s easier to visualize
ourselves being that way; maybe whereas 10, 20 years ago, there wasn’t even any
Muslim women anywhere representing hijab, but now it’s like women wearing
hijab are in fashion industries, or in makeup industries, or in legal professions, are
working at the Target next door, the Starbucks. They’re everywhere just doing
average everyday things. So, it seems more real. It seems more normal. It’s
normalized.
Anya and Ziba also had similar thoughts. Anya said she feels empowered by Congresswoman Ilhan Omar’s election, which she thinks is a testament to the reality that women in hijab should not limit themselves. Similarly, Ziba noted after leaving her job because of her bigot coworker and the toxic environment he had created for her, she has not started working because her focus is on her school. However, her experience there has affected her, and she is a little bit worried that she will be looked at differently by employers once she is out of school. Nevertheless, she said, “At the same time, I feel like we just got someone elected to [Congress] that wears a full hijab…if she can do it, I can do it.” She said she does not let anything limit her, and if she has to find a way to do something, she will, just as she did in swimming or at the gym. She further added:

I honestly don’t think…that it [the hijab] would get in the way if I don’t let it get in the way. I think it starts getting in the way when people think that it will because they stop themselves from going for opportunities. But maybe it will open up more opportunities like who knows because the climate is changing and I feel like especially people in SoCal it’s like…[SoCal’s 45th Congressional District] like it went blue for this past election for the first time like it usually [SoCal’s 45th Congressional District] is always red and Mimi Walters wins so, but this time it didn’t and Katy Porter took, so who knows maybe like by the time I need to apply for a job in a few years, I won’t even have to think I’m not going to get the job because of my scarf right now.

Finally, Donya thought many hijab-wearing Muslim women like her are inspired and empowered by seeing other “strong hijabi women in politics, in government, in law, in medicine, doing all these amazing things…and it’s just a solid reminder…hijab is
never going to be a barrier.” Also, almost all participants said they would not let anything limit them or stop them from applying to positions in which they are interested.

**Seeing it from a religious perspective.** Donya and Roya displayed a strong will in their faith, and that God is on their side no matter the hardship specifically when speaking about their career concerns. Donya truly believed, “When you’re doing something purely for God’s call, the doors open for you.” She said, “I know for me, that was my choice. I chose hijab, and I’m doing it for the sake of God, and I’m happy with it, and I’m proud of it.” She said of course there are struggles whether it is in her personal life like in relationships and wanting to look attractive like other women or in her professional life and finding a good job. However, “at the end of the day,” she stated, “I’m still proud of my choice, and I know what’s meant for me is going to be for me, and what isn’t, is not going to happen, so I don’t ever see it [hijab] as a barrier.” Roya also said it would be really sad to think she would be rejected for a position because of her hijab. However, she said she would never limit herself or let anything stop her while demonstrating her submission to her faith, “If God doesn’t want me to go somewhere, I’m not going to go somewhere. If God wants me to work there, I’m going to work there whether they all like it or not.” Their trust in God’s will offers them a sense of purpose and contentment.

**No religious accommodation requests.** This question was only asked from Assal as a follow up to see if she would be comfortable requesting religious accommodations, such as a praying break, considering her great deal of worries regarding finding a job in a non-Muslim, nonprofit organization. Assal responded, no. She said she does not want to add anything that could work to her disadvantage even after being hired. She said
praying is not an inconvenience because it only takes a few minutes, and she can do that anywhere, but that is not how many non-Muslims view it because they do not understand it and might think it takes one or two hours. She remembers when she was getting her master’s degree in Colorado, one of her Human Relation’s professors once posed a question to the class that what happens if a Muslim man wants to pray five times a day at work. Assal explained to them that they would only need to do their afternoon prayers during a normal work shift, and that it does not take more than a few minutes. Seeing the misconceptions firsthand, especially since this was taught at a higher level of education and by someone who is in Human Relations, made her very cautious of her requests at work even if it is her legal right.

**Being underestimated.** Elmira, Ziba, Mandana, participant 10, and another participant (her name is intentionally not mentioned) believed they have been underestimated in their professional lives, and their capabilities are often questioned. Because she feels people underestimate her, and she feels “the discriminatory expectations,” Elmira always feels “the need to prove” herself. She believed many view her as a naive, weak, “sheltered,” and unknowledgeable person who does not even know the basics such as using a computer, so there is always the question of competency. “That’s why always, when I’m at work,” she said, “I try my best to not only meet expectations, but rise above expectations…to exceed them because I feel like people really don’t expect that.” She also has the urge to “set precedents” to change this stigma they have in their minds of Muslim and hijabi women and to make a positive change for the future hijabi women in the workforce.
Participant 10 also said, as a health care professional, “When I walk into my patient’s rooms, I have to be a little bit more assertive, and I have to prove myself because right away there’s that stigma involved like…Is she competent enough?” She believed “that question of competency doesn’t really come across with nonvisible practicing people.” She believed her competency is undermined because of false and stereotypical “perceptions that Muslim women are uneducated and oppressed,” and that this “is going to resonate into” her as their care giver. Many times, she had to respectfully and professionally divert the religious questions she receives to what matters the most in her profession, taking care of her patients to the best of her abilities, by setting boundaries since religion normally does not have a place at work. She always immediately senses this judgmental view about her as soon as she meets a new patient, but she is thankful that her skills prove otherwise.

Furthermore, while another participant shared her challenges, she also had a positive outlook on the issue. For instance, once she accompanied her mother to court for a traffic ticket she received, but she was very shocked and offended that the judge could not believe she really was a licensed attorney. She said there are also other people as professionals who underestimate her, “but they quickly come around when they realize what my potential is.”

Moreover, she purposefully does not have a photo of herself on the Website, so that her potential clients cannot judge her based on her religious or ethnic background. Hence, the clients get to see her for the first time when she enters the room for the consultation. She noted, “Every time I open that door, it’s kind of like a surprise, like I don’t know what to expect on the other side, and it’s quite funny because you could see
their initial reactions.” She said most of her clients are just glad she is a female, and “they are very excited to meet” her, but there are other times when “you see the shock in their face, and the dread, like their face literally turns pale.” Though, “they’re very respectful,” she could see the concerns and worries:

You could almost see like, can she speak English? Is she a terrorist? Is she this? You could tell from their body language, and it takes them a minute to warm up. It takes them a little bit of time, and almost it’s like they’re listening to me speak, but they cannot believe that I’m actually speaking perfect English. Like where is the accent? I’m like the only accent I have is from California. I’m a very Valley-esque speaking person.

Even though she never knows what to expect and has to work with the added pressure, she is able to “eventually win them over.” She passionately shared:

Every time I retain a client, it’s like a win for me. It’s not a win just because I’m making money, it’s a win because you were skeptical of me, you thought I was incapable, you couldn’t believe that I was an attorney, and yet I was able to win you over as a client, and pursue and entrust me in your matter.

However, she also shared sometimes this underestimation of her works in her favor as a working Southern California attorney. She said people always underestimate her and tell her, “You look so sweet and innocent. Are you sure you can defend me? Are you sure you can do that?” However, they are always surprised with her capabilities, so she likes how her hijab makes her “so unassuming.” She said:

It almost makes me like an unknown enemy in warfare when it comes to legal world. People underestimate you. They don’t expect what the knowledge you
have. They don’t expect your capabilities. They don’t expect your personality, and I find that mysteriousness is quite intriguing as long as it’s in a positive environment.

**Education**

Table 12 contains all major themes generated from first research subquestion related to education.

Table 12

*The Barriers or Struggles Related to Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not want to be tokenized</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggles, bullying, and discrimination by peers</td>
<td>7/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally positive experiences in colleges and graduate schools; more diversity and maturity</td>
<td>11/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discriminated against by a school faculty member</td>
<td>6/11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** *N = 12*

**Struggles, bullying, and discrimination by peers.** Seven of 10 participants, who started wearing a headscarf before entering college, felt isolated or bullied by their peers at least once by the time they finished high school. In addition, another participant had difficulties fitting in once she left an Islamic school for a public high school. Ziba started wearing her hijab when she had already graduated from her four-year college, and Assal had already obtained her education when she moved to Southern California. Elmira and Setareh went to Islamic schools for their elementary and middle school and transferred to public schools for high school.
Donya, Mellissa, Roya, Mina, and participant 11 were bullied at least once by their peers before graduating high school. However, Donya and Mellissa had generally calm and positive environments in school. Though she was the only hijabi in her school from the fourth grade until the eighth grade, Donya really enjoyed her uniqueness at school. She said:

Everybody knew me as the girl with the thing on her head, they didn’t know what it was called, but it made me popular in a different way, not like the typical movie popular cheerleader, but it was like, everybody knew me. They knew what I did.

At the beginning of each school year, her mom would also go to her class and explain to her classmates that Donya is Muslim, the reason she covered her hair, and other matters related to her religion that were observed in school such as fasting. She would encourage the students to ask questions and created a safe environment that they would be welcome to do so. At the same time, Donya felt she was in a very comfortable environment because of that, so she “never felt out of place, and everyone knew that they could talk to” her if they had any questions. She was not the only Muslim in school but “the only visible one,” and she believed that by talking about different aspects of her religion with the class such as Ramadan and Eid (the celebrity holiday after the end of Ramadan) as they were happening throughout the year, a “good majority of” her school learned about Islam and Muslims in a healthy and positive environment. However, when the 9/11 happened, her parents kept Donya and her siblings at home, as they were concerned about their safety, but they went back to school again the day after. That is when one of the students went to her and told her something like, “It was your people who did this, and we hate you.” He went back to her a few days later and apologized.
Nevertheless, she was not the only hijabi in school once she started her high school. There was a large group of Muslim and hijabi students then, and this was a major shift for her.

Mellissa was also one of the only hijabis in her school. She was shy but had a diverse group of friends, so for the most part, she had a relatively positive environment at her school. There was only one incident related to her hijab and her peers that she could remember because it had made her uncomfortable and very sad, especially since she was a shy person. Once, she was going to her locker when two other students shouted “towel head” to her. She looked around to see who they were, but she did not say anything and continued with what she was doing. Similar to Donya’s incident, the offending students felt bad about it and went to her to apologize some time later.

Roya, on the other hand, went to a school where there were more Hispanics and Arabs. However, she would still get ignorant and hurtful comments and questions such as, “Are you bald?” or “that towel on your head” even when she was very young and in the elementary school. However, she had very understanding and supportive school teachers and staff member, which made it easier on her; this point will be elaborated more later in this section. Additionally, she thought because she wore her headscarf early on and before her friends and classmates saw her without it, that made it easier for her. She said everyone knew her with the hijab on, so other than the ignorant comments she would get, she also often would be asked about it, or why she wore it, or when was she allowed to take it off. Whereas her sister who started wearing it after everyone had seen her without the hijab, would get more hurtful comments such as, “Do you still have hair under there? Did you go bald?” According to her, she was also a very mature and
strong-minded child for her age, so she would try not to let such interactions bother her; plus, she would verbally fight back and defend herself.

However, Mina and participant 11 experienced more prejudice and bullying at school. Mina started wearing her hijab when she was in sixth grade, and she recalls she had the toughest time in middle school as far as being bullied in a school setting. She felt she was “almost [being] interrogated” about her hijab and anything associated with her religion in the media. “At that point, it was like 2008, 2009, but people still had 9/11 fresh in their minds, and Bin Laden was still out there, and they were still trying to capture him,” so she thinks these factors really affected her experience. Her peers would ask many questions that she could not answer at that age such as about Islam, terrorism, and Bin Laden, and they would make mean comments to her. For example, when Bin Laden was killed, they would somehow associate her with him and would make remarks such as “Oh, was that your uncle?…Are you sad that he died? Are you mourning his death?” She would also get comments about her hijab such as, “Why do you wear that? Isn’t it hot? It looks weird. You would be much prettier without it. You should try taking it off at school.” She remembers in sixth grade, one of the boys in school who was a year older than her sent her a friend request on MySpace, so he could include this message: “Hey, I really like your hijab. I have one just like it at home, but we use it as a diaper for my baby brother.” She said she will never forget this boy and remembers thinking to herself, “What the heck? Why would he go out of his way to message me that? Somebody I didn’t know. Somebody who wasn’t even in my grade.” She thought, “Already in middle school a lot of bullying takes place, and I was targeted at from religious perspective.” It was interesting to her he had used the word hijab instead of a
headscarf or anything else when many did not know what it was called at the time. She said, “It’s interesting because there was some level of education there, but he was using it in a very mean way.”

While she was bullied more in middle school, she “started noticing the microaggression” when she went to high school where they would not say anything “upright” to her but show it in their treatment and behavior. At the same time, she was very active in school and was involved in many programs, so she felt “people knew me more, and they respected me because I was a good person, and I was doing all these different things.” Nevertheless, she was being treated differently in her classes, and then being accepted to all these programs, she started feeling as if she was being tokenized. Her peers and other competitors would tell her, “You’re only accepted because you wear hijab. You’re just a diverse point.” The comments sparked a sense of concern and consciousness, though she acknowledges that they might have been made out of jealousy.

She said:

I [had] never thought of it that way, so then I was really weary about the kinds of ways people were talking to me. Am I just being tokenized, or is this something that I actually earned by my own merit?

Participant 11 was also the only hijabi and one of the three Brown students in her elementary school. She always felt different and out of place even before wearing the hijab. It was an upscale school with predominantly White and East Asian (Chinese and South Korean) students. She said:

When I first put on a hijab, it was hell….I couldn’t articulate it at the time, I was 10, but I knew I was putting it on because I realized I’m different, so why am I
even trying to fit in, and I was like, I’m doing this thing, and I saw other hijabis do it, and I was like, yeah, like why can’t I do that? Like why am I letting them define me and try to make me White, that’s not who I am…I’d already stuck out ’cause even without my hijab, like I’m visibly Arab, and my name is *** ***; it’s not Sam or Savannah.

She started wearing her hijab, in part, to be defiant, and her experiences with being bullied and isolated got even worse. She was generally a social child, but she did not have many friends because she “stuck out at that school,” so other students would trick her in doing things that would make her feel included, but they were to make fun of her and get her in trouble in school. She decided to wear her hijab in the fifth grade after receiving a detention for naively falling for a classmate’s trap. When she went to school with a hijab on, everyone was confused, and they could not recognize her; “I looked like a different person.” Her teacher pulled her out of class and inquired about it:

Are you wearing this like your mom now? And I was like, yeah, it’s my mom’s scarf. And she’s like, okay, but are you wearing this all the time? And I was like, yeah. She’s like, how come your mom didn’t send me an e-mail or talk to me first? It’s like, why does she need to talk to you first? Like who are you? So, I was like, I don’t know. You can talk to her after school. She’s like, yeah, when you get picked up have her come see me.

She was “already feeling weird,” and now “people are just like really weird; obviously people didn’t hang out with” her anymore, and “the rest of the year it was just a lot of weird comments.” She thinks at the beginning, everyone was just confused, but then, they started asking a lot of questions and making “really negative comments” such
as, “Why are you doing that? But why do you have to cover your hair? But your hair’s so pretty, but now you’re not pretty.” Since she had suddenly become a hijabi, she struggled with her wardrobe transition too; it took her some time to adjust her clothing to be appropriate for a hijab, and she did not know how to wear her hijab nicely. Her parents also were not sure if she would stick to her hijab, and they felt she was too young and not ready for the transition. Thus, they waited a while before they changed her whole wardrobe. Consequently, she felt she was wearing repetitive and unflattering clothing, but she was going to a school “with these rich kids who have like all these different shoes and the brand names.” That made her think “like I’m not cool anymore. I wasn’t even cool to begin with, but now I’m really not, so it was like I hated PT [physical training], like always getting picked last even though I was a fast runner and everything.” Moreover, when she was in sixth grade, her mom did not allow her to go to a science camp because her classmates had told her they would be taking pictures of her when she was sleeping without her hijab on and put it in the yearbook. She was very excited to go, but her mom was reasonably worried about her and told her, “I don’t know what’s gonna happen. I’m not comfortable sending you with those kids away for a whole week with less supervision than normal school.” Subsequently, she “stayed behind with the fifth graders, which again, doesn’t make you look cool either.”

Participant 11 continued to struggle in school with her peers and later with some of her teachers and school staff to the point that her parents decided to homeschool her for a while. She did not like taking that route, “I was crying because I was like, I don’t want to be homeschooled. I want to go to school; I want to have friends.” Her parents reminded her of her troubles and explained to her that was for her benefit. She was
homeschooled for four years, and she “flourished” during that time. The program still had many fun activities to do, so she became friends with many other children who were experiencing negativity at their regular schools, such as Mormons, homosexuals, and people with disabilities. With their parents, they had all formed a community and were involved in many activities, so she “didn’t feel the absence of a school.” She said, “It was better; it was probably the most fun that I had.” However, when she switched to a different homeschooling program, which was student based rather than family based as was her previous program, she started to struggle again. The students in this program were all wealthy and famous youngsters who would be actors, athletes, and so forth, so “it reminded me of elementary school, and so the same thing happened, like I was just looked at weird or whatever,” she noted. Some logistical issues such as having a long drive in addition to her dislike of the program made her parents take her to “a middle college high school, which was college and high school at the same time.” She did not have many difficulties with other students there because they were all very “ambitious” and “wanted to accomplish something more.”

Unfortunately, participant 11 was bullied so much throughout her schooling and had negative experiences for the majority of her K-12 education that she believed it caused her to have psychological and mental health issues. She said all the negative experiences she had made her “very insecure” and caused her self-esteem to “fluctuate drastically,…going from super high to super low.” She started having anxiety and depressive episodes, and as it worsened, she “would have fights or emotional episodes with someone and not remember;” then she “started to have suicidal thoughts.” Later, she was diagnosed, medicated, and recovered. “But it affected me a lot, and the trauma
affects you,” she said. She also thought even though she feels better, certain factors affect her and work as triggers, which also affect her performance in school. She explained:

Like the last two weeks, I turned in my finals two weeks late. I just couldn’t do my paper. I could do other stuff, but I couldn’t do it, and I’m like, why? What is it? What are these triggers that make me upset? Is it because I associate school with that? I don’t know.

Furthermore, Mandana, Anya, and Melika felt isolated occasionally during their school years. They were the only hijab wearing students for at least in one part of their schooling. There were more hijabi girls at school by the time Mandana and Melika were in high school. Mandana and Anya felt isolated when they were younger and had first put on their hijabs. Anya wore her headscarf when she was in the middle school, but she said, “I felt I was young, and I didn’t know anything; I just had it on.” She also felt, “I didn’t have friends. I had barely any friends. I felt people didn’t wanna be friends with a hijabi.” Consequently, she took it off. Once she did that, she had “friends, [and] it was more social.” Most students from her middle school who had seen her with a hijab were surprised when they saw her without it in high school, “So they were kinda like wow, you took it off! Like what happened?…I like you better without it.”

Setareh also felt somewhat left out when she moved to a different high school in her senior year, but she did not face any discrimination. She also does not think her experience was caused by her covering. She said, “I just feel like I was the new girl; everybody had already developed their friendships over the past three years, and people were just being stuck up because they have money, that’s all.” Going to an Islamic
school for her elementary and middle school and then being homeschooled for the ninth grade, her only experience being with students of other faiths was when she went to a public high school. She was very excited about this change,

...because I knew there was a whole other world out there. I wanted to experience it; I wanted to be able to wear different clothes instead of a uniform to school. I just wanted to see what was out there and interact with different people.

Her experience in high school “was not bad” for the most part, and she also had positive memories from the day 9/11 happened. She went to school that day not knowing anything about what happened, but everyone at the school was talking about it. She remembers one of her friends turned around and told her, “You’re our friend, if anyone messes with you, you let us know.” She was very touched by her friend’s support saying:

I really appreciated that because, the first thing, you have no idea what’s going on. You just found out that the twin towers have been knocked down, and then they’re speculating it’s Muslims, and you’re like what does that mean to me? What does that mean for me? How is that going to affect me? And so, that was my first experience of whoa I’m different. Right? But it was quickly countered with the fact that my friends rallied behind me and were like that doesn’t make you any different. That’s not going to change anything whatsoever.

However, Mandana, Melika, and Elmira had difficulty fitting in also. Melika said she struggled fitting in. At one point, she moved to a new place, so it was a challenge to adjust and make friends. As with Setareh, Elmira also went to an Islamic school for her elementary and middle schools and later transferred to a public high school. When in Islamic school, she “didn’t have difficulties as far as wearing hijab,” but she “did have
difficulties as far as the strictness of the school.” Nonetheless, she said, “that’s because it’s a Muslim school, and they wanna be really strict about the way they do things, which I understand.” When in high school, she had three main struggles: trying to keep up with the fashion, fitting in, and answering people’s questions about Islam. Her school was predominantly White, “so all the girls were wearing the short shorts” and the all other things that she “obviously can’t wear” as a Muslim. “Because I’m a girl, and I really want to keep up with trends and keep up with all the fashion of all the girls around me,…my struggle was trying to keep on with trend and to keep within” the cultural and religious boundaries, she said. She did not want to “stick out” and “be the one girl who’s not doing all of this,” and she “wanted to prove to them that I could be hijabi, and I could be fashionable and follow all these trends and follow all of this.” However, it was a challenge, especially when she had first started wearing the hijab. She felt she did not have as many options as her peers had when it came to fashion and wearing the trendy clothes. As she got older, she learned all different “tips and tricks” and became more experienced working with clothing that meets her standards. In addition, many modest fashion wear companies emerged, which made it much easier to find “cute” but modest outfits. She said, “I’m thankful for both of those things: for my experience and for the rise of the modest fashion wear.” However, what really bothered her was that she “was one of the only people who wore hijab at a school that was predominately White.” That is why she felt,

I had the responsibility of answering people’s questions, and that was really difficult especially because I didn’t know a lot of things because I wasn’t old
enough or had enough information to be able to answer their questions. I was always worried about giving the wrong answers to people.

Mina had a similar experience and feeling, as was discussed in more detail in the section titled: Pressure to be the perfect Muslim and citizen. The other factor that really bothered Elmira was that her male schoolmates would make comments and presumptions about her body. She said they would gather and keep guessing how her hair or body looked. She thought that was wrong and was very offended by that. She would try to play it off and take it as a joke, “so that they would stop,” but deep down, it bothered her. The issue of sexualization of Muslim women will be revisited later.

Finally, Anita had very positive experiences at her schools in terms of wearing a hijab and interacting with her peers. In fact, she was encouraged to start wearing her headscarf by her friends from elementary school when she was in seventh grade. They kept telling her, “Come on, you need to wear it; you need to wear it” because she had told them that she wanted to start wearing it in middle school. When she finally started wearing her hijab in the eighth grade, her friends who were not Muslim and had encouraged her to start wearing it were very excited about it. However, she still remembered that someone in middle school made a comment to her about Osama bin Laden when he was killed; that was her first and probably only negative interaction during those years. Later in high school, she would “hang out” with the other two hijabi girls at school, so everyone knew them as a “package.” She did not like high school for other reasons, and she could not remember if she had any problems.

**Generally positive experiences in college and graduate school; More diversity and maturity.** When it came to experiences in college and higher-level education in
Southern California, all participants, except Assal who did not go to school in Southern California, described it as generally positive, particularly their interactions with other students because people are more mature, and for the most part, their schools were very diverse and included many Muslims and hijabi women as well. Mina stated:

In college, obviously the pool got so much bigger. There were so many more Muslims, many many hijabi girls who looked different. Looks like every class you go to, you’re going to find somebody that wears hijab. There’s a bigger community like a network, so there’s places to go pray. There’s places to go break your fast. There’s people you can talk to about these things. There’s support groups, so now I don’t feel like the oneness as much as I did in middle school and high school where I was the only girl in the whole school who wore hijab.

Melika also believed being the only hijabi in a school makes that individual “instantly” identifiable, and “sometimes it’s unfortunate because you bring unwanted attention.” She also “loved college,” and because she has “been always really good in education,” and she was always active and had good grades, she did not have to worry about proving herself as much. She was grateful that she did not have to “deal with the same professor for too long,” especially if he or she had discriminated against her. However, she did not like the lack of diversity in her college, noting, “The environment on campus was sometimes kind of difficult because there is not that many Muslims, like visible Muslims.” Furthermore, Roya thought “everyone kind of keeps to themselves” at the university, so students are not normally bothered by others, while Ziba viewed her
university as “such a progressive environment” where she felt “really good” going there and wearing her hijab.

However, several participants, including Elmira, Mina, Ziba, Mandana, Setareh, and Melika, reported having some social or bonding issues with the majority of their non-Muslim peers, mostly as a result of certain religious limitations such as drinking alcohol, and therefore, was not invited to certain gatherings and college parties. Melika said her schoolmates were “overall pretty respectful”; however, there was a barrier to connecting with non-Muslim schoolmates because there was an “elephant in the room that they know that there is no alcohol and no partying and stuff like that involved, so you get invited less to college parties,...[or] they change the subject when you start talking” or their tone changes. She believed that was “because the hijab to them is something new, and they really don’t know what it is; it causes that shield.” Because the culture of drinking alcohol has been a reemerging theme for school, work, and social life, this point is fully discussed as part of the social life section.

**Palestine-Israel tensions on college campus.** There were some tensions between the students when protesting or discussing issues regarding Palestine, immigration, and the Muslim ban. Donya and Mina were in that environment, but they were not personally cornered or attacked for their views at college by the opposing groups. However, Setareh and Mandana’s experiences were different.

In regard to her college experience, Setareh said, “I don’t think I was ever really discriminated against except I was given a lot of opportunities.” For instance, she was invited to speak about the Quran and Islam in one of her professor’s classes because, at that time, “there was a lot of conflict” and “politics on campus” surrounding Israel and
Palestine. Her “professor thought it would be a good idea” to have her in his class to “shed light” on those subjects and answer questions. She was astonished with the experience and people’s reactions:

It’s funny because you’re in this campus, you believe you’re in Southern California, it’s a very versatile, and what do you call it? Culturally diverse area. But then you realize how undiverse it is at the same time. When you stand in front of a class, and you’re explaining what religious beliefs are, people are like, well, you believe in killing people! You guys are terrorists! And people are shouting at you, things of this nature, and then you’re correcting them, and they still continue in their belief system in their path. They’re like, you don’t belong here; you should go back to the Middle East. And I’m like, okay, should go back to the Middle East? Really really thank you! But, I was never born in the Middle East. I was born here in the United States.

Though “it wasn’t more of a person physically attacking” her, she considers this verbally aggressive encounter an attack but “in a controlled environment.” Another time, she was insulted with “go back to your country” at a college campus protest by a Filipino man yelling at her in a broken English. She was only at that campus for two years, so she did not have any other experiences as far as other students.

Mandana also “became very involved with Palestine” issues, and she is “getting ready to write this resolution called BDS, it’s Boycott Divestment Sanctions, very controversial.” She explained, “Other campuses, there’s been fistfights and security that are there when it gets passed, and people harass. You get blacklisted online by Israeli groups.” If anyone is involved with this resolution, he or she would be listed as a racist
on “a Website called Canary Mission.” She said, “I have not even written the resolution for this campus, but the group, there’s people on campus that heard I was doing it and have already started to come at me.” She has already received aggressive e-mail from pro-Israeli groups calling her anti-Semitic. She strongly disputed the accusations saying she is called anti-Semitic because many tend to think “Palestine-Israel is a Muslim-Jew issue” when it is not. She added, “there’s Palestinian Jews, there’s Christian Palestinians. This issue is strictly Palestine-Israel; you’re either for the Palestinians or you’re against.” Though this is a very sensitive and controversial issue, and anyone involved would receive repercussions, Mandana thinks the aggression toward her is not just because of her involvement, but also because of her ethnic background and, more important, her hijab. She said, “I feel like I draw more attention, and I feel like I’m being picked out because it’s easy, and I wonder if I was Palestinian and without a hijab how it would be. Probably less aggressive.” She believed she is “being targeted” because “there’s like 16 of us on the board of directors, and there’s two other people who are helping me with the resolution, but I’m the only one that got singled out because they’re not Palestinian, and they’re not Muslim.” She documented everything that happened and notified the dean about the issue.

*Family stereotypes and disinformation breed discrimination in children.*

Donya, Mina, and Roya believed the bullies in school who made anti-Islamic remarks were too young to understand the larger issue or to know any better. That is why if they said anything, it was because they heard it from someone in the house, media, or their friends, so they did not blame the bullies. When Donya shared a boy telling her, “It was your people who did this, and we hate you,” which he ended up apologizing to her, she
opened up her story with this: “I honestly think he was just repeating maybe what he heard on the news or what his friends, his family were saying.” She added, “It’s little kids talking.” Mina, too, said, “A lot of the kids were 11, 12, 13, and they were listening to what their parents were saying, or what the TV was saying, so I would get a lot of questions about bin Laden,” about Islam and terrorism, “things bigger than just hijab.”

She was bullied a great deal when she was going to school, particularly in middle school. Last, Roya remembers a girl making fun of her hijab in the fourth grade, calling it a towel. Though she was young as well, she ignored it and did not let it bother her. She noted, “That was very ignorant; a fourth grader saying that, that means she heard it from her parents or someone. Fourth graders don’t know anything.” She believed a lack of knowledge and misinformation disseminated by the media and politicians are responsible for people’s Islamophobic and xenophobic ideas and behaviors. All participants had similar views in this regard.

**Discriminated against by a school faculty member.** Six participants experienced some type of discrimination or mistreatment from an instructor or faculty member throughout their education. Three participants mentioned something positive about their instructors at least at one point of their education. Anya and Ziba did not share anything positive or negative about their experiences with school faculty, and Assal did not go to school in California.

Mandana, Melika, Elmira, and Mina shared some of their experiences with prejudice from the school faculty during their K-12 education. Mandana remembers her sixth-grade teacher would “visibly treat” her “different than other students.” She specifically remembers an occasion where both her and another classmate were being
picked up early. Their names were announced “over the PA system, so the whole class knows” they are leaving. Her classmate’s name was Sam, so the teacher tells the class, “Okay class, everyone say bye Sam, and then they all said bye Sam,” but then Mandana was also leaving at the same time, and the teacher completely ignored her. Later, she asked her, “How come when Sam left, you said like, tell everyone bye, but when I left, you didn’t say anything? She’s like, Sam’s cute! What do you want me to do?” She also talked about a bullying incident in which her classmates mocked her in the lunchroom and lied about it to the principal later, blaming her for what happened. She said she could not get help from the lunch supervisors mainly because they “were not nice ladies.”

Furthermore, Melika said she had difficulty with her teachers. She remembered, in sixth grade, her teacher made fun of her name that is “kind of long, and it’s pretty religious.” Her parents complained about it, but “nothing was done” other than she (Melika) was “transferred out of that class.” Later, when she was in high school, she joined a sports team that does not usually attract many Muslim women. One day, during Ramadan, she was playing while she was also fasting, and one of her coaches told her, “I wish you didn’t wear that stupid scarf, you would be a lot better.” She said, “I still remember this exact day,… I was astonished, and everyone heard him.” Her mom complained “to the head coach, and the coach apologized,… but they didn’t want to fire him because he was a good coach.” She expressed her frustration with her experiences at school, “it was just that racism, and that constant proving to people that I am competent enough, regardless of what religion I am [following]. Unfortunately, it’s always perceived that the hijab is oppressed and makes a woman uneducated [and] untalented.”
Last, when Elmira was in her sophomore year of high school, the Muslim students in school were trying to create a Muslim club on campus, so that they could connect with each other since there were not many of them. When she asked if she could put up a flyer in one of the teachers’ classrooms about an upcoming Muslim association meeting, he told her friend, “Let’s hope they’re not terrorists.” She did not think that was okay for a teacher to say that, especially to other students, so she was very offended and “tried to do something about it.” She was not able to persuade her friend, to whom the teacher had said it, to report him to the administration. Without her testimony, she could not do anything. He was also her Spanish teacher, so she was quite upset that she could not do anything about it. She said, “They’re racist, and they’re Islamophobic, and I can’t do anything about him. I just have to be in this person’s class, and I have to deal with them on a daily basis, and it really sucks.” She later found out he was fired some years later for another issue, and she was happy that he was fired from the school, but she did not like “that he got away with being Islamophobic.” This matter really affected her. She said, “I always think about that, and it just bothers me. Yeah, it breaks my heart.” She then suggested the researcher:

That’s one of your themes. It’s heartbreaking. It’s heartbreaking that we live in a world where people…I don’t wanna say that people see the differences because they should see the differences. They should! That’s a good thing, but that people use the differences against you.

In contrast, Donya and Roya had very positive memories of their teachers and faculty members for the most part. Donya specifically remembered her teachers and administrative staff were very supportive and accommodating after 9/11. They wanted to
make sure she felt safe and welcomed at her school, so they even offered to let her use the teachers’ lounge if she did not feel comfortable eating at the lunchroom. Roya also liked the teachers at her schools. She went to a school that had a number of Arabs, but also had predominately Hispanic, lower income, and marginalized student demographics, so she thought since these students were already discriminated against outside of their own community, the teachers had to be very understanding and caring. She said they were all “very open-minded” and “very nice.” However, she also thinks because many of the students were marginalized, it would not work to have racist teachers at the school. She said:

A racist teacher would not work here for sure. That would not make sense. We’d kick her out. With the students…In my school, the students for sure would probably beat her up. These students don’t care. I went to a ghetto school, a lot of gangsters and everything, so that was not an option to have racist teachers.

That’s not an option.

Nevertheless, the school also had a very diverse group of teachers, and because of the location of the school, they were all very well aware of the hijab and the Arab, Muslim community. She said, “My principal loved me; my principal treated me like an angel.” She also stated her teachers were “very supportive” and “so nice with hijab.” If students would make ignorant comments to or ask questions of Roya because of her hijab, and a teacher were around, he or she would scold them for it. She said they would tell the student something like, “Stop bothering her, you’re so annoying!…or they would yell at them, that’s a very inappropriate question, Juan. Why are you asking that?” She added, “They would teach them [about Islam], especially in my history class. He was
very good at teaching about Muslims. He even asked me to give a lecture about it.” She really liked her high school faculty members.

Moving on to college and higher education, six participants mentioned they were discriminated against or mistreated by one of their professors. Mina, Elmira, Setareh, Mellissa, Mandana, and participant 10 all shared at least one negative experience involving their professors during college. However, participant 10 requested her experiences in college not be discussed in this dissertation. She wrote to the researcher:

You ask[ed] a question about situations I was discriminated in, I know this may be difficult, but I no longer want to talk about my experience in…school. I am afraid that participating in this study will affect my professional side.

Mina participated in mock trials in high school and her first year of college, so for four years, she felt some judges would clearly treat her differently. She described mock trial as,

…an academic team on campus that you go and you compete against other schools, and essentially you are simulating a case, like a court case, so you go into the court. You play that role of the lawyer. There’s people that play the role of the witnesses, and you play out the case, and there’s a judge, like a real court judge who comes and judges you based on your performances.

She remembers on many occasions she “would be the only Muslim hijabi girl in the courtroom all day, not just in that session, but in all the sessions.” She felt some judges were not as nice and forgiving with her as they were toward her peers, even though they had practiced and prepared together and would present the same way. She was very bothered by it and would think to herself, “Why would they treat me or talk to
me in that tone or make me feel little?” She said they were quick to interrupt her and put her down, and “they would be very rude to” her. However, whenever she talked about it to her peers that “I feel like that judge just didn’t like me, they were racist, or they were Islamophobic, they’d be like, oh, it’s all in your head.” It was difficult for her teammates to pick on the microaggressions and to understand how she felt because they were not on the receiving end of it. She said she would sense the vibe and the difference in treatment, but “it’s hard to explain if you haven’t been in the position before.”

Mellissa also felt one of her instructors in college treated her differently than others. She said, “I was always put down by her. I wasn’t doing great in her class. I felt like she didn’t like me because I had a scarf on my head or because of my religion.” She added, “She was nice to everybody except me, and this was in front of everybody, like everybody could tell she treated me differently than everyone else.” For instance, she would always tell other students they did a good job, and then she would give them suggestions on how they could improve. In contrast, she was always “dry” in emotion toward Mellissa. She would not praise her work or give her any positive feedback; “It was more like putting me down and like *** [her name] you need to work harder on this.” She also felt her grades were a lot less than what she deserved. Because her teacher was the main instructor for that major at her college, she “had multiple classes with her,” so she felt she “had to deal with it.” However, Mellissa never complained about her to the administration because she did not know what to say. Nonetheless, sometimes she wished that,
…I could have rewind time and do things about it, you know stand up for myself more. Not to get her in trouble, but to stand up for girls that are like me that might come after to her classes and stuff, but I didn’t.

Then, she remembered another instructor in her history class, where the class subject that day was about Israel, and she was asked, with no reason, where she was from. Once she answered, the instructor looked at her and told her in front of everyone in the class, “Just so you know, there’s no such thing as Palestine, it’s Israel.” She is not from Palestine, and she said she never speaks about her views on that matter with other people; she was also the only visibly Muslim in the class. Thus, Mellissa thought it was her hijab that triggered that conversation, saying, “because I’m probably the only one that knows about the conflict and what’s going on, and that I care about it, and she probably wants to see if I’m going to talk back about it.” She said, “Obviously it triggered me, but I didn’t say anything; she’s my professor, I’m not going to say anything.” She had another Muslim friend who was half American, but she was not in the class when this happened, so when she heard about it, she told Mellissa she should have said something. Mellissa was surprised by her instructor’s behavior and chose not to say anything, but she wishes she had responded to her differently, noting, “That’s something that I won’t forget.” If she had the chance again, she said:

I wouldn’t just like take it from her, like I wouldn’t stay silent. I would politely and respectfully since she’s still my professor, and I have to be nice towards that, I would say that I do believe that it is called Palestine. I would end it there; I would just say that comment, and if she keeps going with it, obviously it’s not a time to talk about it in class time, so maybe after classes I could talk to her, bring
it up to her, and tell her that how I felt when she brought it up, how it made me feel, how it made me look when she kind of picked me out of everyone else, I could have done that.

No one else in the class said anything because she thought they lacked knowledge about the issue. She thought more Americans are aware of the affair, but usually they do not know about anything that does not affect them. Many of those who know about it are probably pro-Israel because that is the American government’s stance. Mellissa ended up dropping this class since the instructor “was always rude,” and she “could not handle it.” She said even though she felt her first professor was also anti-Muslim, she could still handle her, but she could not deal with this one.

Mandana, too, had several instances in which she thought were discriminatory, or the comments and behaviors were racially or religiously motivated. On one occasion, her professor would not give her the day of Eid off. This day is significant to Muslims around the world. In another instance, a psychology professor used an example that correlated divorce with arranged marriage, and Mandana brought that to his attention:

I was just like, I’m sorry, this is a psychology class on statistics, why are we using that as an example? He’s like, it’s a very good example, and I was like, okay, but you’re making the correlation between arranged marriages and Middle Eastern women and Muslims. What about Indonesia? They have the smallest divorce rate in the world. He’s like, we’re talking about Middle Eastern people. And I was like, but you also brought up Muslims, and he’s like, okay, I’m not discussing the example anymore; I’m talking about statistics, and I was like, but that was my point.
She believed he was an atheist because he was like that about other religions as well, and “he would fit in.” Suspecting he was an atheist, she wrote her paper about skepticism the way she thought he would like it even though she did not believe in what she had written in the paper; he loved her piece. She took that as a proof, “I was like, okay yeah, you’re atheist, and you want to shove your propaganda down your students’ throats and make them hate any religion. It wasn’t just mine.”

Elmira also had an experience in college that “really broke” her heart. She was trying to apply for a writing program at her university, and everyone interested had to submit a portfolio of their works along with their applications. One of her first pieces was about Palestine, and the person teaching the class was Israeli. She did not get into the program because her portfolio was allegedly lost. She said:

Out of everybody who applied to the program, he lost my portfolio, and everybody else who applied got in because there weren’t as many applications.

There were enough applications as there were spots, but he lost my application or portfolio.

She continued sadly, “I mean, I could say maybe he really lost it, but I don’t think so. I don’t think he really lost it….because how does that happen? I turned it in with the other applications on the stack.” In addition to losing a chance to be in a program in which she was really interested, not knowing what truly happened really bothers her. She said when things like that happen:

It just makes you wonder, and that’s what the other part that’s challenging; it makes you wonder what really happened. When someone mistreats you and you’re a Muslim, you’re a hijabi, or you’re whatever, you always wonder. Did
this happen to me because of this, or did this happen to me just by chance?

Sometimes you’re like, okay maybe the teacher’s having a bad day, or maybe they’re racist; you don’t know.

Similar to Elmira’s experience, Setareh had to try three times before she made it on a competition team at her graduate school. Recently, and a few years after graduating, she had a discussion with someone who knew about it, and “this person confirmed that the professor in charge was completely anti-Muslim.” She could never understand why she was dismissed the first two times when other people made it and despite her “a remarkable performance.” She said this “shed so much light” because it always puzzled her. Even other people would tell her she “was perfect, and it wasn’t friends; it was random people in the audience that were watching.” “It made sense” to her what the problem was all along, but at the same time, she was very upset. She voiced her anger by saying:

How dare you hinder my ability to grow as an individual, as a future *** [her profession], and as a *** student because of your personal beliefs. I make an effort not to put my personal beliefs towards an individual, but I guess other people still don’t care, they make their personal beliefs known.

However, her first “real experience of discrimination within an educational environment” was in an introductory chemistry class in college. As they were experimenting with one of their lab assignments, her professor looked at her and said, “Don’t try to bomb us right now.” She was shocked by his Islamophobic remark, “How could you say this in front of a class of people?” She thought she was the only Muslim in the class too, but certainly the only one with a hijab. She tried to take action and reported
him to the dean, “but they never did anything about it.” She said as she looks back at her struggles and discriminatory events, she believes she is fortunate that she has not had many negative experiences that were unbearable. She was grateful that these experiences never stopped her from what she wanted to become or made her question her abilities. She tried to take action, but she did not let the negative experiences define her. Whereas, she thought, some experiences could be “devastating” to some people and their lives.

During her college years, a couple of very right-wing Republicans were invited to the campus as guest speakers. She thought “not all Republicans are racist,” but those speakers were, and they had “some very jarring views about the Middle East, and Muslims, and just that whole environment, and I say that whole thing because there’s so many layers to it.” She believed her identity is a multitude layers of different identities such as being a Middle Eastern, a Muslim, a practicing Muslim, a hijabi, and a woman, of which she is “very proud.” Hence, she found their views to be false and their speech to be offensive to her identity. She was also offended by some of their remarks. She said:

I was glad to see that other people in the crowd basically stand up and say, shame on you! How dare you! And I didn’t have to do it myself. I didn’t have to be the single person carrying that torch and trying to defend who I was. Other people of other faiths, of other belief systems, were able to defend.

Finally, Anita had a very positive experience at her college campus regarding the administration. She generally described her college experience as positive. She was very active in college, so many in the administration knew her and were happy to have her at their social events. At one point, she became concerned that she has been tokenized and
her acceptance and positive experience was more politically motivated, but soon her worries disappeared as she learned through inquiries that was probably not the case.

**Turned off by extreme conservativism.** Mandana and Donya were both involved in some type of Muslim group in their school and/or college, but they had different opinions on how some matters should be handled in their groups, and that discouraged them from more participation. Later in high school, when there were more Muslims in the school, Mandana started a club for Muslims. Her school had 500 students, and her club had attracted 80 members. However, the majority were not Muslims and had joined the club “in solidarity.” Mandana was very happy about it. She said, “It was like the best two years in terms of solidarity and feeling included.” However, she started having problems with the Muslim community since they did not like how the club was organized and how there were non-Muslims in a Muslim club or a gay person on the executive board. Some of those individuals also had a double standard in their own life conduct such as consuming alcohol or having sexual activities outside of a marriage, which are both forbidden in Islam. She said, “In those two years, I felt discrimination from my own community for being part of a bigger community.” She became dissociated from the Muslim community because of the friction and negative experiences she had there. She indicated, “I got turned off from the Masjid [Mosque in Arabic], politics, I got turned off from the Muslim community, and then I started college here, and the last thing I wanted to do was join…Muslim Student Association.” Instead, she joined Students for Justice in Palestine, which she really enjoys being part of.

Donya was also “involved in the Muslim student group on campus” when she was going to college. Though her experience was not as negative as Mandana’s because she
was so focused on her education, she too had some difficulties with the members of this group. She said she did not always “fit in,” and she was always “the rebellious one,” adding, “Because I’m more liberal and open minded in my understanding of faith, I also couldn’t connect well with a lot of the Muslims” in that group. For instance, she did not believe women and men should sit separately on opposite sides of the room from each other. She would say “We’re in college; we’re sitting next to guys and girls all the time in classes. Why are we doing the separation?”

The Barriers or Struggles Related to Social and Public Life

The second subquestion guiding this study was: What social challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) experience? To address this question, the participants were asked: What barriers or struggles, if any, have you experienced or are experiencing as a veiled Arab Muslim woman related to your social life and in public? The question was broken into two sections: social life and in public. Microaggressions, visibility, higher degree of alertness, and pressure to be the perfect Muslim and citizen were the reemerging themes in this section. In addition, the following themes emerged from this question.

Social Life

Table 13 depicts major common themes of the barriers or struggles related to social life based on the collected data.

Table 13
The Barriers or Struggles Related to Social Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not drinking alcohol affects social life outside of the Muslim community</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared values of Islam determine the circle of acquaintance and friendship</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is more challenging to date and find a suitable life partner when wearing a hijab</td>
<td>5/11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 12

Not drinking alcohol affects social life outside of the Muslim community.

Half of the participants said not drinking alcohol and choosing not to be in certain environments because of alcohol affected their social life when it comes to the non-Muslims. Elmira, Mina, Ziba, Setareh, Melika, and Mellissa shared some of their struggles or thoughts on this issue. Their collective view regarding the relationships among the hijab, their Muslim identity, and drinking or clubbing is portrayed through Mina’s perspective.

Mina thought the most notable matter that affected her social life was that she could not engage in certain activities as others do, noting “maybe not because I’m veiled, but just because by virtue being Muslim, you feel like you are trying to maintain the religion without causing barriers.” She said being young and going to college means clubbing, partying, and drinking to many of her fellow classmates and friends who are not Muslim. Unlike other participants, she got invited to many engagements that involve alcohol or environments at which she does not feel comfortable being present such as
clubs. She said her friends are respectful and understanding enough to let her know ahead of time and not to push her to do something that she is not comfortable doing.

She thought it was her Muslim identity that drew these lines for her rather than her hijab, but her hijab helped her to maintain those lines. She said, “I can still be veiled and not be a good Muslim, so I can still wear hijab and drink and do other things, but I would feel more reluctant to participate because I wear a hijab.” To her, it just looks weird to see a woman drinking alcohol while wearing the hijab, so just visualizing herself participating in certain activities such as going to a club, dancing, or drinking with the hijab on makes her uncomfortable. That is why she constrains herself from such activities or environments, saying, “I feel like there are choices that I have to make as a Muslim woman mostly for my religion, and then for my hijab.” She thought if she were ever to take part in things of that nature, she would be better off not wearing her hijab altogether. She believed:

There are some lines that I have to draw for myself to take care of my own body and take care of my own mind, and that includes excusing myself from social events or social activities that I know are not Islamically correct and would reflect poorly on a woman who wears hijab. Not that I’m doing it for other people. Not that I’m wearing hijab for other people, and not that I’m responsible for every woman who wears hijab, but I feel like you kind of have to take on a responsibility. If you chose to do it, then you need to know that people are looking at you, and they’re watching you, and you want to be a good example for yourself, like reflect well on yourself, but also on others. So, it’s hard. It’s like a double-edged sword because on one hand it is very personal, hijab, but at the
same time it’s collective.

This is how other participants who spoke about drinking, clubbing, and smoking also thought. They all proudly took it upon themselves not only to maintain their own boundaries as Muslim women, but also to ensure they present a good image for a Muslim woman who wears a hijab. For instance, prior to wearing a hijab, Ziba still had very strict rules for herself as far as not engaging in activities deemed forbidden in Islam such as drinking alcohol or smoking. However, she would still go out with her friends to a bar or a club even though she would not drink or smoke. She became more conscious of her behavior and religious rules as she started wearing her hijab, which was one of the most important reasons for her to wear the hijab in the first place. She wanted to become more religious, and the hijab did, in fact, help her to stay conscious of her religious identity partly because it works as a constant reminder of what they can and cannot do from a religious point of view and a social perspective. Anita also thought it was Islam that has, so far, protected her from drinking or drug use. She said, “I see people get into lots of trouble because of drug and drinking, and I’ve been protected from that.” Islam is “a moral code,” otherwise, “If I wasn’t Muslim, I would be so far away from the path; I’d be all over the place,” she said.

However, it is not just drinking or going to a bar that is a concern, but also other engagements that revolve around drinking, as Setareh explained. She said:

Now that I’m more mature and I know I don’t want to be in those drinking environments, I don’t go to some functions that my friends hold, I just don’t. I don’t want to be around a bunch of drunk people. It’s going to make me uncomfortable. I’m not going to be enjoying it. I’m not going to be happy that I
am the only sober person there, and everyone is acting crazy.

That is how not drinking alcohol and choosing to live one’s life within certain parameters affect socializing with others who have a different lifestyle, according to these participants. Setareh said, “It is challenging sometimes because it’s like when do you tell your friends, hey, I’ll hang out, just don’t bring the alcohol?” As a result, Elmira, Ziba, Setareh, Melika, and Mandana reported experiencing isolation and some form of bonding issues with their non-Muslim peers in college, at work, or in social settings. Elmira partly explained how this isolation happens, especially as a young college student:

When you’re with a group of friends, who all they wanna do is smoke, or drink, or do this, or do that, or there’s a party, and this is what people are doing, and you don’t do it, they’re not gonna invite you next time, and they’re not gonna invite you next time, but then they don’t hang out any other time, so you kind of get lost in that. You get lost in that loop. You’re not there, or friends who wanna go out for brunch and have mimosas and get drunk and everything and do that, but then it’s like, oh, but if we bring *** [her name], then she won’t drink, and that’s not fun and whatever.

Elmira said, “Sometimes, I’ll have struggles with not, not fitting in I would say, but more like have troubles with staying relevant.” Since they spend time and have drinks together, they also get to know each other more, and they also would talk about things they did together, so it is hard for the person who missed out on those engagements to relate to their conversation because she was not there. The issue of relevancy is not exclusive to her non-Muslim friends; it also includes her Muslim friends who do not have the same lifestyle. However, Mina’s experience was different in this
regard. She stated, “I don’t feel like those things put a strain on my relationship or make it harder for me to have friendships outside of my religion.” Even though she chooses to limit herself from certain activities such as drinking and clubbing, she said, that “doesn’t mean that we can’t get breakfast the next morning and talk about what happened the night before. It’s just that I wouldn’t have been there, and it’s okay.” She added there is “generally a mutual respect despite the fact that we have different beliefs.”

Nevertheless, Setareh said she felt “socially isolated” during college because she was never invited to parties. She said at her college, “students are known for their heavy drinking,” and she might not have gone to any of those gatherings because of that drinking factor even if she were invited, “but the fact that I wanted to be included, the fact that I wanted to feel like I was involved and I belonged was really what I wanted at that time.” Looking back, she said, “Though I wanted that, I’m glad I didn’t have that because it would have just not been the environment that I’m okay with.”

Ziba shared having a similar feeling. She used to be invited more to social functions before she started wearing her hijab even if she would not attend. Whereas now, she does not even get invited, and it somehow bothers her because she still wants to feel included and to feel they thought of her. She likes to have the opportunity to choose whether she would like to go to a gathering instead of being excluded and having that decided for her. For instance, she said one of her classmates had a pool party during the summer, and she invited everyone but not Ziba even though she had added her to her Facebook friends list. The mixed messages confused Ziba, but she thought, “Maybe they did not want somebody like fully covered at the pool, I don’t know it was just weird.” She was sure that were it not for wearing a hijab, she would have been invited to the
party because they would not have seen her as any different even though she still would not have had alcohol or worn a bikini. She did not have problems with her non-Muslim friends who knew her before she wore a hijab because they did not see her as any different.

However, this issue is not exclusive to college or younger people, it also affected the participants’ professional and social lives. For example, Melika was bothered that her colleagues have a stronger bond with each other because of the activities they do together after work that involve drinking. Mandana said, in America, “Everybody freaking loves drinking,” and everything from birthday parties, finishing finals, or having a weekend off to “like even networking mixers, like opportunities to meet new professionals and connect and get jobs is done over alcohol.” She continued:

Like they don’t know how to do anything else, and for me, it’s like I want to bond with everybody, like I want to network too, I want to have fun, but I’m not gonna drink and yeah, I can go and just drink water, but why do I want to be there? Like it’s uncomfortable; everybody’s drunk except you. It’s weird.

As with Mandana, based on her experience, Setareh also thought in Southern California or in the U.S., in general, “You can’t have the experience without alcohol.” However, she thought the drinking is not as much of an issue as it is the level of consumption. Spending a lot of time in Europe, she compared Americans to Europeans, and said, in Europe, “I’ve never been at a function where somebody was plastered. Where here, if there is the function, nine times out of ten, 99% of the people are plastered at the event which then makes it a very uncomfortable environment.” Just as Setareh, Mandana thought activities “on a social level are more favored towards people who are
not Muslim” or very religious particularly in Southern California. She believed, “It’s hard to be religious in general in Southern California. We’re very liberal out here and atheism is on the rise, which is fine, but I think people view religion, in general, as something that’s like old-fashioned.”

**Shared values of Islam determine the circle of acquaintance and friendship.**

Assal, Anya, Melika, and Mellissa, four out of 12 participants, mentioned that the majority of their friends are Muslim, Arab, or Middle Eastern because they generally share the same moral values and lifestyle. Mellissa said most of her friends, regardless of wearing a hijab, have the same characteristics and personality type, and that they all care about the same elements and have similar lifestyle and activities. She surrounds herself only with people who fully support her, encourage her to be better, and want the best for her. She said she makes sure she knows who her real friends are and lets go of those who bring her down or do not support her fully. She is grateful to have such people around her and thinks if they wear the hijab, that is just an added plus. She emphasized the hijab is not just a scarf, it is a mind-set and mannerism, so even though some of her friends do not practice veiling, they still have the same mannerisms and mind-set.

Assal also said probably only 10% of her friends are non-Muslims, and those are “very tolerant.” She said they are “really good friends,” and she goes everywhere with them “except when they go to the bars.” She said her social life is reflected in being a mom, so her friends are also mostly moms, and “they have a lot of things in common.” She said, “I don’t feel different because we focus on our common things more than our differences.” She has a much larger pool of friends and acquaintances now that she lives in Orange County instead of Colorado for a combination of different reasons, but she
thinks it is much easier to make friends in her new place. She also said having the majority of her social life within her own community is “what make it easier” for her.

Anya spent most of her time with her Muslim friends as well, adding, “It’s always been a good time with friends even though we wear a hijab, we still have a good time.” However, Melika’s perspective on this aspect of her life was slightly different than the other three participants. She said her social life, overall, is “really good,” and she is fortunate to be surrounded by many friends and “respectful people;” though they are all from within her “own culture.” She continued:

I don’t really have any close friends that are not Middle Eastern or not practicing, so it does sometimes make me feel odd because here I am in America, and I identify as American, but my life really isn’t American because I was forced to choose to stay within my own community because that’s where I feel the most comfortable, and the most respected, and the most understood, which is the biggest thing, I think.

She believed her treatment by non-Muslims and people outside of her culture would have been different and more welcoming if she were not wearing her hijab. Since choosing to exercise her religion and wear her hijab, she has been treated poorly by the majority of the people outside of her community, and because she does not feel welcome, respected, and understood by mainstream Americans in general, then she has no choice but to stay within her community even though she is American and feels she should be included.
It is more challenging to date and find a suitable life partner when wearing a hijab. Donya, Elmira, Ziba, Setareh, and Mandana, five out 11 single participants, shared they experienced difficulties dating and finding a suitable life partner, with Mandana suggesting this should have been specifically a separate interview question. Elmira said:

Even Muslim guys, they don’t really want to date you…they don’t wanna be in a relationship with you because they’re like, oh they’re hijabi, or they don’t want to approach you because they think that you would be boring, uptight, that you would be very restrictive, that you would be just so many different things.

She thought the restrictions she made for herself such as not drinking or clubbing should not affect her potential long-term relationships, especially with Muslim men, but they do. Donya also said there have been Muslim men who liked her as an individual, but they did not like that she wore the hijab.

Mandana was more descriptive of her feelings and experiences. She shared a couple of her struggles regarding relationships and men. Having dated both Muslim and non-Muslim men for short periods of time, she thought she had attracted the wrong men. The first man she dated as a potential marriage candidate had the appearance and status of a religious Muslim man, but she found out later he had elements of promiscuity. She said that was the first time she questioned the role of hijab in her relationship, “Even though he’s trash, his character sucks, I don’t want him back, [and] I don’t care what he likes, it was the first time where I was like was it because of my hijab?” Having similar experiences with non-Muslim men, she became “really distrusting of men.”
She still struggles with whether the man in which she is interested would like her hijab, noting, “It doesn’t matter whether a guy likes it or not because I’m not gonna take it off, but what does matter is am I gonna stay with him or am I gonna date him?” Recently, there was an Arab Muslim man who was interested in getting to know her. He flew from the East Coast to meet her and her family and spent some time with her and his sister going around the city, but “at the end of the week, he said, you know what? I really liked her, but I can’t. Her hijab attracts too much attention when we go out.” He said, “I would love if she just took it off, then we could get to know each other without all the attention.” She was very offended by that and said, “He didn’t just say, oh, I don’t like the fact that she wears hijab, leave me alone. He wants me to be with him and take it off for him! Who the f*** do you think you are?”

Meanwhile, there was mutual interest with a non-Muslim man with whom she gets along very well, and he seems supportive of her, but he is the total opposite of what she expects to marry. He likes to drink and party, which are against her and her family’s cultural and religious values. She also wants her children to be Muslim and raised accordingly. At the same time, she does not know how his Catholic family would treat her as a hijabi Muslim women even if he were ever to convert to Islam. She said, “It sucks that instead of me focusing on how I’m gonna feel, I’m focused on how they’re gonna treat me.” She said these issues could be distracting “from why I wear hijab and me and my relationship with my hijab.” She continued:

I hate that in dating, it’s seen as, depending on who you’re talking to, either you’re with a Muslim guy who wants you to wear it, which is also bad, because I just don’t think men should tell us what to do. I don’t think they should be
allowed to tell us to wear it or not to wear it. It’s me and my hijab. You stay out of it. So, you either have Muslim men that are like, I prefer a hijab, and I’m like, nope, because then they’re not looking at you as a person, they’re just looking at you as a woman who wears a hijab, or you have all the other trashy men that I’ve talked to or dated, where the hijab was a turn off.

She added men who have certain perceptions and stereotypes cannot see and appreciate a Muslim hijabi woman’s beauty, strength, and confidence.

Similarly, Ziba struggled with finding the right man who is also supportive of her hijab. When around a man whom she is interested in marrying, she becomes very self-conscious of her hijab, and that also affects her self-esteem, especially when there are other beautiful nonhijabi women in the same setting. As Mandana said, she does not like that that part of her life affects her relationship with the hijab and causes her to temporarily lose sight of the reasons she started wearing it. It is just difficult to separate the hijab and a permissible way of marriage in Islam when there are feelings of despair for building a future relationship. As mentioned, Elmira, Donya, and Mandana also became very self-conscious of their hijab when they were or were not approached by a potential suitable candidate for marriage.

Since Ziba started wearing her hijab as an adult and after graduating college, she experienced how it is to be a nonhijabi regarding male attention. Prior to wearing a hijab, she also was not necessarily very modest with her clothing, so she explained, “I noticed that when it came to men, it was like the less modest you are, the less modest you come off as, the more they would approach, or try something, and this is mostly non-Muslim men.” She thought “it was actually really bad” because she was getting approached by
all types of guys, including those she really did not want to be approached by because they were “so disrespectful.” Since wearing her hijab, she has fewer inappropriate interactions with men, and if there are conversations, especially with non-Muslims, it would be mostly out of interest and curiosity. Thus, she likes that her hijab protects her from many of those men who are inappropriate and shallow minded, but at the same, she is sometimes worried whether a suitable man would be able to appreciate her beauty as a hijabi woman, because part of being a new hijabi as an adult woman is to rebuild one’s confidence, according to her. Ziba felt she had “reconstructed” her face after a month of wearing the hijab and “completely did not see” herself as “beautiful anymore,” and it took her much time and effort to rebuild that confidence and beauty and just to get used to herself. That is why issues with relationships, particularly, affect her self-esteem.

Last, Setareh said dating and finding a potential suitor is very frustrating for two reasons. One, there are many non-Muslim men who are “interested in you, and they’re intrigued by you because you wear the hijab, but to explain what your boundaries are when it comes to dating is difficult, it’s very difficult.” She said having to explain “that you don’t think it would be best to date them [because of cultural and religious reasons],….or what the concept of dating is because culturally it’s different for us [Muslims] than it is for other people” is challenging. Two, “there are a lot of Muslims, but there aren’t that many great fish in the pond.” She also said there are dating apps such as Minder, which is similar to Tinder but for Muslims, “but everyone there is from all over the country; it’s not like Tinder where it’s like okay, in a 30-mile radius, this is how many people there are, these are people you could choose from.” On the same note, when Setareh was younger, she started wearing more conservative clothing because she
wanted to be more religious, so she could find the right man at a young age. She thinks it is funny that her “religiosity, at that point in time, only focused on the hijab.” She noted:

There’s this concept of you should get married straight out of high school, and I felt like I would not be an acceptable suitor unless I was more religious. I think, looking back at it now, being more religious hijab wise, equals being a better suitor, equals getting married younger.

She thought a combination of her own expectations and her surroundings at the time gave her that pressure. However, the pressure to be the perfect Muslim woman and the drastic change in her apparel made her lose her sense of fashion, which she loves, and sense of being herself; therefore, she became very depressed for a period of time.

**In Public**

Participants also shared some of their most common barriers or struggles related to their public lives (Table 14).

Table 14

*The Barriers or Struggles Related to Public Life*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Random selections and high anxiety at airports</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited First Amendment, self-censorship, and an urge and feelings of suppression</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being treated differently depending on the type of clothing and scarf styling</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 12*
Random selections and high anxiety at airports. All participants, except Anita, said they are almost always “randomly selected” at airports and described traveling and going to airports as the most stressful part of their public life as an Arab Muslim hijabi woman. Some added they were also subjected to more screenings at other security checkpoints. However, most participants complained about the airport staff while some were disturbed by other passengers’ microaggressions as well. The only person who was not always subjected to “random selections” was Assal, who removes her hijab while at airports and on airplanes. She said, “Airports are the only place that I feel not safe, not safe at all.” When traveling through airports, she makes sure to remove her hijab and not to speak Arabic. Both her and her husband consciously avoid speaking Arabic with each other and their children when at airports and on planes. She said she does that for her safety and because of all the stories she has heard on the news.

She shared how her experience was as an identified Arab Muslim prior to obtaining her American passport even though she did not wear her hijab when traveling during that time either. She explained a Yemeni passport has the same color and look as the American passport, so when the custom agents would see her husband’s American passport and hers that looked the same, they would smile and tell them welcome home. However, as soon as they realized it was a Yemeni passport, they would ask her to step out of line, and they would take them to a room where they would stay for half an hour or an hour for questioning. She was grateful for obtaining her American passport, so she did not have to repeat that experience. Nevertheless, she thought in addition to having an American passport, it was probably her cautious behavior such as not wearing a hijab nor speaking Arabic that has made her traveling experience easier as she looks like another
mainstream American. She has not traveled in the past five years since moving to Southern California because of the war in Yemen and “because there is no place to go [her home country].”

She does not like that she feels the need to remove her hijab. She described her feelings:

I feel sad. I feel like I’m taking it [off] because I’m afraid, and I don’t like that. I feel that I am not safe. I feel…someone is oppressing me. I feel that someone is oppressing me, and he wants me to walk the way he wants, and I don’t like that. I feel weak, but I have to because I don’t want…especially at the airports, there is a lot of bad experience that I don’t want to go through, right? And I tell myself that it is a few hours in my life that I can do that, and the other days I can be myself.

She said she tries not to think about the times that she removes her hijab at airports because it makes her sad. She stated, “I don’t like to remember bad things; I try to ignore it.” She felt very sad when in those situations, so after the fact, she justifies it to herself, so she does not think back and become sad. She felt:

I was compromising for my own safety, and my own safety is the first priority. I give myself a reason not to feel bad after that because I did it for the right reason, and I know it is temporary.

As new hijabis, both Ziba and Anya noticed a change in treatment and level of screenings at airports compared to when they did not have a hijab. Ziba said, “[The] airport is interesting; the random selection is so annoying, but at the same time, I haven’t felt it as much as I know a lot of people have.” She got “really anxious at the airports specifically” because she heard there was an incident where a feminine product that a
woman had on her body was searched, so she is scared that something like that or a behavior amounting to sexual harassment might happen to her during a search. She feels safe everywhere but airports. She was worried about an upcoming trip with her sister, and whether she would be subjected to questioning, “My sister doesn’t wear it, so I’m a little bit scared. What if something happens? What if they want to interview me?” She had a positive experience at the John Wayne Airport in Orange County, saying “it is usually amazing,” so it was somewhat reassuring to her that she was going to travel through there. She said she really appreciates the respect she receives “from the people that work specifically at John Wayne.” She compared her experience to other airports, “I traveled to London, and they just selected me from my whole family, and I was literally the only veiled person.” She said she was “never not even once” selected for random checking prior to wearing her hijab. She was thankful she has not had negative interactions and discrimination from passengers, saying, “I feel like I’d know how to handle an employee being like that because like okay it’s part of their job or whatever” but not the public.

Anya also said traveling “was easy” for her before wearing the hijab, so when she had it on for the first time traveling, she was worried because she knew “they do extra screenings for hijabis.” She had a jacket on and could not take it off because her shirt underneath was sleeveless, but she said it was hard for them to understand why she could not take it off, and “they want[ed] to make a problem out of it.” She also thought they searched younger people more because they did not search her mom as much as they did her. She said, “like they didn’t have to check my bun, like I’m not hiding anything!”
Mandana also complained about an experience she had at an airport regarding her hair tie. She indicated, “I hate traveling in hijab, hate it, absolutely hate it.” She said her least favorite experience at an airport was when she was traveling to Michigan for a conference, and the TSA agent told her, “your head beeped” even though she was not wearing any earnings and hair pins; she had only tied her hair with a scrunchie. She said the agent grabbed her bun really hard, paused, and then stroked it in a quick and strong motion with two hands; “I’m like, are you expecting it to blow up? What was that? It was just the weirdest thing ever!” She described other incidents where she was forced to remove an item such as shoes when other passengers with similar items passed through security without having to remove them. She said she is usually subjected to a more thorough screening than other passengers.

Elmira shared, “When I’m at airports, I get people staring at me, [and] I always, always get random selection.” She also shared she was once traveling with her nonhijabi friend when the suitcase she was carrying got stopped for a search but not her friend’s. She thought it was because of a candle in the suitcase. At the next security checkpoint and by mistake, she was carrying her friend’s luggage, and her friend carrying hers. She experienced the same issue again. They stopped the luggage that she was carrying, but they did not search the luggage that her friend was carrying. She said, “same bag, when it was with a nonhijabi, she didn’t get stopped; when it was with a hijabi, she got stopped.”

Melika noted, for her, there is always safety concerns when using any type of public transportation. She added she is a frequent traveler, nationally and internationally, visiting more than 20 countries in the past year:
So we fly a lot, and experience a lot of different cultures, and through a lot of different airport security; it’s a unanimous experience that if you’re visibly Muslim or any person of darker skin or portray something that’s not normal to them, normal being White or Asian, stuff like that, you obviously get extra security and extra checks.

She said she was just recently traveling with her mom to the Long Beach (California) Airport, and she and her mom were the only people who were asked to walk through the 3-D body scanner, which is “obviously used for more intensive security.” The rest of the people, before and after them, had only to walk through the simpler metal detector, the type that looks like a door frame and is seen everywhere. She said:

I remember there was about 20 people in front of us, they all went through the normal metal detectors. When it came to me and mom’s turn, the TSA agent was, wait…you guys there, so he made us go through extra security, through a more invasive body scan, simply because we were covered. It was very unfortunate, and I remember I had spoken up, and I was like…I didn’t speak to him directly, and I told my mom just laughingly, wanting him to hear, I’m like, welcome to being Muslim in America. After we finished, the rest of the group went through the other sensor [again].

She said this signifies the level of Islamophobia there is in the U.S.; “the hijab, right away they think terrorist.” She added the passengers in the planes act “very scared” too; “You always see that sense of fear in them like, oh, is this hijabi going to sit next to me?” She said sadly, “I constantly, in certain situations, I’m ashamed that I speak Arabic because if I speak Arabic, it induces fear, so whenever in certain situations, I try to speak
only English.” Even though English is her native language, she said in certain situations such as airports and airplanes, she only tries to speak it “to prove to them that I am just like you guys,” adding:

I shouldn’t have to do that. I shouldn’t have to put in extra effort to make them feel like I’m one of them because I am one of them; I’m born here. I’m just as much American if not more American than many of the people that I cross. She said her family prefers to speak Arabic only in the household and normally not outside, so when they are outside,

…especially in airports, in certain situations where we feel like there’s a higher chance to be kind of isolated and higher chance to be especially selected, “randomly selected” actually is the correct word that they use, but in situations where we feel like our Arabic or our culture’s going to pose a safety threat, then we naturally just choose to speak English. It’s our body’s natural defense mechanism.

Donya mentioned, “I literally hate traveling in general; I just hate it,” because she gets very air sick and tries to sleep “the whole time” to help suppress some of her dizziness and nausea. She said, “By default, I’m already tense and tired when I’m traveling, so it really does not help the fact that we’re all randomly selected or identified.” Nevertheless, she thinks “they’ve changed their random selection system” because last couple of years, “it’s gotten better,” and she has not been pulled aside or subjected to extra searches as much, saying there are some hassles “because we’re identifiable.” However, she added, “I think the bigger problem that I feel in the airport is really the people, the regular general people, not even TSA anymore because they’re
always tense. They’re always looking at us in suspicion. They’re always uncomfortable.” She said, “I can’t tell if they’re being extra nice because they’re scared, or if they’re being extra nice because they’re just nice people.” She felt when she is walking onto the plane, people are nervous, and “they all have that face like, please don’t be sitting next to me, please don’t be sitting next to me.” She joked she is “the best company” to have because she only sleeps until the plane lands, and they have to leave. It bothers her that people view her with fear and suspicious, noting:

I feel like it’s sad that a lot of people, number one, really trust the media way too much, so they’re taking in this information that’s feeding the hate, and number two, that a lot of people are allowing this fear to prevent them from building relationships.

She has had both positive and negative experiences with other passengers where some people went from being nervous and scared at the beginning of the flight to feeling comfortable after speaking together and finding commonalities by the end of the flight. Her negative experiences, though, were such that they wanted to switch seats or not sit next to her. She said, “I think most of the time people are just like, we’re just going to have to deal with it and hopefully she’s not a crazy bad person.”

Mellissa also said the airport is the only place she feels “something because they randomly select me sometimes.” When she and her female family members, who also wear the hijab, were not randomly selected once, and the two White ladies behind them were, they were very surprised because that usually does not happen. Though those women became upset and suggested it should not have been them but the ones in hijab, Mellissa and her family, instead.
Furthermore, Mina shared that airports are the only place she is very “cognizant of” her behavior and surroundings because her family has “been stopped before.” They would be randomly selected, and sometimes, their hands would be wiped and checked for traces of explosives as well. She said her and her family are “very cognizant” of how they conduct themselves at airports, ensuring they do exactly what they should be doing as far as emptying pockets, taking off belts or anything that might register when passing through the metal detector, and so on, so “there is no suspicion.” She said they even, …make sure we’re not making a scene in the airport, [like] make sure my mom isn’t upset with us, nobody’s yelling at anybody else, just keeping it very very low key, just trying your best to not draw attention to yourself.

Despite doing everything right, she said when she was traveling recently with her mom, they were “stopped every single time; either something would go off in the beeper, or something in our bag, or something they wanted to check or whatever.” She said when she was younger, and she would be taken aside or to a room to be searched more thoroughly, she would be more bothered and self-conscious because she would feel embarrassed by people’s looks. As she has grown older, she wants people to see how she is being treated differently and “to see what kind of stuff we have to go through because it’s unnecessary, and it’s ridiculous; because it seems uncanny that it’s always you that gets randomly selected.” When she was younger, about 12 or 13 years old, she was confused and uncomfortable, “I’d be like why are they touching me? What did I do?” Whereas now, she would “just talk loud, so people can see because it’s annoying, and you just get tired of it.”
Similarly, Setareh indicated:

You’re always nervous in the airport because you don’t want to be embarrassed in front of other people; you don’t want to be singled out in front of other people, and a lot of times in the States I am.

She compared her experience at airports or in other public areas when traveling to Europe, such as in France and Iceland where people are welcoming and see her as an individual. She said though she is blessed not to have a “real true experience socially” in a negative way, she constantly faces bigotry and derogatory comments and behavior on a daily basis whether it is at the airport, at the gym, on a hike, or a networking social function.

Last, Roya said people are nice at the airports, but she gets “scared” going there sometimes. She contemplated whether she is “a little bit paranoid” because she wears the hijab, or that at different security checks such as airports or Disneyland, they search her more than her friends who are not Arab or hijabi. She said even her friends notice it, and they tell her, “He looked way too long in your backpack.” She said it was interesting to her because they are usually polite and nice, but they search her more. Once she was going to the Disneyland with her friend who is Asian, and she said the security officer seemed as if he did not even care to look into the friend’s purse, but it took him some time to get through hers. Her friend brought it to her attention, but Roya was confused because the person was also very nice to her. She thinks he might have subconsciously thought she might be a terrorist, so he searched her bag more thoroughly.

**Harassed while commuting other than the airport.** Several participants mentioned they experienced some form of negative encounter while commuting or some
concerns about commuting other than by air. Mellissa gets stares sometimes while driving, but she tries to ignore them. As mentioned earlier, the day after the San Bernardino shootings, someone intentionally tried to hit Donya while she was driving. In another incident, Donya and her friends were heading back home from a protest in Los Angeles right after 9/11 when the people in another passing vehicle threw a bottle of beer at their car. Because the windows were open, the bottle entered the vehicle, broke into pieces, and covered them in beer and glass particles. Recently, Anita and her friend were driving when they noticed the man in the car next to them was staring at them, and then he yelled, “Where is your camel?” and something else about back home. She said they were both confused and “were just so caught off guard” about the interaction, and what he even meant. She said after the interaction, they were just driving quietly and thinking, “What the hell just happened?” and “Did that just really happen right now?” especially because it was close to her home. They thought about the incident “the entire day.” She said, “It was weird; it was uncalled for and random.”

Mandana had a similar experience when someone told her mom who had parked her car “kind of crooked,…Hey, park your camel better.” She has also received offensive gestures while driving, “Like the day after Trump got elected, I got flipped off on the freeway twice,…and both times, it was a truck with an American flag in the trunk.” In addition, she is concerned when she uses an Uber because she does not know how the driver will treat her. Once she had to take an Uber to the airport at 3 a.m., so she was more anxious because of the hour. Since she could not see the driver, and she was afraid, she was texting her mom and friends, sending them her location in case something
happened. At the time, the driver all of a sudden, “goes sister, you’re Muslim?” He was Muslim himself; she said, “Oh, the relief that I felt.”

Last, regarding public transportation, Melika said, “There’s always that fear of safety because you don’t ever know who’s in the bus.” Similarly, Roya said she has never used a public bus, but she said, “I would not get on a bus. I get scared. I think I would be scared a little bit.” She said what if “I’m alone and there’s someone racist on the bus? It’s scary, like someone wants to hit me or something; that’s scary.” She also mentioned she might experience a hateful comment or act at any time. She said,

…you’re going to experience…any time, you never know when you’re going to experience it. It’s just been my luck Alhamdullah [thank God in Arabic]. I’m very thankful, but right now, when I leave [the interview], I could experience something when I’m walking to the car. I don’t know if any of these people are going to be rude to me, trip me, make me fall, hit my car. I’ve had someone driving, the motorcycle smashed her car into the freeway, like was hitting her car. I don’t know who’s going to be rude to me, racist to me.

She then said that she has to start being more careful when she is driving. She said, “I should watch if someone’s following me to my house” because when her mom was younger, she was followed.

**Limited First Amendment, self-censorship, and an urge and feelings of suppression.** All participants mentioned they exercise self-censorship and have an urge to suppress expressing their true feelings whether be it related to religion and politics or a daily activity. Even though the U.S. Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, this freedom is perceived to be very limited to almost all participants as Muslim and hijab-
wearing women. Mina explained this concept in detail. She said freedom of speech for “Muslim people it’s kind of not free at all, or at some level it is a bit censored.” She believed:

As a Muslim person, you kind of have to think twice specifically when it comes to things like Palestine, or when it comes to things like terrorism and denying or affirming certain groups. ISIS for example, do you agree that ISIS is a terrorist organization? If yes, don’t you agree that it’s also a Muslim organization? So, does Muslim equate to terrorism? So, it’s like I can’t say anything without carrying the weight, again, of a massive issue that doesn’t really equate, right? Anything you say seems to carry more weight than anything that anybody else says.

She believed when it comes to larger issues such as those related to countries, religious organizations, political groups and alliances, and international policies, “Muslims have to be careful about who they align themselves with.” To demonstrate this, she said, for example, if someone from an Arab, Muslim, or Middle Eastern background speaks against Israel, then she or he “all of a sudden [and] inequivalently,” becomes anti-Semitic and racist and loses all the credibility while if another person from a different racial and religious background raises the same issue, people are willing to listen to that person and discuss the matter. When an Arab, Middle Easterner, or Muslim speaks out about certain issues, he or she is viewed with suspicion, quickly accused, and shot down. She added, “It seems like we don’t have a lot of leeway, a lot of freedom, with what we can say or how we can explain ourselves” because words and ideas are taken out of context. She also thinks “people in general, whether they realize it or not,
put a lot of emphasis on the words of Muslim people,” and one person, right or wrong, instantly becomes the representative of Islam and the Muslim community. Even if some Muslims make ignorant and uneducated comments, and other Muslims want to correct them or denounce their ideas, their intention and ideas are questioned and undermined. She believed, at times, a question is set to trap Muslims regardless of whether they answer it, and so Muslims are doomed. There is also government surveillance of Muslims. It is because of such factors that all participants who were asked said they exercise self-censorship and are very careful about what they say, who they say it to, and where they say it; though they still feel obligated when there is no one to defend or speak out on behalf of Muslims to ensure their voices are heard.

However, other than self-censorship in political and religious subjects, all participants also felt an urge to suppress their true feelings or identity on a daily basis. This is closely aligned with the concept of feeling the pressure to be the perfect Muslim and citizen. Because they wear the hijab and are visibly identified as Muslims, and because they believe they are constantly looked at and judged, they might not always defend their rights. Many times, they let go of things that they might not have otherwise if it were not for their hijab. For example, Mellissa said if she purchases items, and the cashier makes a mistake on the receipt, she is very careful approaching the cashier if she does so at all. She makes sure she is smiling and is extra polite, so she does not offend anyone or leave a bad impression. Though being respectful is good manners and expected, actively and constantly thinking about others’ perceptions and going beyond to please them solely because of one’s appearance is neither fair nor healthy.
This suppression is further displayed in other areas of their lives. For example, Elmira said since she has been discriminated against in school based on her identity, now that she wants to apply for different schools and positions “where people are in the situation to accept or reject” her, she struggles with how much she should reveal about herself. She asks herself, “Do I wanna make it clear that I’m Muslim? Do I wanna make it clear that I’m Palestinian? Do I wanna make it clear that I’m Arab?” She fears disclosing her identity, social activities, or political stance in an application could be used to discriminate against her. She said, “I don’t wanna lose an opportunity because of this, but at the same time it makes me think, but if they don’t want me because I’m Palestinian, then I shouldn’t want to be there to begin with.” She does not know which path to choose, and the struggle with those thoughts is very difficult.

**Being treated differently depending on the type of clothing and scarf styling.**

Four out of 12 participants said they believe the way they dress or style their headscarf impacts the way they are treated by the general public; generally, the less traditional and conservative, the less harassment and the more acceptance. For instance, Melika’s mother stopped wearing more cultural, long dresses, and skirts after 9/11 to reduce the negative interactions and harassment she was receiving. Similarly, Mellissa said she thinks one reason she has not had many negative experiences and discrimination is because she looks “different than other people that wear scarfs.” She said, “I like to make myself look presentable and nice and maybe not everyone does that.” Then, she added, “I feel like people treat you differently when you look a certain way too, so if you look different than the norm, you get treated differently too.”
Mandana also noticed when she wears her scarf more loosely where her hair shows sometimes, or she wears it in a turban style, she is treated differently than when she wears her scarf more conservatively or along with an abaya or more traditional and conservative clothing. She said if she dresses modestly but trendier, and she walks in “to Macy’s or Sephora or whatever,” they would greet her and offer help “because I look like an upscale girl. I look like I’m from here; I look like I’m from Orange County, and I want to buy stuff.” On the contrary, if “I walk in with an abaya or whatnot, I look like a foreigner. I look like the people on TV that they make us look bad,…I look like all the stupid, negative, offensive stereotypes.” Additionally, she said, “I notice a difference in my treatment when I’m wearing makeup and not wearing makeup, regardless of whether I have hijab on tightly or loosely, [and regardless of the person’s gender,] I notice a difference.” As a result, she has become “hypersensitive to the way I’m dressed that day. I can’t just roll out of my bed in sweats and go in or whatever.”

Other than at school and internship sites in Colorado and when she wears a burkini by the ocean or the pool, Assal has never been harassed or experienced microaggressions in Southern California. She said:

I’ve been thinking why I haven’t been harassed. I know a lot of my friends, a lot of stories, that happens. They have been harassed, and especially in the last administrations that has been taking place, there is a lot of judgementalization,…but I don’t see that. I think because of this [pointing to her headwear], because I customize my wear, and not let go of my values. To, what is, melting with the society that I live in. I think that’s why, but yeah, I haven’t been harassed once.
Assal only wears her scarf traditionally when she goes to a mosque or Muslim gatherings. Anywhere else, she covers her hair with a hat or something similar, so no one can tell she is a veiled Muslim woman unless they are in the close proximity and pay attention. Furthermore, since she is afraid something unfortunate might happen to her or her family because of her hijab and Arab or Muslim identity while traveling by air, she does not wear her hijab there or speak Arabic. She thinks these factors have helped her to blend in with the rest of society, so people cannot easily assume her ethnicity or religious identity and target or mistreat her.

Furthermore, Melika mentioned it has become more difficult for her to wear her hijab, so she started wearing her scarf more loosely because she is trying to fit in more. She said it is unfortunate that she is doing that because she used to be more conservative about it, but “nowadays, I just kind of wrap my scarf around because…I’m trying to stand out less.” However, unlike Assal, she still looks visibly Muslim. Thus, wearing her scarf more loosely has not helped to protect her against mistreatment or reduced her concerns, noting, “It doesn’t matter because if you wear the scarf, you’re still a target.” She added, “It’s always going to happen, as long as you’re wearing the scarf, whether it’s a turban, whether it’s a full-on scarf, whether it’s…depending on what style you like to wear it, it comes with the territory.” She emphasized the prejudice and hate that Arabs and Muslims, particularly hijabi women, receive is due to “racial institutions.” Therefore, hijab wearing women would always face discrimination as long as they are visibly identified as Muslim.
Whether Incidents of Discriminations Were Reported to Authorities

Encompassing education, work, social, and public settings, participants were asked if they have reported any incidents of discrimination, harassment, or hateful act to respective authorities. The interview question read: Have you ever reported any incidents of discrimination to any authorities? Why? Do you think you would respond differently if something similar happens in the future? How? The following themes emerged from this question (Table 15).

Table 15

Report of Discrimination to the Authorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nothing major to be reported</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of backlash</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 12

Nothing major to be reported. All participants, including Donya, Setareh, Elmira, Melika, Roya, and Mandana, who reported incidents to authorities said most of the encounters or negativities they experienced because of their hijab and/or ethnicity were done in microaggressive ways. They said they have been fortunate not to experience anything physical or life threatening or to feel the need to report the incident. However, when Melika was younger, she was assaulted on the way home from school by someone yanking her scarf and trying to pull it off her head; she did not report the incident to the police. However, half of participants have taken action in certain circumstances.
Donya reported the truck that circled around her whenever he saw her to the Orange County Human Relations Commission. Because the truck had “Muslim Butcher” written on its body, and he had displayed the same circling behavior accompanied with loud music on multiple occasions, Donya had felt threatened and thought she had to report the incident. She never saw the truck again after filing the report. However, when a bottle of beer was thrown at her and her friends on the freeway after 9/11, they did not report it to the police. She said:

So the bottle shattered and the glass was all over us, and it was like beer and glass and all of that while we were driving. But the car drove away, and it was like, we were in the middle of the freeway, what are we...We didn't...Nobody was severely injured, so we didn't feel this need to stop and call the cops and make a report but maybe now, if it happened to me now, I would have reported it.

Setareh also called the police when a man verbally attacked her and her friends, who were all hijabis, for a long period of time when they were shopping at a wedding warehouse. When police arrived, they escorted the man out of the store, but they told Setareh they could not press charges against him because of some legal reason. In addition, she reported a racist manager to a higher ranked supervisor. In that case, the manager was moved to another location.

Similarly, when Roya was 16 and subjected to discrimination by customers, she talked to her supervisor about it. He offered her emotional support. Also, when Melika was in school, and her teacher made fun of her name, or her coach made a derogatory comment about her hijab, she told her parents, who complained to the school’s administration.
Elmira reported one of her male classmates who made inappropriate jokes about Muslims to her teacher when she was a senior in high school. Her teacher talked to the student. Elmira said she thought that was important to do, and she would report anything that happens in the future because “we need to set precedents; you need to be able to set an example.” She said, “If someone in charge goes and talks to that person and punishes them in some way or calls them out on their actions, that gives an example to everybody else that says this is not okay.” She also attempted to take action against her Spanish teacher who had commented, “Let’s hope they’re not terrorists,” referring to the Muslim association in her school. However, her friend who heard it did not want to report it to the administration, so she could not do anything about it.

Similarly, Mandana has tried to stand up for herself in situations that she felt were discriminatory. She reported issues that happened at work to her supervisor. When her professors made comments that she thought were discriminatory and ignorant, she reported them to the chair of the respective department. She also reported the anti-Semitic accusatory e-mail messages she received because she is working on the Boycott Divestment Sanctions to her professor. She said though they are not written in threatening language, she wants to make sure everything is documented should something happen. However, her reports were not always taken seriously or resulted in appropriate action.

**Fear of backlash.** Anya thought “a lot of hijabis get discriminated against that they don’t talk about, and…not all hijabis go and report discrimination against them; they just stay quiet.” She believed many hijabi women do not report discrimination because they are afraid of the backlash such as losing their jobs or their friends. Two participants decided not to report cases of discrimination because of fear of backlash. For instance,
when participant 9’s employer pulled her off a case because of her scarf, at first, she
wanted to file a lawsuit against her. However, she chose not to pursue any legal action
for two reasons. Firstly, everything was said on the phone and denied via e-mail, so she
did not have any tangible evidence to prove her case. Secondly, she thought her field of
work in Southern California was small enough to damage her career path since she was
new and her employer was very well-established. She said:

> What I really looked at was like okay, the *** [her work] community is so large,
> but it’s so small at the same time, and your reputation is everything, and she could
damage my reputation if I tried to go after her, and being a young *** [her
profession], I did not want to do that.

Even though she was encouraged by one of her professors who was a civil rights
attorney, and this incident professionally and emotionally affected her, she did not take
action against her employer.

Similarly, participant 10 never reported any discriminatory incidents she
experienced at college because she feared backlash, and not just from those professors
involved, but also from her classmates and other professors. She had difficulty getting
accepted because of her hijab in the first place, so she did not want to stand out more than
what she was, and she did not want to do anything that could jeopardize her position at
school and her future profession. Even though she has graduated and working, she asked
the researcher not to include anything specifics about her college experiences, despite
them being very hurtful, since she thought her incidents were very specific and could
jeopardize her professional life.
**Other Emerged Themes**

The following themes also emerged through analyzing this study’s data (Table 16).

Table 16

**Other Emerged Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hijab, a source of empowerment, pride, identity, strength, and submission to God’s will</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western feminism is patriarchal and one sided</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexualization of Muslim women</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of cultural competency among health care professionals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 12*

**Hijab, a source of empowerment, pride, identity, strength, and submission to God’s will.** At some point in the interviews, participants were asked: What does the hijab mean to you? Why do you wear the hijab? All participants, without exception, said they chose to wear the hijab on their own and practice it very proudly. To them, hijab is more than just the practice of modesty even though it is an imperative and inseparable part of it. As Mina said, “You can still be modest without having hijab.” However, they also pointed out the meaning of the hijab as well as styling of their headscarves and clothing are ever-evolving and have changed as they have grown older.

All participants said hijab has been a source of strength and empowerment. They believed it takes a certain level of strength and confidence to wear a headscarf and be a
visibly Muslim woman. For instance, after wearing a headscarf during middle school and experiencing isolation, Anya did not want to keep her hijab during high school because she “was scared of people” and their reaction and did not want to “be the only one.” However, she started wearing her hijab again when she turned 20, noting, “I felt I was ready. I felt I was strong….when I put it on, I wasn’t scared, and I was like ready to face everyone,…I guess that’s a big accomplishment…’cause it’s hard to start.” She thought one needs to be spiritually and mentally a strong individual to be able to wear the hijab and face the challenges that come with it. However, not everyone feels as strong at the beginning of their practice of hijab, just as Anya did not have it at first during middle school. Mellissa also said as a shy and introverted teenager, her strength and confidence were built within time, but “I feel like the scarf built that quicker for me.”

They also felt empowered by the hijab for variety of reasons such as taking back their sexuality and femininity, standing up for their religious rights and beliefs, respecting themselves and their bodies, and breaking stereotypes. Elmira and Melika said being a hijabi Muslim woman motivates them to always do their best and to break stereotypes. Calling hijab comforting and empowering, Melika stated, “A lot of things that I do in my life have been to prove to people that the hijab is empowering whether it’s my profession, whether it’s my extracurriculars, [and] whether it’s to play sports.” For example, she specifically participated in a sport that many hijabi women have typically stayed away from since she used to hear “a hijabi can’t play” that because of the outfit, and she wanted to prove them wrong. She added:

I’d apply for certain jobs. I’d apply for certain things, certain awards, certain scholarships, just to prove that the hijab actually is…It encourages me. I’m like
what’s the worst that can happen? I won’t get it, but what’s the chance? So, the hijab has given me that power and that strength to go above and beyond what people think I’m capable of.

Mellissa also shared that wearing the hijab is to respect herself, “I view myself as more of a person than just looks. I have a brain that I use rather. When people talk to me, they see me for me, they don’t see everything I have to offer.” Roya could not describe the feelings of empowerment she gets from wearing her scarf, but she said, “The headscarf, to me, means power. It means Islam. It means I’m doing something right with my life.” She fell in love with how her mother looked in a hijab, and now that she wears it herself, it “means a lot” to her religiously and spiritually. To her, hijab means “I have the power of the world. I’m very proud to wear the headscarf, and I’m very proud to be a strong woman that can wear it and that can fight for my religion.”

Hijab also equals identity to the participants. Anita shared, “Hijab is my identity, my Islamic identity.” Despite that many view hijab simply as a means to show modesty, “It’s like a part of me that I have to put in my introduction. I am a Palestinian American Muslim woman,” adding, “You can’t think of *** [her name] without thinking of hijab, so I’m like a package, and I’m proud of wearing it even though sometimes you’ll have challenges.” Similarly, Assal said:

Hijab means to me, that it’s me. It’s like my nose, my eyes, I can’t change it because it’s part of me. It’s part of my culture. It’s part of my belief. My values. I feel that, if I take it off completely, that I’m taking part of me. There are things in my values that I just can’t let go. One of them is that I’m from Yemen; I’m so
proud of that, and the other one is that I am Muslim, and this is the way that I practice my Islam. It is the way that I choose to practice my Islam.

She contended her hijab is not a provocation and an urge to be “in your face,” rather, it is something that puts her “in peace” saying, “It’s just for me.” She said, “This is how I’m happy. This is my character. I just can’t take it off and be another person just to please another people’s eyes, right? This is why hijab’s part of me.”

Last, but definitely not the least, hijab is a sign of submission to God’s will and God’s consciousness. Though wearing the hijab is challenging in many ways, and some days are more difficult than others, all participants said they wear the hijab because they believe it is their duty, and they want to conform to their religious obligations. Mellissa said, “Honestly, I feel it as strength, I feel like anyone who wears it is very strong and has that will and a love for God, and they know their priorities.” While Mina believed hijab was mandated by God, she also thought, “Ultimately, it is a choice” because “there’s no compulsion in religion,” which is why “I choose to continue wearing it despite the fact that it’s challenging sometimes, and I think it’s just because it’s bigger than me.” She believed “there’s more going on underneath just my existence in this world. It’s bigger than just physical. It’s metaphysical. There’s spirits and angels, and there’s an afterlife, and there’s dimensions.”

At the same time, she believed with the hijab comes God consciousness because it always works as a reminder to her who she is, what her values are, and how she should conduct herself in this life. She said her hijab always keeps her in check, “When I feel like I want to go astray different directions in my life, if I want to do things outside of the scope of Islam,…it brings me back; it kind of humbles me.” All other participants felt
the same way. As Anita explained, Islam works like a compass that protects its followers from harm and trouble such as drinking alcohol and using or abusing drugs.

**Western feminism is patriarchal and one sided.** Donya, Elmira, Setareh, and Mandana criticized the mainstream Western feminism for being too narrow and one sided. They believed the voice of hijbi Muslim women is not heard and their accounts of feminism are often dismissed. Setareh saw her hijab as liberating because contrary to mainstream Western beliefs, it protects her from “societal pressure.” She said, “The hijab presented a challenge, and I think that challenge has allowed me to grow into my individual self.” She believed society puts too much pressure on women, in general, in terms of how to look, speak, behave, and dress, and the hijab helped her not to give in to such pressure for the most part; though she has not been completely immune to it. Criticizing social media and enormous societal pressure on women, she said even children as young as 9 years old are sexualized. She inserted:

> It’s not about judging the choice; it’s about the pressure of being forced into that choice. Otherwise, you’re considered unliberated; otherwise, you’re considered oppressed, but really, you’re not. It’s the reverse. We’re not succumbing to what social media says. We’re not succumbing to what the social standards are being put out. We’re standing our grounds, and each one of us has our own individual way of doing that as a hijabi….that’s why [the hijab] it’s liberating to me.

Elmira felt the same way. She passionately explained her hijab is the, …ultimate stuff of feminism. It’s me taking back what’s mine; taking back my body, taking back my sexuality, taking back everything, and me deciding who gets to see me like that, and who doesn’t get to see me like that.
She added, “You only get what I give you, and that’s what I love about hijab. I love that. I love that I have this ultimate privacy.” She believed, “Men feel entitled to seeing your body,” but by wearing the hijab and modest clothing, she takes this entitlement away from them, which makes her feel in control and empowered. To them, this outlook is often missed by mainstream Western feminism.

In addition, Mandana believed mainstream Western feminism is patriarchal and feeds men’s interest. She believed that even though there has always been a portrayal of a proper woman, who wears a knee-high skirt and a long-sleeve blouse, and that women who deviate too much from that image by wearing more or less get criticized and labeled, surprisingly, those who wear less are more accepted and celebrated than those who decide to wear more clothing. To her, this proved that mainstream Western feminism is still controlled by the men because they want to see females’ bodies but make women think they are in charge. While she believed it should be ultimately the woman’s choice what to wear, she believed:

if we [women] cover up more, we’re seen as like prude, or we’re seen as like too much or whatever, oppressed or the men are still telling you to cover up when in reality I think the reason that it’s become more popular for women to take off their clothing is because it feeds into the male gaze, it feeds into what they want to see.

She criticized the mainstream Western feminism for believing and supporting this approach and not supporting those women who choose to cover more skin. Those who choose to be naked are cheered and celebrated, and it is considered to be liberating, but when women choose to wear a hijab or a nighab, they are criticized, judged, and seen as
oppressed and subjugated. She believed true feminists actually do respect all women’s choices, including wearing a hijab or other modest or religious clothing, and though a small percentage of them do, they are mostly women not men. That is why mainstream Western feminism is considered to be patriarchal and one sided, as sexism and men’s interests are integrated to in this perspective, Mandana explained.

**Sexualization of Muslim women.** Donya and Elmira pointed out that Muslim women and the hijab have been sexualized by many in the West. While Donya was happy to see more inclusion of hijabi Muslim women in recent years, she questioned the authenticity and integrity of different brands and organizations that have started to include them in their product lines and promotional features. Closely aligned with the concept of tokenization, she wondered whether this inclusion is just a selling point by branding themselves as open-minded and inclusive, or whether it is a way of sexualizing hijabi women, which has been a historical phenomenon in Western culture. To make her point, she used featuring hijabi journalist, Noor Tagouri, in the *Playboy* magazine’s 2016 edition as an example. Though she disagreed and yet respected Tagouri’s decision and reasons for being featured in the magazine, which is known for sexualization and objectification of women, she criticized the nature and questioned the real intention behind *Playboy*’s invitation. She was quite alarmed by that and said it is a clear reminder to young women such as her and other members of the Muslim community to be very cognitive of their decisions and actions because it could be very difficult to identify the real intentions as well as negative factors and consequences associated with these actions. She believed because of the West’s constant demonization and dehumanization of Muslims, sometimes Muslim community members are so eager to fit in with mainstream
society and prove the media’s portrayal of Muslims wrong that they may fall into other traps. That is why it is important for the Muslim community, especially those who live in the Western countries, to be cautious and examine seemingly positive opportunities carefully, she suggested.

Elmira also spoke about Western men’s entitlement to know and see females’ bodies and to sexualize and fetishize hijab and Muslim women. When speaking about feminism and women’s empowerment through the hijab and Islamic values, she said her non-Muslim male classmates and acquaintances always ask her about her hair (the color, texture, length, etc) and body. While her defense mechanism was to laugh it off and take it as a joke, “so that they would stop,” she was bothered deep inside that “this isn’t okay….Why do men feel so entitled to know these things?” Because she was covered, and they have not seen her body, they were triggered to know the unknown by guessing, questioning, and teasing her about it many times. She found that very disrespectful, and that is why she feels empowered by the hijab, that she is in charge of her body, and people only get to see her the way she wants to present herself to them. She was also very disturbed to learn that something as respectful as religion and culture were sexualized by the West and its men, and that the hijab and veiled Muslim woman are fetishized. Though this was an uncomfortable topic for her to address, Elmira thought it was important for this matter to be included in this study. She was told by a man in college that, “He has this fantasy of having sex with somebody who’s only just wearing a hijab.” She said, “That’s disgusting; the fact that that’s like a fetish now, that they fetishize the hijab, they fetishize cultures and religion, I think that is disgusting. It’s gross to me. You see it everywhere!”

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Lack of cultural competency among health care professionals. Participant 2 and participant 11 complained about the lack of cultural competency among health care and mental health care professionals. Participant 2 was given a pregnancy test and told her health issues were probably because of pregnancy even though she explained to her doctor that she had never been sexually active. Although she said she understands that this may have been a standard protocol, she felt extremely disrespected by how the doctor responded. She told her doctor, “I’ve never had sex; I can’t be pregnant, and they didn’t believe me, and he said, Uh huh, like let’s see…whatever.” She was quite bothered by his disbelief, and that he did not take her seriously and thought she was just “putting on an act.”

Participant 11 was also really disappointed by all the mental health professionals she has seen. She said they were clueless about the Arabic and Islamic culture and values, so instead of speaking about the issues bothering her and addressing her concerns, she had to spend hours teaching them about even the basics of her culture and religion. She felt they were more curious about the culture and religion than they were about her concerns and diagnosing her. That is why she would always end up changing therapists, and then stopped therapy altogether.

Summary

After restating the purpose statement and research questions, the methodology, data collection process, population and sample, and data analysis process were briefly described, ensued by presentation of the collected data through data analysis and emerged themes. Each research question was paired with respective interview questions and emerged themes. Each section included a table demonstrating major findings of the
pertinent research question. For this study, 12 participants were individually interviewed face-to-face. All participants were Arab Muslim hijabi women (18 to 40 years old) and lived in Southern California. All participants lived, worked, or went to school in different cities in Orange County.

Three interview questions were asked to address the central research question, and the data analysis revealed all participants believed Southern California is generally and relatively a positive living environment for Muslim hijabi women. All emphasized locality matters in their experiences, and that they have been fortunate not to have experienced physical altercations because of their ethnicity or religious appearance. One participant was physically assaulted when she was younger with someone trying to pull her hijab off. However, all participants mentioned receiving microaggressions has been an inseparable part of their lives, including in work and education settings as well as their social and public lives. In addition, 10 participants said the political climate had a direct impact on their lives as a veiled Muslim woman. Eight participants spoke about being alienated from society, and that they are seen as the other by mainstream Americans even though they were born and raised in the U.S.

All participants said wearing a hijab makes them visible, and their visibility makes their experiences living in Southern California or in America, in general, different than others. They all reported having a high level of alertness for their surroundings, despite feeling relatively safe in Southern California. Also, almost all participants said they felt pressured to be the perfect Muslim and citizen because they are constantly being watched and judged by others, particularly non-Muslims. They fear their personal character and manners reflect poorly on the Muslim community as a whole because many
non-Muslims are not very forgiving of Muslims and would like to generalize any negativity to the religion and the community as a whole.

Even though they are not given the benefit of the doubt by society, all participants said they are very cautious with what they would call discrimination because they always give others the benefit of the doubt that their actions might have been a result of other factors such as having a bad day or being, generally, a mean person. However, they also said they could easily sense discrimination at times, while, at the same time, it was not always easy to know what triggered the encounter because they are an intersection of different identities such as being a woman, young, Muslim, Arab, and hijabi. Furthermore, eight participants also talked about discrimination within the Muslim community. They thought, as in any other community, there are also important issues within their community that need to be addressed by its members.

As for the first subquestion, which addressed the barriers or struggles related to work and education they experienced, participants were asked one interview question that was broken into work and education categories. Regarding work, all participants experienced some type of discrimination at work or in the hiring process. Also, seven out of 12 participants shared their concerns regarding job opportunities as a Muslim hijabi woman. They did not want their scarves to become tools to be accepted or rejected; they wanted to be seen only through their individualities and their qualifications. As far as education, seven of 10 participants who went to school in Southern California and wore a hijab had struggles with fitting in, and they were bullied at least once by their peers before they graduated high school. All participants who went to college in Southern California said they had a generally positive experience at their college or graduate level.
Many participants thought maturity and more diversity were important factors in creating that positive environment. However, six of 11 participants were discriminated against by a school faculty member throughout their educational years.

The second and last research subquestion addressed the barriers or struggles related to social and public life they experienced. Half the participants believed not drinking alcohol affects their social life outside of the Muslim community, and four participants noted shared values of Islam determined acquaintances and friendships the majority of the time. In addition, five of 11 single participants said they have difficulty finding a suitable life partner while wearing a hijab, particularly in the Muslim community. In public life, the most prominent issue was airports. All participants, except one, said they were constantly subjected to random selection, and they experience high anxiety at airports and on airplanes. One participant fears for her safety so much that she chooses not to wear her hijab while traveling by air even though it makes her feel very sad, weak, and oppressed.

The following chapter presents a thorough examination of major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions based on the findings, implications for action, and recommendations for further research. Chapter V closes with concluding remarks and reflections.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter concludes this research study by providing a brief overview of the problem, purpose statement and research questions, and research design and methodology, as well as the populations and sample. Further, a detailed discussion of the major findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions drawn from the data ensue. Last, as part of the conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks are presented.

Overview of the Problem

There is a long history of prejudice, discrimination, and hateful acts against Arabs, Middle Easterners, Muslims, and those perceived to be of the same background in America though everything intensified post-September 11, particularly the first few years (Aziz, 2012; Campbell, 2015; Daraiseh, 2012; Davila & Mora, 2005; HRW, 2002; A. Moore, 2010; Muqtedar Khan, 2004; Rabby & Rodgers, 2009). There has been a steady rise of incidents of prejudice and hateful acts against these communities since 2010 as a result of many factors such as the rise of ISIS (or IS), a migrant crisis in Europe, a series of terrorist attacks across Europe and the U.S., anti-Muslim propaganda, and Islamophobic rhetoric by politicians. Veiled Muslim women are often easy targets for discrimination and hateful acts because of their visibility and being female. There has been a spike in discrimination and hate crimes against Muslims all around the U.S., including California. The researcher was interested to learn about the lives and challenges of young Arab Muslim women who wear the Islamic head covering, known as hijab, in Southern California. California is known for its multicultural and predominantly Democratic population, but there are also very conservative and less diverse areas in
Southern California. Thus, the lived experiences of young Arab Muslim women who live in Southern California and wear the hijab in the contemporary era of rising xenophobia is unique.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old) in the contemporary era.

**Research Questions**

This study was guided by one central research question and two subquestions designed to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges experienced by Southern California female Arab Muslims (18–40 years old). The research questions were as follows.

**Central Question**

What are the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old)?

**Subquestions**

1. What work or education challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) experience?
2. What social or public challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) experience?

**Research Design and Methodology**

A phenomenological method was used to inquire about the lived experiences and perceived challenges of the participants. A phenomenological study views a
phenomenon through the perspective of its participants; it is their reality, and how they feel about that phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). That is why such studies are subjective and heavily reliant on human beings’ experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2002), and it is the researcher’s responsibility to ensure the participants’ voices are heard (Phillips & Bowling, 2003). There is still lack of scholarly literature on Muslim women who wear the hijab, so their voices are often missed (Zempi, 2014). This study attempted to humanize and individualize its participants through a qualitative phenomenological study and their voices while also looking at collective data that are based on their individual shared experiences (Eichelberger, 1989; Patton, 2002).

To collect data, 12 participants were recruited and interviewed. The researcher met with each participant face to face and conducted qualitative, semistructured interviews, which were audio recorded by the researcher and transcribed by a third-party company. A following meeting was held to provide participants with a printed copy of their signed Confidentiality Form and their interview transcripts. The researcher also went through the important themes within the individual’s transcript for the purpose of clarity and member checking. In addition, participants were offered a chance to edit, add, or change any materials in their transcripts.

**Population and Sample**

The exact number of Muslims in the U.S. is not available since the U.S. census does not collect data on religions. However, when extrapolating the limited available data, it is estimated that there are more than 10,000 adult Muslim females who consistently wear the hijab in Southern California, with a large portion being of Arab heritage. The target population of this study was Arab Muslim females who wear the
hijab (18–40 years old) and live in Southern California. However, because of many factors such as time and financial constraints, a smaller sample of 12 participants was chosen for this study. A sample is a smaller size of the target group. A sufficient sample size for a phenomenological study is recommended to be five to 25 by Creswell and at least six by Morse (as cited in Mason, 2010).

All participants met the criteria for the target population; they were all Arab, Muslim, female, between the ages of 18 and 40, wear the hijab, and live in Southern California. Also, it just happened that all participants for this study worked, lived, and/or went to school in Orange County. A purposeful sampling was used to choose the participants. Different Islamic centers and organizations were contacted throughout the Southern California area. Once the first participant was recruited, almost all other subjects were also recruited by or through her. Last, each participant was able to choose a Persian name from a list provided in order to protect her true identity.

Major Findings

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old)?

Finding 1: A generally and relatively positive living environment, but locality matters. All participants thought of Southern California as a more progressive region that has helped in creating a generally and relatively positive living environment for visibly Muslim women. They believed the multiculturalism and diversity in Southern California make it easier for them as veiled Muslim women to feel more included compared to many other states with less diversity and a smaller Arab and Muslim
population. They believed not all cities within Southern California are as diverse, noting in some areas and cities they do not feel as welcomed, included, and comfortable as they do in other parts where there is more diversity or a larger population of Arabs, Middle Easterners, and Muslims.

At the same time, many participants pointed out that while California has been historically a Democratic state, parts of Southern California, and specifically the Orange County area where the participants lived, worked or attended school, have a large and strong presence of conservative Republicans. In addition, one of the participants pointed to Trump’s voting percentage (31.6%) in California (California Secretary of State, 2016), saying, “You’re still likely to meet [a racist].” Nevertheless, several participants pointed out being a Republican or voting for President Donald Trump are not necessarily equivalent to being intolerant and racist toward the Arab and Muslim community although many can be. In other words, the more Democratic and diverse a region is, the more inclusive and comfortable the environment might be for a hijabi Muslim woman.

When considering the Public Religion Research Institute’s 2015 findings, the participants’ perception of Republicans is not without a merit. According to this survey, the majority of Republicans (67%) believed American Muslims needed to do more to address extremism versus Democrats (45%) and Independents (52%); more Republicans had generally a negative perception of Muslims (Cox & Jones, 2015). In addition, President Trump ordered a Muslim ban, causing an uproar in the country. When the case was brought before the Supreme Court, it voted in favor of the order and President Trump by the Republican Justices (five) against the Democrat Justices (four; Liptak & Shear,
2018). The Republican Justices also did not consider the anti-Islamic rhetoric connected to the ban unlike the lower courts (Liptak & Shear, 2018).

**Finding 2: Microaggressions and normalization of a level of alertness and microaggressions.** A prominent theme was being stared at and experiencing different forms of microaggressions, which have been an inseparable part of the lives of the participants in this study. One participant said, “People always stare when we wear a hijab. That’s just normal; people will always stare.” Some participants noted they are amazed that in the world of technology and easy access to information and the relatively large presence of veiled Muslim women in Southern California, people still do not know much about the people or the religion other than the misinformation and stereotypes from the media. They are still surprised to see a Muslim woman with a hijab.

Whether in at school, work, a social gathering, or in public, they are prone to experience microaggression and to be treated with disrespect or discrimination. They know it is going to happen to them, they just do not know when and where, so there is always a spark of anticipation in their subconsciousness no matter how comfortable and safe they feel in a place. That is why they are also well aware of their surroundings for the most part, and they usually take more precautions when in public than they would if they were not a hijabi. However, because fear and microaggression have been part of their lives for a long time, the precautions come naturally to them, and the majority (10 of 12) try to ignore microaggressions unless it is out of the ordinary. Simply put, they have coexisted with certain perceptions, microaggressions, and a level of alertness because this has been their lives since they started wearing a headscarf.
**Finding 3: Assumed as oppressed.** Eight participants mentioned they are assumed as oppressed by many non-Muslim Americans. They were bothered that there are many misconceptions about Islam and Muslim women, and that wearing a hijab to many is viewed as being oppressed. All participants proudly said they started wearing their headscarves by choice, and that they wear that for the sake of God. Wearing a hijab is a relationship between them and God, so they did not want anyone to tell them to wear it or not wear it. Even though there are undoubtedly Muslim women who are forced to cover their hair (Jailani, 2016), mostly in certain Islamic countries, many studies suggest a large number of Muslim women wear the hijab willingly and proudly (Al Wazni, 2015; Jailani, 2016; Zempi, 2014). However, this willingness is questioned by some such as Billaud and Castro (2013) who argue Muslim women who cover, even if voluntarily, are so oppressed that they cannot see their oppression.

This ideology of Muslim women’s oppression within Western culture and history and making the hijab its symbol is highly cited by many scholars and historians (Al Wazni, 2015; Byng, 2010; Croucher, 2008; Das & Shirvani, 2013; Hodge et al., 2017; Jailani, 2016; Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; Piatti-Crocker & Tasch, 2015; Sloan, 2011; Zempi, 2014). The meaning of hijab has been politically interpreted by the West (Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; Zine, 2002) to be the sign of “submission and a threat to freedom and individuality” (Jailani, 2016, p. 52) and “the patriarchal power of religion” (Zempi, 2014, p. 2). Western countries needed an excuse to invade and colonize Muslim countries for their resources, but they had to justify their actions before the public and international eyes (Al Wazni, 2015; Bradford, 1999; E. W. Said, 1977). Thus, they created a narrative of Muslim women as oppressed and a need to be their savior; this way
their invasion was not seen in a negative light anymore (Al Wazni, 2015; Bradford, 1999; E. W. Said, 1977).

**Finding 4: Seen as the other.** Eight participants said they are seen as the other even though they see America as their home country, and the majority of them were born and raised there. One participant was particularly frustrated that many White customers at her workplace ask her where she is from during the short time she helps them at the register. She said even when she responds that she is from Southern California, they do not like the answer and insist on knowing which country she originated from, saying, “They just can’t put me in an American box.”

American Muslims are seen through the sphere of otherness (A. Moore, 2010), and according to E. W. Said (1981), this phenomenon of otherness started when the West created an identity for themselves. L. Ahmed (1992) believed the otherness of Muslim women formed in the 18th century when the West started to have more interactions with Muslim women through the colonization of Muslim nations, and as it started to create its own narrative for them. The French and British, particularly, took the lead in creating an image for Western women, so they deliberately created an opposing image for those of the Orient (the East)—the countries they planned to invade (Al Wazni, 2015; Bradford, 1999). Though this otherness is deeply embedded in the history and culture of the West, and was originally crafted for colonization and creation of an identity for self, it has never been advantageous for Western politicians to correct their ancestors’ narratives of the Middle Easterners and Muslims. In fact, Western politicians in the contemporary era have emphasized the differences and sense of otherness by adding to their ancestors’ narratives, so they can advance their power and feed their greed. What was projected as
rescuing subjugated Muslim women in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Bradford, 1999) has turned into “the War on Terror” (Al Wazni, 2015, p. 326) in the 21st century, and veiled Muslim women have become the face for this war and otherness.

**Finding 5: Backlash and impact of the political climate.** Ten participants said certain negative incidents such as the September 11 and the San Bernardino shootings, as well as the changes in the political climate such as the presidency of Donald Trump, directly affected their lives, mostly in negative ways. Many participants have been called a terrorist or have been accused of affiliation with extremist groups, with many of these incidents taking place during their school years. Some participants experienced verbal abuse, offensive gestures, and road rage while driving after a terrorist attack, during the 2016 presidential campaign, and after Trump’s election. President Trump’s campaign was based on anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric (Bauman, 2018; Costello, 2016; Everding, 2018), and he signed an executive order banning the entrance of Muslims from six majority Muslim countries (Liptak & Shear, 2018).

The participants’ experiences parallel reports of intense backlash and a rise in discrimination and hate against the Muslim community after certain national and international incidents or political affairs (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Aziz, 2012; Campbell, 2015; Daulatzai & Rana, 2018; Faiola, 2016; HRW, 2002; Payne, 2015; Reuters, 2018; Siemaszko, 2015; Suleiman, 1999; Sullivan et al., 2015; Zunes, 2017). A few participants implied they become oddly anxious when a tragic event happens and are in a way relieved when they learn the perpetrator cannot be linked to Muslims and Middle Easterners. One participant stated when she learned about September 11 and the speculations about Muslims, she was at school, and she thought to herself, “What does
that mean to me? What does that mean for me? How is that going to affect me?”

Correspondingly, M. A. Muqtedar Khan (2004) believed after a tragic event, such as the September 11, the Muslim community in America suffers in different ways. Not only does it suffer from losing community members, both Muslim and non-Muslims, it also suffers societal, economic, and political backlash as well as the comprehensive retaliation (M. A. Muqtedar Khan, 2004). For instance, because of September 11, the Muslim community lost more than 200 of its members, and it suffered the intense backlash from non-Muslim fellow Americans; it further suffered when America started its comprehensive retaliation, as one of its methods, toward suspected Islamic targets around the world (M. A. Muqtedar Khan, 2004).

**Finding 6: Role of the media.** Several participants talked about the importance of the media and its impact on their lives as veiled Muslim women. Five participants firmly believed mainstream Western media outlets disseminate misinformation, hate, and Islamophobia. They blamed the media’s biased role in creating and spreading of fear, bigotry, and hate among non-Muslims against Islam and Muslims. At the same time, four participants also believed the Western media had a key role in their level of consciousness, sense of alertness, and perception of danger. Particularly, at sensitive times or in certain places, these participants felt their lives and their family members’ lives were threatened, and they became very alert and anxious because of what they had seen and heard in the media.

The participants’ view on the media’s role in creating and spreading Islamophobia and stereotypes is aligned with many previous studies (S. Ahmed & Matthes, 2016; Artz & Pollock, 1997; Hussain, 2010; Kamalipour, 2000; Kanji, 2018; McClure, 1975;
McDavid, 1983; Ridouani, 2011; Samo, 1975; Semaan, 2014; Shaheen, 2003; Stockton, 1994; Suleiman, 1975; Terry, 1975; Thussu, 1997). These studies suggest Arabs, Middle Easterners, and Muslims have been always shown in a one-sided, distorted, and negative light whether in the context of news (S. Ahmed & Matthes, 2016; Artz & Pollock, 1995; Kamalipour, 2000; Kanji, 2018; Ridouani, 2011; Stockton, 1994; Wilkins, 1995), literature (S. Ahmed & Matthes, 2016; Ghareeb, 1983; Ridouani, 2011; Wilkins, 1995), movies (Hussain, 2010; Shaheen, 2003), and even cartoons (Ghareeb, 1983; Ridouani, 2011) and video games (Semaan, 2014). The demonization and dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims are deeply rooted in the political history of America long before September 11 or any terror attack.

Based on these studies, for decades Western and American media outlets and writers created and used false and distorted images of Arabs and Muslims to use them as scapegoats for their economic failures such as high oil prices, unjust national and international actions such as supporting Israel against Palestine, invasions of Iraq, as well as the Patriot Act and the Muslim ban as national policies. The same way America created a false image of other groups such as the Japanese and Jews to fit its propaganda, it has portrayed Arabs and Muslims through a narrative that fits its propaganda (Stockton, 1994). One participant emphasized “the only reason” for the maltreatment of Muslims in America and around the world is the media and politics. She believed Muslims are called terrorist, so that America can invade Islamic countries and steal their oil and money. Similarly, many scholars (Artz & Pollock, 1995; Ridouani, 2011; Stockton, 1994; Thussu, 1997) strongly believed the uncivilized portrayal of Islam and its demonization by the mainstream Western media only fits its “geo-political interests in arms and oil”
Thussu, 1997, p. 264) and serves as a public justification for its maltreatment, wars, and policies against the Arab and Muslim countries (Artz & Pollock, 1995; Ridouani, 2011; Stockton, 1994; Thussu, 1997). The Western narrative of an Eastern veiled Muslim woman versus its narrative of a Western and liberal woman won it years of unlawful occupations of Muslim countries (Al Wazni, 2015; Bradford, 1999; E. W. Said, 1977).

The image of Arabs, Middle Easterners, and Muslims created by the West and the U.S. is the image of a dumb, rapist, murderer, abuser of women, religious fanatics (Shaheen, 2003), greedy, unworthy oil-rich, punitive, violent, barbaric, terrorist, and patriarchal (Ridouani, 2011; Shaheen, 2001), as well as inhumane, lustful, and backward (Semaan, 2014). The Middle Eastern and Muslim women are also portrayed as submissive, oppressed, evil, killers, illiterate and uncivilized, poor, hostile, extremist, ugly and unpleasant, or sexualized and cheap (Shaheen, 2003), as well as distant and impersonal (Wilkins, 1995). These images have been reflected in the experiences of this study’s participants such as being seen as oppressed, underestimated, and sexualized.

**Finding 7: Wearing a hijab equals visibility and that changes the experiences.** All participants believed they look visibly Muslim because of their headscarves, and that this visibility has an impact on their experiences as a Muslim woman. They emphasized that it is their hijab that changes their experiences of living in Southern California for the most part not just being Muslim. They assumed the experiences of living as Muslim women and men whose appearance or accent do not identify them as different or Muslim would be similar to non-Muslims for the most part. One participant added the experiences of other individuals who practice their faith more conservatively such as Orthodox Jews and Mormons are also different from the general
public in Southern California because of their conservative or religious attire. She thought Southern California, in general, is not a very religious and conservative region, so anyone who appears to be more conservative would have difficulty fitting in.

Though the practice of veiling, in a religious context, originated in Judaism, and it is still practiced by some Christian and Jewish women, and also has a long history in many cultures around the world where it has been used to identify one’s social status or for fashion purposes, it has been primarily and widely associated with Islam and Muslim women in recent centuries (Das & Shirvani, 2013). Moreover, a growing number of Westerners find the Islamic head covering intimidating and view it as a threat to their secularism and democracy (Das & Shirvani, 2013), which has led to banning or considering some sort of ban on hijab (Das & Shirvani, 2013; Jailani, 2016; Piatti-Crocker & Tasch, 2015; Zempi, 2014). As aforementioned, the West historically created a distorted image of the hijab and Muslim women, so it could justify colonization as well as invasion and the maltreatment of Muslims in the contemporary era (Al Wazni, 2015; Artz & Pollock, 1995; Bradford, 1999; Ridouani, 2011; Stockton, 1994; Thussu, 1997).

However, such political stances and narratives have a direct and powerful impact on those who portray that image, the veiled Muslim women who live in the West (Considine, 2017; Lichtblau, 2016). Many Westerners who lack knowledge and are misinformed by politicians (Bittermann et al., 2016; Everding, 2018; L. Said-Moorhouse, 2016; Shadid & van Koningsveld, 2002) and media (S. Ahmed & Matthes, 2016; Alghamdi, 2015; Artz & Pollock, 1995; Hussain, 2010; Kamalipour, 2000; Kanji, 2018; McClure, 1975; McDavid, 1983; Ridouani, 2011; Samo, 1975; Semaan, 2014; Shaheen, 2003; Stockton, 1994; Suleiman, 1975; Terry, 1975; Thussu, 1997), act upon these false
narratives and stereotypes (Considine, 2017; Everding, 2018; Lichtblau, 2016). According to the Pew Research Center (2017), there were more reports of discrimination against Muslim women than Muslim men. Also, the data show the likelihood of discrimination is more when a Muslim woman wears the Islamic head covering (ACLU, 2008; Pew Research Center, 2017).

Finding 8: Higher degree of alertness and pressure to be the perfect Muslim and citizen. As a result of their distinctive visibility because of their hijab and the existing Islamophobia and scrutiny of Muslims, all participants said they are well aware of themselves and their surroundings. They all reported generally feeling very safe and comfortable in Southern California; however, they also mentioned they do not feel as safe or comfortable in certain places. Some participants also reported being a lot more conscious of their surroundings because of a variety of reasons such as past negative experiences. For instance, one participant, who was mistreated and hurt by a customer, is very aware of customers’ behaviors as soon as they enter the store. She looks for clues to how they interact with her vis-a-vis her colleagues. She said she wants to be mentally prepared in case she is mistreated, so she would not again be so caught off guard. Another subject stated she is hypersensitive to her surroundings whenever she goes out of the house, and that gives her great anxiety sometimes.

Meanwhile, 11 out of 12 participants mentioned they feel a burden to be the perfect Muslim woman and citizen solely because they are visibly Muslim, and people, Muslims and non-Muslims, are always watching and judging them. They were quite bothered by needing to go out of their way to be a perfect Muslim and model citizen in order to avoid being misunderstood and to prevent it from being attributed to the larger
Muslim community. They thought non-Muslims are unforgiving toward veiled Muslim women, and these women are not given the benefit of the doubt. Instead of being judged on their character and individuality, they are judged based on their relation to the religion, and any negative judgment is attributed to the Muslim community in its entirety. This makes them extremely self-conscious of their behavior at all times. As mentioned before, this pressure is caused by the faulty and negative image many Westerners have about Muslims (Al Wazni, 2015; Artz & Pollock, 1995; Bradford, 1999; Cox & Jones, 2015; Ridouani, 2011; E. W. Said, 1981; Stockton, 1994; Thussu, 1997), which considers Muslims, particularly veiled Muslim women, as foreign and the other (E. W. Said, 1981; Tindongan, 2011; Zempi, 2014), and always views them with a level of suspicious (Muqtedar Khan, 2004). A study by S. R. Khan (2014) discovered Muslims felt they are viewed by non-Muslim Americans as disloyal, hostile, hateful, and suspicious. Being the face of Islam for wearing the hijab, the participants in this study absolutely felt this unfair pressure on their daily lives.

Finding 9: Detecting discrimination is complicated; Labeling it discrimination with caution. All participants believed detecting discrimination and identifying the accurate type of discrimination are often very difficult and complicated. While at times, it was crystal clear to the participants that they were discriminated against, and they knew the main causes of discrimination, other times they could not tell whether they were mistreated because the person was having a bad day, was just a mean person, or was being racist and Islamophobic. Furthermore, several participants specified they are at an intersection of different identities such as being young, a female, an Arab, a Middle Easterner, a Muslim, a hijabi, and et cetera. Hence, it is often confusing and very
challenging, first, to identify discrimination for what it is and second, to distinguish what part of their identity triggered the discrimination. For instance, one participant dealt with abusive comments from customers who were sexualizing her and her hijab, so she did not know whether the comments were meant to be Islamophobic or sexist. However, it is not just the victim of discrimination who is often confused. In addition to many hate crimes and discrimination incidents going unreported by the victims, many others are underreported by law enforcement officials because of a variety of reasons, including a failure to identify hate crimes (Singh & Singh, 2012).

Furthermore, many scholars believe women of color and minorities’ experiences are different than White females, but mainstream feminism often fails to recognize that, and it tries to generalize its ideas about White women to other women (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado, 2003; Wing, 2003; Zimmerman, 2013). Delgado (2003) argued two different worlds of color and gender such as the combination of experiences of Black men and White women do not equal the world of Black women. Similarly, Crenshaw (1991) believed many “feminist and antiracist discourses have failed to consider intersectional identities such as women of color” (p. 1242) while they need to consider their experiences within the multidimensional aspects of their social identity (e.g., class, ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation). That is because all these factors are interconnected (Crenshaw, 1991). Comparably, the experiences of veiled Muslim women and discrimination against them cannot be simply put in a box with everyone else; their experiences should be put in a multidimensional perspective even though it might be difficult to clearly identify a component of discrimination and its type.
Nevertheless, all participants were very cautious of what they called discriminatory or bigotry incidents or interactions. Some participants said they usually get a strange feeling or a vibe when someone is being Islamophobic or mistreating them based on their identity. All participants said they tend to evaluate a negative experience in its totality and by putting everything into consideration. Ten participants said not every unfortunate interaction is bias based, and they like to think more positively about unpleasant situations and the people involved. A couple of participants implied this type of thinking helps them cope with the constant and everyday microaggressions. However, they all also looped back to the problem of not always being able to identify and distinguish discrimination especially when it is subtle and some key elements are unknown. For instance, one participant said:

It’s annoying having to think, is it racist? Because you’re never going to know if it was racist or not. I’m never going to know if those jobs didn’t accept me because they did not like me, I was not qualified, or if they were racist.

Another participant was rejected from a competition a couple of times before she was finally accepted. At the time, she was frustrated and did not know what she lacked that caused her rejection. She only learned about being discriminated against a few years after graduation when someone who knew about the situation told her the main person on the panel was known for his anti-Muslim views. Because most of the participants have worn their scarves for so long, some said sometimes they even forget they are wearing one, so they just go about their day. On many occasions, when negative interactions such as microaggressions take place, they try to forget about it and let it go. As one participant
mentioned, microaggression has become part of her daily life, unless something extraordinary happens, which then makes her pause and wonder.

**Finding 10: Feeling of being worn out and thinking of removing the hijab.**

The constant judgment, discrimination, and microaggression have caused all participants to feel exhausted and worn out over time. Many factors such as life experiences, upbringing, their social circle and support, and the individual’s characteristics directly impact these feelings’ intensity. This is what critical race feminists, Patricia Williams (1987) and Adrien Katherine Wing (2000) have warned about. Throughout the years, these young women have experienced multitudes of psychological, spiritual, and cultural oppression shattering their fragile spirits. Though still very young, many of them already feel tired from their circumstances. Every time society oppresses them, they experience a form of spirit injury, and when a group of spirit injuries occur throughout the years, they accumulate and result in spirit murder. Though almost all participants said they had occasionally thought of not wearing a hijab or wearing it differently because of a variety of reasons such as fashion and concern over their professional lives or fearing for their personal safety, two participants indicated they experienced so many spirit injuries that they were seriously considering taking their hijabs off even though deep inside they have no desire to do so. They think by taking off their hijabs, it might be easier for them to blend in with society, and therefore, prevent further discrimination and certain negative experiences.

**First Subquestion**

What work or education challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) experience?
Finding 11: Experiencing bias and discrimination related to work and concerns about job opportunities. All 12 participants were subjected to some forms of bias or discrimination at work and/or when searching for a job. Two participants were specifically told they would not be considered for the position because of their hijab; one was a Muslim business. Several participants did not know why they passed the online and phone screenings during the hiring process but seemed to founder in the in-person interviews. They could not tell if it were because of their hijab because they were not given any reason or a call back, and the interviewers mostly seemed to be nice and respectful. Though, several participants said they view it more optimistically, thinking it was probably because someone was more qualified than them. However, seven of 12 participants were concerned their ethnic background, being visibly Muslim, or having certain political views might affect their future career paths and opportunities. They thought they need to be more skillful and have greater achievements than other applicants for employers to look past their scarves and hire them. Even then, some might choose not to hire someone wearing a scarf.

Even though the majority of the participants were still very young (early 20s) and pursue higher education rather than working, their limited exposure to struggles and life experiences aligned with the available data and literature. Statistics show Muslim women are two to three times more likely to be unemployed in the United Kingdom (Easton, 2016) and Canada (Rahnema, 2006) compared to other women. “Being women, being from an ethnic minority, and being Muslim” (Easton, 2016, para. 6) creates a “triple penalty” (para. 6) effect leading to major disadvantages and discrimination, according to the Women and Equalities Committee.
Family pressure and lack of Muslim community support are also included in the report as contributing factors for this gap (Easton, 2016). However, family pressure was not an issue for the participants in this study. There was also more Muslim community support in this study because several participants chose to work within their community, and they did not report any mistreatment or discrimination. Only three participants were discriminated against at a Muslim-owned business, which in one case, the perpetrator was not Muslim, and in another case, the employer who discriminated was a self-described nonpracticing Muslim. There was only one case of discrimination in which the business owners were Muslim, and they told the participant that they did not wish to hire someone with a hijab.

The report’s emphasis was Islamophobia and recruitment discrimination for which part of the applicant’s identity such as the Muslim woman’s name and her cultural or religious appearance could be a trigger for such action (Easton, 2016). Based on this report, in the UK, negative experiences and fear of facing Islamophobic encounters during the hiring process and in the work environment discourage many Muslim women from pursuing certain jobs (Easton, 2016). However, the participants in this study had a more positive outlook despite their struggles and concerns. Most participants said they would not let anything stop them, and they would push forward with their plans and dreams. Some looked for solutions such as trying to get an internship within that industry and building their skill sets while also strengthening their networks and references. In addition, some subjects expressed their faith and submissiveness to God’s will, saying if He wants them to work somewhere, they will be no matter what, and if He does not, that would be okay with them as well because they trust His judgment.
Studies suggest veiled Muslim women are at a disadvantage in the U.S. (Acquisti & Fong, 2016; Ali et al., 2015; ACLU, 2008; CAIR, 2018a; el-Aabedy, 2017; Esses et al., 2014; Ghumman & Ryan, 2013; King & Ahmad, 2010; R. Robinson, 2016).

Employment discrimination was the fifth most frequent type of anti-Muslim bias incident in America in 2017 (CAIR, 2018a). According to R. Robinson (2016), there is structural discrimination in place against Muslim women in America that increases as they appear more Muslim. She believed a strong Islamophobia exists in both American political parties that prevents them from fighting for veiled Muslim women’s work rights since they fear it could jeopardize White privilege (R. Robinson, 2016). However, according to a scientific experiment, there was a significantly higher rate of bias among Republican employers and in Republican regions in favor of Christians and against Muslims (Acquisti & Fong, 2016). This study also showed Christians had a higher chance (by 13%) of garnering job interviews than Muslim applicants (Acquisti & Fong, 2016).

However, after being hired, a couple of participants left their jobs because they were discriminated against at work because of their hijab and religious affiliation, and they found their work environment to be toxic. Most participants had a neutral or positive working relationship with their colleagues for the majority of the time, but there were also a few who had biased and xenophobic coworkers. However, the majority of participants, especially those who worked outside the Muslim community, dealt with at least one anti-Muslim manager and experienced discrimination related to their supervisors. A couple of participants had positive interactions with their managers. Almost all participants who had some type of interaction with other people at their work,
whether with customers, clients, or patients, had at least one Islamophobic or negative interaction related to their religion.

In America, there have been cases of discrimination against Muslim women for wearing the hijab at work and refusing to remove it (ACLU, 2008; Hooper, 2018c; Richwine, 2012). One participant was asked to remove her hijab because her manager considered it a hat, but the issue was soon resolved when uppermanagement got involved; similar cases have been filed (ACLU, 2008; Levine, 2015). However, one participant felt she was being punished for wearing her hijab by being removed from the sales floor and not working with customers even though it was not explicitly said to her. A woman in Texas was specifically prohibited from wearing the hijab while working on the sales floor (CAIR, 2018a). Discrimination and harassment by customers (Rossman, 2017) and in favor of customers by companies (el-Aabedy, 2017) against veiled Muslim women employees have been also reported.

**Finding 12: Being underestimated.** Seven participants said they are often underestimated in their field and profession. They believed many view them as incapable, uneducated, and naive. One participant said she is often looked at with pity, and she believes people think she is sheltered and oppressed. Another participant working as a health care professional noted, “there is always the question of competency.” They believe these stereotypes stem from the negative image they have about the hijab and women in Islam. A couple of them said they work even harder to exceed the expectations to prove them wrong and to set precedents for other future hijabi women.
These negative perceptions about veiled Muslim women are the results of the image Westerners created for the East and the Middle Easterners. For centuries, Westerners have viewed veiled Muslim women as oppressed (Al Wazni, 2015; Byng, 2010; Croucher, 2008; Das & Shirvani, 2013; Hodge et al., 2017; Jailani, 2016; Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; Piatti-Crocker & Tasch, 2015; Sloan, 2011; Zempi, 2014), backward (L. Ahmed, 1992; Zempi, 2014), and barbaric (Macdonald, 2006; Zine, 2002). They have been projected as “sexually constrained, illiterate, tradition-bound, domesticated, and poor” (Zempi, 2014, p. 11). Westerners viewed Islam as misogynistic, patriarchal, and backwards (Zempi, 2014) while establishing a presumptuous sense of superiority toward the Muslim world by touting their presumably superior system of liberty and democracy (L. Ahmed, 1992). This feeling of superiority is rooted in colonialism (Al Wazni, 2015; Jailani, 2016; Kapur, 2002). It is the world of “us” (Zempi, 2014, p. 9) and “them” (p. 9). The image of a liberated and empowered woman among mainstream Western feminists is sexually expressive and desirable while a veiled Muslim woman is oppressed and subjugated (Al Wazni, 2015; Fernandez, 2009; Jailani, 2016; Kapur, 2002; Klaus & Kassel, 2005; Raju, 2002; Zempi, 2014).

**Finding 13: Struggles, bullying, and discrimination by peers in K-12 education.** Seven of 10 participants who started wearing their head coverings during their K-12 education reported being bullied at school at least once by their peers. They were made fun of for wearing the hijab, associated with terrorists, and were isolated and dissociated from other groups. Some also had problems fitting in. One student had her scarf almost pulled off of her head by a stranger while returning home from school, but the majority of the time, participants were verbally and emotionally abused. One
participant believed her experiences with harassment, bullying, and isolation during her K-12 education caused her to have psychological and mental problems, saying, “It affected me a lot, and the trauma affects you.” At one point, she even had suicidal thoughts. Even though she was diagnosed, treated, and recovered, she thought her negative experiences in younger years might impact her adult life. She thought there are elements that work as triggers that are mostly associated with school and cause depression and withdrawal.

Studies show Muslim American students are more prone to being bullied based on their faith than students from other faiths (Costello, 2016; Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017; Ochieng, 2017). There has been a spike in bullying and harassment in American schools nationwide against minority groups and those perceived as “different” (Ochieng, 2017, para. 6), particularly Muslim students. However, in California, Muslim students experienced bullying and harassments “more than twice the average of Muslim youths nationally” (Bharath, 2017a, para. 1) in 2016 with 53% of respondents being “mocked, verbally insulted or abused” (para. 2) and 26% cyberbullied. Moreover, 36% of female respondents had their headscarves “tugged or pulled off their heads” (Bharath, 2017a, para. 4). Shad Alnashashibi, a 15-year-old student who had her scarf pulled off a few times at school, told a KQED News reporter at a bullying prevention bill rally against Muslim students, “To them it’s just pulling off a headscarf, but to us it’s pulling off our identity. To them it’s nothing, but to us it’s almost everything” (Romero, 2018, para. 9). Furthermore, a study released by the California chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations warned not only has there been a spike in Islamophobic incidents at
schools around California in recent years, but also the incidents have become more physical and violent in nature (Bharath, 2017a).

Finding 14: Generally positive experiences in college and graduate school; More diversity and maturity. All participants described their college and higher-level education as generally positive. Some participants said they were very busy with work and focusing on their education, so they did not spend much time on the campus. They were not sure if that was a contributing factor in having a seemingly positive experience interacting with their peers. However, many participants thought more diversity and maturity were the main reasons for creating a generally positive environment at colleges and universities. Depending on their major and school, they said there were more Muslim women with and without hijab from different backgrounds and hijab styles on their campuses and classes compared with their K-12 school years where some were the only hijabi or one of the only hijabis at their schools. Participants whose majors or schools did not include as many veiled Muslim women reported experiencing more microaggressions and discomfort. Those participants who were more socially and politically involved stated they experienced verbal abuse and aggression, but they said the aggression was more toward their group and Muslims in general rather than directed at them as a person. The focus of these events and protests mostly surrounded Muslim rights and Palestine. They said there was always tension between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli students. One participant was specifically targeted and accused of anti-Semitism by pro-Israeli students based on learning about her intentions to draft a resolution called Boycott Divestment Sanctions.
Finding 15: Discriminated against by a school faculty member. Six of 11 participants who had gone to school in Southern California said they were discriminated against by a school faculty member on at least one occasion throughout their K-12 and/or college educations. The other participant, who obtained her Master’s degree in Colorado, also experienced a couple of ignorant and discriminatory encounters with instructors. Four subjects were mistreated by a school faculty member (e.g., teacher, coach, cafeteria personnel) at least once prior to graduating from high school whereas two participants thought their teachers and school administrations were very supportive and welcoming. Other participants did not mention anything positive or negative about their school staff. Moreover, six participants were discriminated against by a faculty member during college and higher educations. The participants were visibly mistreated or treated differently; were told offensive comments about Islam, Muslims, or the hijab; and were dismissed unfairly from educational or academic programs because of their faith, the hijab, their national origin, and political views. Fearing participating in this study might impact her professional life, one subject specifically asked the researcher not to include her experiences of discrimination at the university.

Human rights organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center believe many teachers and school staff are biased toward certain groups and use that against their students (Collins, 2018). What they find even more concerning and alarming is that many incidents go unreported (Collins, 2018). Only a small number of discriminatory incidents are reported each year, and many of those are not addressed appropriately (Collins, 2018). This was also the case in this study. Only, some of the negative incidents during K-12 were reported by parents to administrations while other
discriminatory incidents went unreported. Almost none of the college-level
discrimination incidents were reported to the respective officials. Only one participant
tried to take action by contacting the respective deans, but nothing was done as a result.
She believed that was because many of the professors in that department shared similar
views. She also tried seeking help from CAIR, a well-known Muslim rights advocacy
group in America, but since her reports were anonymous, they did not go anywhere
either. The SPLC report also found many school faculty members are engaged in online
abusive and Islamophobic behavior (Collins, 2018). However, the participants in this
study were not aware of such behavior and did not report anything in this regard.

**Second Subquestion**

What social or public challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females
who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) experience?

**Finding 16: Not drinking alcohol affects social life outside of the Muslim community.** Half of the participants mentioned not drinking alcohol has affected their
social life outside of the Muslim community. They said the boundaries they set for
themselves as veiled Muslim women separated their college experiences from
nonconservative, nonpracticing Muslims, and non-Muslims because they were either not
invited or were invited far less frequently to their friends’ and classmates’ college parties.
Even when they were invited, they mostly could not participate because the venues
involved alcohol, dancing, clubbing or activities they deemed inappropriate for a veiled
Muslim woman to attend. Some said even though they could not go to such gatherings
because they would not feel comfortable being around drunk people and that type of
environment, they still wished their friends and classmates were more inclusive and
would invite them, so that they could also feel they were part of that group. One participant said though she is now glad that she was not invited to such parties, when she was going to college, she really felt “isolated,” and she really wanted to feel she “belonged” and “included.”

Some participants mentioned they also faced the same issues at work and in the professional environment because American culture particularly embraces alcohol consumption. One participant felt she was not able to bond with her colleagues at work as they have bonded with each other because they usually go for drinks together, but she does not. She always feels an “awkward tension.” Though one participant was able to maintain her relationship with her non-Muslim friends in college and did not see alcohol preventing her from forming friendships outside of the Muslim community, the other participants found that to be very challenging.

A few participants also pointed out that it is not solely drinking alcohol that prevents them from attending such social engagements, but it is also the level of alcohol consumption that makes the environment uncomfortable. They believe many Americans are heavy drinkers, and that affects their decisions about attending social gatherings. Some participants believed it is their hijab that particularly sets many boundaries for them because they feel the need to respect the hijab and its image. In addition, they believe they become visibly Muslim by wearing the hijab, and therefore, they will be more closely scrutinized for their behaviors by both Muslims and non-Muslims. They simply do not feel comfortable engaging in certain activities while wearing the hijab. Most subjects believed by being a practicing Muslim, regardless of whether they wore the
hijab, they have clear limits and boundaries. However, they thought their experiences would have been different if they were not wearing the hijab.

**Finding 17: Random selections and high anxiety at airports; Harassment while commuting and in the public sphere.** Airports and air travel were one of the most prominent, if not the most, of challenges and stressful parts of the public side of the participants’ lives. All subjects said they were regularly chosen for random selections at airports and traveling, particularly by air, which gave them great anxiety. One participant shared she does not wear her scarf at airports or on airplanes and intentionally does not speak Arabic, so she does not experience what many other Arabs and Muslims have gone through. She said she feels “oppressed,” and it makes her “really sad” when she takes off her hijab at airports, but she believed that it is necessary to keep her and her family safe. Another participant mentioned she chooses to speak only English on airplanes, so people know she is just like them; she was upset that she had to take extra measures to make others feel more comfortable. Two participants who started wearing their hijab as either an adult or at an older age said their experiences of traveling were very different before and after wearing the hijab. One said she was never randomly selected prior to wearing her hijab, and she was the only person in her family to be randomly selected for further search while traveling recently. She was the only person who was wearing the hijab in her family. However, a few participants said, despite the existing challenges and discriminations, in the last couple of years, they have experienced fewer random selections than before, and they have been treated with more respect by some TSA agents and at certain airports.
There were reports of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim incidents at airports as well as racial and religious profiling (Senzai, 2004). For the past few years, there has been a steady increase in the number of biased incidents instigated by government agencies in the U.S., from 314 in 2015 to 919 in 2017 (CAIR, 2018a). Customs and Border Protection was the agency with the highest number of reported incidents (348) for discrimination against Muslims, and TSA was fourth highest (72 incidents; CAIR, 2018a). Some participants referred to the phrase “traveling while Muslim,” which is known among many Middle Easterners and Muslims who live in the West. Though they said they have not experienced anything specific from other passengers, they are always anxious about their flight experience. A couple of participants said they could see the fear and anxiety in people’s faces as they walked onto the plane and looked for their seat. There were an increased number of harassment cases by passengers and discrimination by airlines and their staff members against Arab and Muslim passengers in the last couple of years (Araiza, 2015; Barnett, 2011; CAIR, 2015; Harvard, 2016; Kennedy, 2016; Lee, 2017; Luongo, 2016; Rana, 2015; Stack, 2016b; Vissar, 2015).

However, some participants were also harassed while driving. Offensive remarks and gestures were the most common type of harassment, but there were also a few instances of aggressive driving with the intention of hurting the participant and throwing objects such as a bottle of beer at the vehicle. None of these incidents were reported to the police. In 2017, 6% of reported anti-Muslim bias incidents happened during a commute and on the roads and sidewalks (CAIR, 2018a). In En-Nabut (2007), an Arab-American hijabi female revealed she had her vehicle’s windows completely tinted because she was being harassed while driving.
Furthermore, participants also experienced varying degrees of microaggression and hostility while shopping, dining, and working out at the gym. One participant and her friends were bombarded with offensive and Islamophobic remarks when a hostile woman yelled and screamed at them in a shopping center parking lot. Another participant was also followed to her car by another shopper who had earlier cut her off at the register. She approached her aggressively and asked the participant if she could understand English because she was trying to ignore her and move away from her.

Public harassment and discrimination against veiled Muslim women in America are not uncommon. For instance, veiled Muslim women have been denied services (ACLU, 2005, 2008) and discriminated against or harassed at restaurants by the staff (Branson-Potts, 2018; Hooper, 2018b) or other dinners (Briscoe et al., 2017).

**Other Findings**

**Finding 18: Nothing major to be reported and problems with reporting discrimination.** Almost all participants, including those who have reported incidents to authorities, stated they have been fortunate not to experience physical assaults or being denied services. They thought they did not need to report an incident or call for help if they were not physically attacked or in fear for their lives. However, there were couple of incidents that were reportable, but the involved participants thought otherwise and chose not to report them. Looking back, they have some regrets. For instance, in one incident, the participant’s scarf was almost pulled off her head in an attack while she was returning home from school. In another incident, the participant was driving with friends when someone in another car threw a bottle of beer at them, which resulted in broken glasses and splashed beer all over the passengers. They were lucky and were not severely
injured by the bottle. Half the participants had reported at least one bias-based incident to someone during their lives (i.e., in school, at work, in public), but there were other instances of hate and discrimination that were not reported.

A few factors mentioned that led participants to decline following up on an incident or reporting it to authorities. Several participants said when a discriminatory incident happened to them, they were younger and had a mind-set that they did not care enough to spend time pursuing prosecution. Another issue was lack of knowledge and confidence. Because they were younger, they did not know what they could do or what their legal rights were, and if they had some knowledge, they did not have enough confidence to follow up. Yet another factor was fear of backlash. A few participants mentioned a fear of backlash and consequences made them not report the discrimination. They were afraid if they spoke up, they would be seen as even more different, lose their job and source of income, lose their friends and colleagues, or make the issue worse, especially if the discriminator were a school staff member or a teacher or professor. Finally, a couple of participants mentioned they did not fully trust law enforcement because they thought law enforcement would be more likely to be racist and not believe their side of the story.

These are some of the reasons many civil rights activists fear may cause many of the hate and discriminatory incidents to go unreported (Singh & Singh, 2012). Every year, many bias-based incidents go unreported and underreported because of different factors such as failure to identify hate crimes and fear of law enforcement, immigration status, et cetera (Singh & Singh, 2012). Any time there is a rise in hate crime against minority groups, civil rights activists become even more alarmed because they know
there are many other incidents that never get reported by victims. Even when these incidents are reported, they might be misidentified and miscategorized by the authorities (Singh & Singh, 2012).

**Unexpected Findings**

Throughout the data collection and data analysis process, four themes emerged as a surprise to the researcher. As a Middle Eastern, Muslim, hijabi woman, the researcher was familiar with these concepts but perhaps in a different setting or as a passing thought. These findings were an unexpected result of this study. Each finding is briefly discussed.

**Do Not Want to Be Tokenized**

Though the hijab is often viewed as a reason for discrimination against Muslim women in the Western world, and all participants shared this concern, three participants were also concerned with being tokenized because of it. While they did not want to lose out on a position in academia or workplace simply because they are Muslim and wear a head covering, they did not want to acquire a position simply because they wear the hijab either. There were times these participants were worried they were being tokenized by their schools, and that their accomplishments were not a result of their abilities but rather a result of their appearance. They said they want to be seen and evaluated based on their intellect, skills set, and what they can offer as an individual rather than being dismissed or accepted simply because of a piece of cloth on their head. They were worried some companies and organizations might accept or hire them so they can showcase their diversity by having a visibly Muslim woman in their program or company. However, that undermines their sense of worth as an individual and accomplished person. Moreover, they were concerned that if tokenization was being the sole purpose of their
hiring and acceptance, would they have the same opportunities as others to advance or if the company or organization wants them as a showcase employee for public relations, hence preventing them from promotion to higher levels. Al-Khatahtbeh (2016) warned about the negative effects of tokenization on creativity and competition in an article titled, “The Negative Effects of Tokenization on Creativity and Competition.” She expanded on the idea of tokenization and its positive and negative effects in her book titled, *Muslim Girl: A Coming of Age.*

**Discrimination Within the Muslim Community**

Eight of 12 participants were bothered by a negative experience or issue within their community. Some of these participants were even more bothered by their own community than they were by the non-Muslim community. That was because they expected more from those who practice Islam, and because they expected their community to be a source of support, inclusivity, and positivity since the Muslim community already is scrutinized by others.

As veiled Muslim women, they thought they experienced negativity in a complex and confusing manner since both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities judged them on their personal beliefs and choices as well as their appearances. They were saddened that not only are they being watched constantly and judged by the non-Muslim community, but also by their own community when they need it to be a source of support and empowerment. Because Islam and the Muslim communities are already targeted, demonized, and dehumanized by the West, they were frustrated that they are not able to criticize their own community as they would potentially suffer negative consequences from both parties. They believed many in the Muslim community think community
members should not publicly criticize their community because it would be taken out of the context and would be used against them. They all acknowledged this point as well and thought if they criticized the Muslim community in the smallest way, anti-Muslim groups and politicians would twist the information and use it to fan the flames of Islamophobia. Nevertheless, they believed if they do not talk about the issues within their community, they would never be able to address them appropriately. They believed the Muslim community struggles with some issues just like any other community, and that those issues should be addressed only by the people of that community.

They thought some in the Muslim community take it upon themselves to speak or act on behalf of other Muslims when they do not have a complete and correct understating of Islam. They also believed many confuse culture with religion, which leads to having inaccurate judgments and perceptions about others. They complained Muslim women are criticized, accepted, or rejected for wearing and not wearing the hijab in the Muslim community. Last, one participant thought there were issues with racism and feelings of superiority in the Muslim community especially among some Arab Muslims toward Muslims of other ethnicities. They emphasized there needs to be unity among all Muslims despite their gender, appearance, ethnicity, and the way they choose to practice their faith particularly at a time when Islamophobia is on the rise. They thought it was also equally important to raise issues seen within the community, so that they could be addressed properly before they cause a schism within the community or within the faith.
More Challenging to Date and Find a Suitable Life Partner When Wearing a Hijab

Five of 11 single participants discussed the challenges of dating and finding the right person as a life partner as a social challenge. Believing this is an important issue, one participant criticized the researcher and suggested there should have been a separate interview question regarding this. In line with criticism of the Muslim community, some participants felt hurt that many men within their own faith and community view them only through their hijab just as non-Muslims do. Some Muslim men told them that they liked them as people, but they did not wish to marry a woman with the hijab. Though they believe hijab is a religious mandate, they thought it is ultimately a choice, and they chose to wear it proudly, so they do not want anyone to come between their relationship with the hijab and God. They do not want anyone telling them to wear it or not wear it. They also do not like Muslim men who want to marry only hijabi women. However, they were hurt that a sensitive and emotional subject such as finding their life partner impacted their psyche, confidence, and relationship with the hijab. Some mentioned there are non-Muslim men who are intrigued by their hijab and show interest in them, but it is difficult to explain to them about dating and limitations in Islam. Additionally, there are usually clashing lifestyles and cultures. Thus, they prefer to marry within their own community, but so far, it has been difficult for them.

Positive Outcomes From the New Climate and Trump’s Presidency

Four of 10 participants who spoke about the backlash in the aftermath of terrorist attacks and negative political climate mentioned a positive outcome has also emerged from those circumstances. They said more people have become interested in learning about Muslims and Islam, and some constructive conversations have taken place, many
times with random strangers in public. Some received warm words of support and encouragement in standing up for their rights and to be proud of who they are, also by strangers in public; they wanted to make sure they know not every American feels negatively about them, and that they are welcome and supported. One also said people of many different groups are united in helping and supporting each other against bigotry and discrimination.

**Conclusions**

According to Roberts (2010), a research study’s conclusion section is where the researcher, “analyze[s], synthesize[s], and evaluate[s]” (p. 180) all the data and information gathered throughout this process to draw conclusions. The conclusions are made based on evidence and findings, so they are not merely personal opinions (Roberts, 2010). The following conclusions were drawn based on the literature review, findings of this study through the data collection, and the researcher’s field notes and observations.

**Central Research Question**

What are the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18–40 years old)?

One of the most notable strengths of Southern California is its diversity and multiculturalism. It is also home to many Arabs, Middle Easterners, and Muslims from around the world. Moreover, California has been historically a Democratic state, which, based on research (Mogahed, 2018) and the participants’ beliefs, generally provides more support and tolerance to Muslims and minorities. These factors helped create a generally safe and receptive space for the Muslim community, particularly the hijabi Muslim women. However, while California as a whole is a very diverse and a relatively tolerant
state, there are also cities and regions within Southern California that are more conservative and are not as diverse. Areas with minimal diversity do not provide that sense of comfort, inclusivity, and tolerance to hijab-wearing Muslim women as other more diverse and culturally receptive communities and regions do. When in such areas, the participants tended to be more vigilant about their surroundings and did not feel as safe or welcomed. However, that is not to say discrimination and Islamophobia are missing in those who have more Democratic views. In fact, many studies and surveys revealed that a large number of Democrats share similar views as Republicans do toward Islam and the Muslim community though it is more prevalent among the Republicans (Cox & Jones, 2015; Lipka; 2015; Mogahed, 2018; A. Moore, 2010). For instance, just as with many Republicans, many Democrats also believe Muslims “have outdated views of women” (Mogahed, 2018, para. 4).

America has institutionalized racism against minorities and Muslims in particular (E. W. Said, 1977). Islamophobia is on the rise (Brumfield, 2015; Curwen & Shyong, 2015; Frumin, 2015; Neiwert, 2015; Reuters, 2018), and Southern California is not immune to that either (Farivar, 2017; Ochieng, 2017; Suter, 2015). This study’s participants and their families have directly experienced the effects and backlash after September 11, San Bernardino shootings, the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump’s presidency, and the Muslim ban. The media (S. Ahmed & Matthes, 2016; Artz & Pollock, 1995; Hussain, 2010; Kamalipour, 2000; Kanji, 2018; McClaure, 1975; McDavid, 1983; Ridouani, 2011; Samo, 1975; Semaan, 2014; Shaheen, 2003; Stockton, 1994; Suleiman, 1975; Terry, 1975; Thussu, 1997) and politicians’ xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric (Aziz, 2012; Bittermann et al., 2016; Breeden & Blaise, 2016:
Perry, 2013), policies (Daraiseh, 2012; Human Rights First, 2008; A. Moore, 2010; Perry, 2015), and intentional misinformation ignite fear, division, and a toxic environment for all groups of people, particularly marginalized communities such as the Muslim community. The negative portrayal of the Arabs, Middle Easterners, and Muslims by the Western and American media, literature and education, and national and international policies for decades are the main reasons for marginalization of these communities and the existing and rising anti-Arab and anti-Islam rhetoric. Arabs, Middle Easterners, and Muslims have been demonized and dehumanized for decades, and they and anyone who is perceived to be from these groups suffers daily as a result of it, whether they live in a Western country or in their home country.

Consequently, a combination of lack of true exposure and proper education along with a great deal of misinformation cause many to fear and even despise the Muslim community, and for some to act upon their ill thoughts and feelings. That is partly why, despite the cultural diversity in Southern California, microaggression toward hijabi Muslim women is so prevalent, and that is also why all participants still felt they are seen as the other, oppressed, and inferior on a daily basis. Though most of them were born and raised in America and Southern California, they are viewed and made to feel foreign. While there are groups of people who respect them and view them as individuals, many others view them with suspicion and do not think they should live in the U.S. and be part of American society. They judge them on their appearance because of their headscarves, and they judge their religion based on false information and stereotypes. They have a preconceived image of their life stories and who they may be. If one does wrong, the whole community and religion are responsible and undermined.
Therefore, there is a great deal of pressure on veiled Muslim women from inside and outside of their communities, which is why these women are also continuously conscious of their behavior and always attempt to hold themselves to the highest standards while being good representatives for Islam. There is an expectation of being a perfect Muslim and citizen from within created by scrutiny from the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. These daily pressures and microaggressions slowly but surely affect the lives of these young women. Most of them are numb to a certain level of microaggression because it has been part of their daily life for so long. Thus, as part of their survival mechanism, they adopted a higher degree of alertness about their surroundings as well as anticipating mistreatment and microaggression as part of their daily lives. While microaggression is the most common way people display their dislike toward hijabi women in Southern California, others take it further by discriminating and displaying overt Islamophobic behavior. Such negative treatment of hijabi Muslim women gradually wears them out. This is not just about the hijabi women’s psyche and human rights, but also about society’s overall health and prosperity, as Williams (1987) and Wing (2000) explained it. Though under much pressure, as Inayat (2007) suggested, many Muslims also shy away from seeking help from mental health professionals for a variety of reasons such as language and cultural barriers as well as fear of judgment, discrimination, and mistreatment.

**First Subquestion**

What work or education challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) experience?
Based on the available literature (Ali et al., 2015; ACLU, 2008; Aziz, 2012; CAIR, 2017a, 2018a; Easton, 2016) and this study’s data analysis, it is evident veiled Muslim women are at a clear disadvantage regarding career opportunities. Being a woman, a minority, a Muslim, and a hijabi affect their career paths and professional lives. It is more difficult for them to get hired, and even after being hired, they might not have the same opportunities to be promoted. They are also more likely to be harassed and discriminated against by their colleagues, supervisors, and other stakeholders such as the customers, clients, and patients. Furthermore, their competency is often undermined as they are underestimated and viewed as oppressed.

There is also a general concern about having fair job opportunities and future professional lives as hijabi women. As was also echoed by the participants, veiled Muslim women have to work harder and exhibit more qualifications to be considered for a position compared to non-Muslim and non-hijabi women vying for the same position. There is a common fear their hijab and identity would be the determining factors in their selection instead of their characters, intellects, and skills sets. In addition, there is concern about tokenization. Rejection based on discrimination and acceptance based on tokenization are equally dangerous and devastating to both to the individual and society (Al-Khatahtbeh, 2016). Veiled Muslim women need to be valued for who they are and for their individual merits and skills and to be fairly evaluated among their peers.

However, despite these concerns, the accomplishments of some hijabi Muslim women are a source of empowerment and inspiration for other hijabi women, most notably is Ilhan Omar’s 2018 election as a congressional representative. When there are powerful and successful veiled women in different fields such as politics, sports, and
fashion, it is easier for other women who identify with those individuals to visualize themselves as successful professionals who can do anything. Thus, the accomplishments of one hijabi woman significantly impacts other women who identify with her.

What is important is not so much that a hijabi woman broke the stereotype, as American and Western media refer to it when reporting about a successful veiled woman, but rather that she took back what was taken away for many years as a result of institutionalized prejudice and anti-Muslim, anti-hijabi policies and practices. For example, Ibtihaj Muhammad, a hijabi Muslim American fencer medalist, joked that she started fencing because the outfit was modest (Deb, 2018). She also talked about the resistance and microaggressions she received throughout her journey to become a professional athlete and even received death threats for representing America as a Black, veiled Muslim woman (Deb, 2018). This is the struggle of veiled Muslim women. As they shared in this study, it is not the hijab that oppresses them, but the manner in which they are being treated by society. When a group of minorities are not represented in a field, for example tennis in sports, it is tennis and the policies and practices surrounding it that should be questioned and analyzed, not the minority group. The question should be: What is it about the tennis that is pushing hijabi Muslim women away? Evidently, based on their personal and educational accomplishments, all the young women interviewed for this study were talented, intelligent, and successful. However, their strengths would not be known and their talents would not have flourished if they were not given the equal opportunities they deserved, as was the case for several who were denied opportunities because of their religious and political views.
Thankfully, as discussed in the literature review, social media have given these women a platform to voice their thoughts and concerns, and many companies have also come to the realization that they have missed out on profiting from a very large group of consumers. While the main or only purpose of such companies might be financial, such as producing modest sportswear, a new horizon of opportunities has become available to hijabi women. Just as the participants mentioned, veiled Muslim women are resilient, confident, and strong individuals; it takes a certain level of confidence and strength to wear a hijab in a Western country such as the U.S. where they know they are under constant scrutiny. They are not oppressed if they are not seen in some fields; neither are they breaking stereotypes when they are seen; they are just not given a fair opportunity to accomplish their dreams and utilize their talents.

As mentioned, the struggles of veiled Muslim women in America starts very early: while they are still going to school. Based on some reports (Bharath, 2017a) and this study’s data, bullying by peers and discrimination by school staff largely takes place when students with the hijab attend K-12 education. However, this study revealed those who attended more diverse schools were less likely to be bullied or face discrimination. In addition, when the teachers and the school staff were more educated about Islam and more inclusive, the students experienced less bullying and harassment, and when they did, their teachers were more supportive of them. Not understanding the unique needs of a marginalized group such as young hijabi students could hurt them as much as intentional discrimination. For instance, a few teachers asked a couple of participants to speak about Islam in front of the class when the participants were still very young and did not have a good understating of Islam or much broader questions and more
comprehensive subjects such as terrorism. Regardless of their intentions, what they did was wrong and unfair, as participants explained, and it only singled them out even further. Teachers should be more sensitive and considerate when dealing with veiled Muslim students who are already marginalized and ensure a safe environment for students of all colors and faiths. Similar to the results of this study, studies such as Daraiseh (2012) emphasize the importance of creating a safe and welcoming environment for Arab and Muslim students and preventing dissemination of false, distorted, and negative information regarding Islam in the educational context and environment. Such toxic environments and teachings only further contribute to confusion and stereotyping among non-Muslim students and thus causes Arab and Muslim students to often experience feelings of shame, low self-esteem, and a burden of educating others about their cultural and religious background which ultimately affects students’ academic achievements.

However, the parents’ role cannot be ignored in creating a safe space for their children. Though only one participant had this experience, it is worth pointing that her mother went to her class each year to explain to her classmates why she covered her hair, fasted, prayed, or was different in some manner. “A safe environment” was created for the students to ask questions and learn more about the participant instead of going with wrong assumptions. This participant was the only Muslim girl who wore the hijab at her school, but unlike the experiences of other participants, she enjoyed being the only hijabi girl in her school. She thought it made her “popular,” and everyone knew her, but in a different context. She had one of the most positive experiences in school compared to other participants who were in a similar situation, and noted through her and her mother’s
support, the majority of the school learned about Islam. It is important to note that this is a phenomenon of multidimensions, which obviously requires a multidimensional analysis, and that is out of the scope of this current study. However, Yull, Wilson, Murray, and Parham (2018) suggested when marginalized parents of color are more engaged in their children’s schools, there is a higher level of engagement between the parents and the White teachers. That leads to less “parental isolation” (Yull et al., 2018, p. 319) and “fosters a collective understanding of shared experiences of injustice, and positions parents of color as empowered advocates who work collaboratively with White teachers to promote educational equity for children of color” (p. 319).

Unlike their K-12 schooling, the experiences of participants in regard to other pupils were generally positive during college and higher education. They also felt more comfortable and less visible because there was a larger and a more diverse pool of students including more Muslims and veiled students. One participant whose college was not as diverse still felt very visible and isolated. Considering these factors, it is concluded diversity in schools and colleges helps with creating a more tolerant and positive environment for veiled Muslim women.

However, this study disclosed that while the bullying and discrimination from pupils were reduced at the college level, there was more discrimination from professors and school faculty. More than half the participants had a negative biased-based interaction or discriminatory experience involving a faculty member while attending college and higher education. The data prove many teachers and school faculty members harbor xenophobic, Islamophobic, and racist beliefs, and they act on their personal beliefs while interacting with students (Collins, 2018). In some instances, the participants
missed opportunities because the person had Islamophobic or pro-Israel ideologies. Besides being discriminated against as an individual because of their religion, ethnicity, and political views, there were cases of misinformation and dissemination of Islamophobic ideas in the context of education. Students in higher education settings and a human resources class where they were taught about diversity and inclusion were given misinformation. This is an important point because it shows how much power professors and faculty members have not only on the future of students and hijabi women, but also that they can easily disseminate false and discriminatory information to a new generation in an educational setting based on their own fears and shortcomings. Moreover, their unfair treatment and rejections or, at times, ignorant and discriminatory comments directed toward the participants, their religion, and culture had a negative impact on their psyche, performance, and achievement.

Many incidents of bullying, harassment, and discrimination at different educational environment levels (i.e., K-12 or higher education), and whether perpetrated by other students or faculty, went unreported. In many cases, if reported, they were not adequately addressed. Many times, the students were desperate because they thought they could not prove the discrimination. For instance, on one occasion, the student was told by her Israeli professor that she could not get into a writing program because he had lost her portfolio, which included pieces about Palestine. She had submitted her portfolio with the other candidates, all of whom were all accepted. Though absolutely devastated, she could not prove her portfolio was not lost.

Most times, they were not given a reason for being rejected whether it was in an educational setting or work and professional setting. Thus, they were unsure whether
they were discriminated against. One participant uncovered the reason she was rejected multiple times for a program at her college, despite her remarkable performance and scores, was that the main judge was anti-Muslim. She learned that a few years after graduation. In another instance, a participant was pulled off a project at work, but this time her employer told her it was because of her scarf even though it was all denied afterward. After such findings, the participants started to question all other times they were rejected and whether they were, in part, a result of their identity. Almost all participants said when they were rejected for a position, discrimination is not the first reason they consider, though it is a lingering concern in their back of their minds. Unless their hijab and religion were brought up during the interview, or they were visibly treated differently, the first reaction for most participants to a rejection was that there must have been another candidate with more qualifications. While this shows their positive attitude toward life and seeing good in other people, when considering these factors, it is concluded there are more incidents of discrimination, but in many cases, they are either unknown to the victim or difficult to prove. Even when they are known to the victim, and there is evidence to prove the wrongdoings, they still go unreported for the most part because of a lack of encouragement, fear of backlash, and lack of knowledge about their rights as well as available options and resources.

**Second Subquestion**

What social or public challenges do Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the hijab (18–40 years old) experience?

This study revealed, having to deal with microaggressions on a daily basis is one of the greatest hurdles for veiled Muslim women in Southern California. There are still
many people who do not know anything about Islam other than what they have heard in the media or have never personally known a Muslim even though Southern California is a very diverse region. California is home to the largest population of American Arabs (Arab American Institute, n.d.) and one of the largest populations of American Muslims (Pew Research, 2017). The fear of others stems from not knowing the other group or having false assumptions about them (Sayyid, 2014; University of California, Berkeley, n.d.). A participant who started wearing her hijab in her early 20s said she does not have any problems with her non-Muslim friends that she knew prior to wearing her hijab because they know she is the same person and not any different from them. She has struggled to connect with new non-Muslim schoolmates after wearing the hijab because she is viewed as different. In addition, because hijabi women are viewed as different, many people do not know how to interact with them even if they do not have negative assumptions about them.

Furthermore, being practicing and visibly Muslim women impacts their social circle and conservative lifestyle. Not drinking alcohol was the most cited reason for social isolation and preferring to have a larger circle of Muslim acquaintances. Many participants felt isolated during their college years because they either were not invited to many social gatherings by their classmates, or if they were invited, they could not have attended because of limitations they designated for themselves as hijabi Muslim women. Some believed not being able to drink and engage in certain social functions created barriers between them and their non-Muslim or nonpracticing friends, classmates, and colleagues while also potentially reducing their professional opportunities. This
demonstrates that veiled Muslim women are uniquely isolated from certain aspects of American society.

This issue has been echoed in other studies as well. Though studies confirm hijab offers a sense of empowerment and liberation (Hannan, 2011; Jailani, 2016; Ruby, 2006; Zempi, 2014), as this study found, it is important to note that with hijab also comes feelings of restriction, which works as a double-edged sword to some (Litchmore & Safdar, 2016). Litchmore and Safdar (2016) discovered while hijab offers feelings of liberation and protection, it might also become a barrier to some in certain situations. For instance, a participant in their study expressed her gratitude for how hijab protects her from “sinning” (Litchmore & Safdar, 2016, p. 205) and being in Islamicly unfavorable places such as a club, but another participant felt this component of hijab meant she is left out of some social activities with her non-Muslim friends. While the first participant was grateful for the hijab’s benefits, she complained about social restrictions that she encountered such as holding back her opinions on certain subject matters because of a fear of being judged unfairly based on her religious beliefs and attire (Litchmore & Safdar, 2016). These findings parallel to this study’s findings, and it shows that although some feelings such as being restricted from clubbing might be completely personal, many other restrictive feelings are bound to society and policies that need to be changed. For instance, Muslims are much more easily targeted under the Patriot Act and similar policies for expressing their political views than people of other religions.

However, there is further isolation even within the Muslim community because its members generally have strong perceptions of how Muslim women should dress and behave. Some American Muslims are shying away from being visibly Muslim and are
actively trying to hide their Muslim identity. This group of Muslims rejects and criticizes veiled Muslim women for practicing their hijab while more conservative and religious community members might criticize veiled Muslim women for not adequately practicing their hijab. Such mixed interactions, constant judgment, and criticism from both non-Muslim and Muslims make veiled Muslim women feel as if they are not qualified to be part of these communities. Such feelings of isolation and the relentless microaggressions, discrimination, and pressure are exhausting and mentally demanding for these women.

Issues within the Muslim community and differences in values and lifestyles also impact the life of Muslim women in the world of dating and finding potential spouses. Even the intervention of modern technology such as Internet resources that offer assistance in finding a suitable match for Muslims have not been able to help this study’s participants because there is a scarcity of appropriate members in close geographic proximity. Despite the Western perception that Muslim women wear the headscarf because their male counterparts demand it, many participants objected their marriage candidates’ requests to remove their hijabs and chose their hijab over them. However, they are hurt when they are told either to wear or not wear their hijab. This further proves a large number of veiled Muslim women in the Western societies wear their hijabs freely and do not allow others to tell them how to practice their religion or cover their bodies.

The data also highlight the existence of racial and religious profiling of veiled Muslim women in public places such as airports. This is an indication of the systematic and institutionalized racism and Islamophobia within the American government and society. All participants were consistently subjected to random selection for further
security checks by airports TSA agents and on many occasions were mistreated or discriminated against. Traveling and going to the airport are challenging and bothersome to the travelers, but flying as a visibly Muslim woman has its own added anxiety and difficulties. In addition, several participants were harassed while driving, shopping, dining, and spending time with their friends, which are an indication of the veiled Muslim women’s constant visibility and vulnerability.

Hijabi Muslim women are also suppressed on a daily basis because of their visibility and the burden of being a role model for Islam and the Muslim community. It is easier for them to be victimized and for them to eschew filing formal or informal complaints or police reports. In addition, their voices and credibility are more likely to be undermined and dismissed as a result of their readily assumed political connections and ideologies. It does not help when mainstream Western feminism is one sided and instead of fighting for Muslim women’s rights dismisses their voices and criticizes their choices.

**Other Findings**

It is much more difficult for younger females to wear a hijab, especially if they are unmarried and have not settled down. They are at the phase where they have a desire to be and feel beautiful and confident about themselves and find the right man who will support them with or without the hijab. It does not help that in Western societies such as America there are particular images for beauty and femininity and that social media espouse unattainable beauty standards. This is particularly difficult when women start wearing the hijab. When they start wearing the hijab as young girls, and because they are inexperienced, they might not know how to transition and commit to being a hijabi while
being themselves and wearing outfits that are comfortable, trendy, represent their character, but still meet Islamic requirements. These factors, along with not being fully able to understand and explain their reasoning behind their actions and choices make it easier for them to be isolated and bullied at school. However, those who start wearing their hijab as young adults also have their own struggles. They might find themselves adjusting and defining their new self and wardrobe, refining beauty standards, feeling beautiful, and rebuilding their confidence. They are also more conscious of their decisions, their options, and the potential consequences.

**Implications for Action**

The following implications for action are recommended based on the literature review, this study’s findings, as well as the participants’ suggestions. Education is key in this section. All suggested cultural competency training programs must be relevant, interactive, and periodic. Respective agencies must follow up with enforcement of current legislation that promotes equal opportunity employment and education.

**Education System**

Elementary and high schools as well as colleges need to include cultural sensitivity and Islamic studies in their curricula, so that people learn to be open-minded and tolerant to those who seem to be different before entering society as adults. Correct information needs to be provided to students early to combat false information disseminated by the media and politicians. This also promotes critical thinking in young minds, so it would be more difficult for them to be deceived by misinformation. There are many flaws in the current American education system in which Islamophobia and racism are institutionalized. Students are not taught about real-life problems and
contemporary societal issues, and they lack the desire to learn and research more on their own. These issues are larger than just those concerning Muslim students and the Muslim community and need to be carefully addressed in a timely manner.

Furthermore, teachers and school faculty at all levels of education need to have consistent cultural sensitivity training and learn about the special needs and concerns of students and their parents. The U.S. Secretary of Education should ensure such policies and procedures are constructed and implemented within the American educational system. Meanwhile, parents should become more involved in their children’s school programs and work with the teachers and school faculty to ensure a safe environment for all students. Including other students in religious and cultural celebrations ignites interest and compassion. In addition, Muslim rights activist groups such as CAIR and local Islamic centers should approach schools to offer support and training if and when needed.

Media

Media are a powerful source of disseminating not only truthful but also false or misleading information (McNelly & Izcaray, 1986), and so they can potentially influence any society’s construct of knowledge and perception of reality (Poole, 2002). Akbarzadeh and Smith (2005) found that many news anchors and editors covering Muslims were not knowledgeable about Islam and Muslims and too often confused some Muslim countries’ traditions and cultures with Islamic principles. Thus, not only must the media disseminate unbiased reporting and adhere to good principles of journalism, which is based on fact finding and fact reporting, they should know the basics about Islam and the Muslim world and receive cultural sensitivity training.
Though this is extremely challenging, it is necessary to take measures to ensure that at least the American media are moving in the correct direction. The American Muslim community along with its Muslim and non-Muslim human activists and legal counsels should work together to petition the government for regulatory measures regarding fact-based reporting. They should also advocate for measures that ensure people in the media and entertainment industry go through training and are held accountable for gross negligence and repeated offenses. Muslim activist organizations should organize seminars, exclusive to the media and the entertainment industry, covering facts and figures about Islam and Muslims as well as journalistic ethical challenges in the context of current sociopolitical developments. Furthermore, extra effort should be made in creating discussions regarding misinformation, stereotypes, and commitment to generating materials based on credible and unbiased sources despite existing challenges in order to find common grounds. According to Abukashawa (2009) and Akbarzadeh and Smith (2005), the Western media’s construct of knowledge about the Muslim world is based on Orientalism and the alienation of other cultures and civilizations other than the West. That is why educating these key players in the media and entertainment industry could potentially help in combating such mind-sets and stereotypes while creating a foundation for true knowledge about Muslims and Islam.

The Muslim community and human activist groups should also take a strong stance against Hollywood and its tradition of demonizing and dehumanizing Muslims and Middle Easterners. Therefore, each time, there should be a strong condemnation of those actions as well as demanding systematic change within this industry by employing different means such as social media campaigns, boycotts, and legal measures. When
news anchors and key media players are openly racist, xenophobic, and Islamophobic, they need to be removed from their positions not only through public pressure but, more important, through legal venues. Legislators have to make sure there is a clear line between freedom of speech and hate speech or intentional misinformation.

**Health Care and Mental Care**

Health care and mental care professionals must be educated about Islamic culture and patients’ needs through cultural sensitivity training programs. The burden of educating health care professionals about religious and cultural values and practices should not lay with the patient but on health care and mental care professionals. Hiring and including competent health and mental care professionals who share similar cultural and religious backgrounds in regions that have higher population of Muslims could be very beneficial to both the patients and the care providers. However, Muslim care givers must be ethically and culturally well trained, so that their personal cultural and religious beliefs do not interfere with their treatment. All patients are entitled to fair and professional treatment. A standardized program of training and certification of health care and mental care providers would meet this requirement. For example, a university or professional society-based continuing medical education program could offer such training and certification. Mosques and Islamic organizations should provide a current and updated list of health care and mental care professionals who obtain and maintain such certifications and training. In addition, professional health care and mental care training programs, including those of academic setting, should be more welcoming to hijabi women for seeking admission and enrollment.


**Law Enforcement**

Aforementioned, one of the most prominent issues when addressing hate crimes and bias based incidents is the lack of accurate data on such incidents which can be caused from a variety of reasons such as none reporting, underreporting, and improper data collection. The Department of Justice must change its voluntary data sharing position and mandate all law enforcement agencies to properly collect and report hate crimes data. A uniform description and categorization of hate crimes as well as data collection processes and reporting are also necessary to standardize and validated data. In addition, legislators and politicians should play their role to ensure the federal government is provided a more accurate data and realistic picture of the bias and hate crime epidemic so that the nessessary legislations, policies, and budget could be allocated to properly address this nationwide issue. Taking hate and bias biased incidents seriously in all level of the society, in public and in government, and correctly identifying its sources needs a cultural change that requires time and a multidimensional and multicomponent approach.

Local law enforcement agencies need to be more active in reaching out to the Muslim community to build rapport through different community engagements, so that people feel safe reaching out to them when they are in need. However, they need to be very cautious in their approach, and their only goal must be building a bridge and breaking the barriers with their Muslim neighbors and not to use that as means of surveillance and discrimination. Most police and sherriff’s departments have some type of community engagement units that seek better relationships with the public while also share safety tips and relavant legal rights, create alliance, and learn about the issues and
concerns of that community. They need to use the same platform for the Muslim community but understand that a marginalized community has its own challenges and building a trusting relationship might be more demanding. Consulting with Muslim community leaders and human activist organizations would be very beneficial, particularly at the beginning.

Law enforcement agencies must work with established Islamic centers and Muslim rights activist groups such as CAIR to train officers in cultural competency before graduating from the law enforcement academy and periodically throughout their careers. They need to work with established Islamic centers because they would have a uniform message compared to a Muslim employee who might not be competent in this matter.

Last, but not least, TSA, other agencies within Homeland Security, and law enforcement agencies should emphasize criminal and behavioral profiling instead of racial and religious profiling. The core value and duty of any type of law enforcement agency in the U.S. is to protect and serve the community regardless of their gender, religion, ethnicity, skin color, sexual orientation, political views, socioeconomic status, etcetera. It is the duty of those in charge of such entities to ensure their employees’ conducts are aligned with their departments’ core values and any discriminatory behavior or policy is detected and addressed appropriately. Cultural sensitivity training programs must be offered periodically.

The Muslim Community and Human Rights Organizations

Muslim rights activist groups such as CAIR, local Islamic centers, schools, and workplaces should educate the Muslim community about its rights, available resources,
and the importance of reporting hate and bias based incidents to the authorities. Such information must be handed to parents, students, and employees and be visibly installed on the walls of schools and workplaces.

The Arab, Middle Easterner, and Muslim communities have to be bolder and louder in vocalizing their concerns with their biased portrayal within the media and American entertainment industry and demand fair and unbiased coverage through different means such as social media campaigns and boycotts. Hollywood movies and American mass media play a key role in creating and disseminating a false and negative image of Arabs and Muslims around the world.

Muslim rights activist groups must also work closely together to create manuals and training and take it upon themselves to reach out to their local law enforcement agencies, health care centers, and schools to advocate for their community members. Just as with the LGBTQ community and other minority groups, the Muslim community should also have allyship training. In an allyship training program, a group of community members and professionals create a program that educates non-Muslim community members such as school staff members, other students, employers, and law enforcement officials how to support Muslim students, classmates, employees, or victims. A small group of Americans might actually be well educated about the Muslim community, its challenges, and proper way of supporting it, but many others may not. There are many who are not necessarily Islamophobic, xenophobic, or have negative intentions but also do not genuinely know how to behave around Muslims or support them if and when issues arise. Such training would provide them with the necessary information and empower them to take action when they need their help.
**Recommendations for Future Research**

There has been a growing body of literature on veiled Muslim women in recent years. However, there is still a lack of research on this population. The following are some recommendations for future research:

1. Replicate this study in larger scales, different regions within the U.S., different age groups, and different ethnic backgrounds such as White, Asian, and Black American Muslims. Remember, follow-up questions are key!

2. Conduct a phenomenological study on discrimination within the Muslim community based on race, gender, level of religiosity, and different types of hijab styles and modest clothing.

3. Conduct a phenomenological study on Muslim women who decided to take off their hijabs and the reasons behind it.

4. Conduct a study on the concept of tokenization, its extent, its positive and negative effects, and how Muslim women (with and without the hijab) view it.

5. Conduct a study on the real impact trending individuals with Internet-based and social media followers have on the Muslim communities, particularly hijab-wearing females and their attitude toward the hijab and modest fashion.

6. Conduct a qualitative and comparative study on the living experiences and perceived challenges of young nuns or orthodox Jewish women compared with young Muslim hijabi women.

7. Conduct a qualitative study on what American Muslim men really think of the hijab and their reasons for supporting or not supporting the hijab.
8. Conduct a study on the real and perceived extent of freedom of speech for Muslims and minorities in America.

9. Conduct a phenomenological study on how the association of Arabs with Islam and Islamophobia affects Arab Christians in the Western societies such as the U.S.

10. Conduct a study on how being mistaken for a Muslim and Islamophobia affect the practicing Sikh community.

11. Conduct more studies exploring the effects of Islamophobia on mental health, particularly on hijab-wearing Muslim women.

12. Conduct a phenomenological study focusing on the challenges and issues veiled Muslim women face related to finding a marriage partner in the West.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

Being an immigrant young hijabi woman in Southern California, this study has been personally affecting me intensely. I have learned so much about my own religion and the history of Muslims in the West as well as colonization and its long, lasting effects on the Muslim, Arab, and Middle Eastern communities and countries. I had the opportunity to meet very brave, intelligent, and successful young hijabi women who inspired me with their positivity and strength. I was in awe with their unconditional support for me and this study. I also learned that I am not alone in experiencing and feeling certain phenomena.

However, many tragic events have also happened throughout this journey; several terrorist attacks took place in Europe, supposedly by Islamist extremists, and then retaliatory terrorist attacks against Muslims in Canada and most recently in New Zealand.
They resulted in a large loss of lives and left behind many with physical, emotional, and mental injuries. The scale of grief after each event has been devastating. The war in Yemen and Syria was ongoing, and there was a humanitarian crisis in Yemen that left thousands of children and innocent people dead. Both my mother country Iran and my home country America are involved in the fight in Yemen against each other.

Donald J. Trump, who ran an anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim campaign, became the president of U.S. and assumed office in January 2017. A couple weeks into his administration, he placed a Muslim ban on seven majority Muslim countries, including Iran. The order sparked large, spontaneous protests all around the country by many who were not Muslims. Since then, the U.S. withdrew from a nuclear deal with Iran and reimposed sanctions, despite its European partners’ insistence on respecting the deal and international reports that Iran was in compliance with the conditions of the agreement. In addition, the U.S. embassy was moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, officially recognizing it as the capital of Israel, despite global condemnations. This move led to violent clashes in Palestine and unprecedented killings of Palestinians in a protest in one day; thousands of people were also wounded because of the use of “live ammunition, tear gas, and firebombs” (Al Jazeera, 2018, para. 20) by Israeli forces. In addition, 2018 was a “a grim year of deadly violence, illegal settlement expansion, and home demolitions” (Al Jazeera, 2018, para. 1) with “at least 289 Palestinians” (para. 2) dead, including 56 children. Against international law, President Trump also recently (March 2019) recognized Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights of Syria, which were seized by Israel by force in the 1967 war.
Meanwhile, there has been an ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and the illegal imprisonment and encampment of more than 1 million Muslim minorities of Uighurs and Kazakh origin in China. However, thus far, the U.S. never intervened in these cases and has barely commented on these issues. There has been an international crisis and geopolitical divisions in the Middle East as a result of an air, land, and sea blockade against Qatar by Saudi Arabia and its allies with President Trump’s support. Jamal Khashoggi, a U.S. resident and Saudi Arabian dissident and columnist for The Washington Post, was brutally murdered and dismembered in the Turkish embassy by the Saudi security forces. While there have been international condemnations and an outcry for answers from Saudi officials and the crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, whose involvement in this senseless act is strongly suspected, the U.S. President has decided to side with him against his European allies. Since the 2016 presidential campaign, there has been an increase in hate crimes and discrimination against Muslims and minorities and an increase in White supremacy activities, but the White House has failed to condemn such groups and ideologies and failed to take action to prevent these tragedies.

These are only some of the impactful events related to Muslims and this study’s subject because there have been many more heartbreaking incidents such as the separation of children from their parents at the border that took place during this dissertation’s writing. On a more personal level, I also experienced incidents of harassment and discrimination, particularly in the last couple of years. That is why writing this dissertation has been difficult and heartbreaking at times as it is so close to home and my heart. I have also tried my best to remain an unbiased researcher. It was
also difficult to criticize my community in a scholarly paper because I realize it could be easily taken out of context and used to further criticize and demonize Muslims. However, I held tight to my duties as a researcher to report without censorship. In addition to my researcher’s responsibility to present facts and findings, I felt obliged to do my utmost to humanize the participants in this study because this is a population that is too often demonized and dehumanized. They are individuals with feelings, fears, and hopes, not numbers. I also took it upon myself to inform readers about Islam and Muslims and their experiences in America. Knowledge and education are key to breaking fear and exposing stereotypes that stem from misinformation and a lack of knowledge. I hope I met my goals.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A–2010 Estimate of Muslim Population in California

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Bernardino

Kings

Stanislaus

Los Angeles

San Francisco

Sutter

Madera

San Joaquin

Tulare

Marin

San Luis

Ventura

Obispo

(US Religion Census)
APPENDIX B–Interview Script

Date:
Time:
Duration of the Interview:
Participant’s Pseudo Name/Number:
Interviewer:
County of Residence/Work/School:
Recording Devices:

Introduction: I truly appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this study. Being a hijabi Muslim woman myself, I understand some of the issues we may encounter in society. However, the voice of veiled Muslim women and their individual experiences are not much studied and understood by the politicians and law makers, scholars, or the general public. As mentioned in my initial email, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18-40 years old) in the contemporary era. A phenomenological study is one that only seeks to understand certain phenomenon through the lens of its participants and is heavily reliant on the individual interviews. This study will add to the growing body of literature on the life of Arab Muslim women who wear the hijab in the United States and their experiences as a part of a minority group.

Please know that as a researcher, my role is not to judge you or make any assumptions about you or your experiences. Your anonymity and wellbeing are my outmost priority during this process. Please rest assured that your identity and personal information will remain confidential, and I will not share that with a third party. I will be using a number or a pseudo/fake name for you and all other participants when referring to you and incorporating your statements in my study. I would like to go through the consent form at this point since I need your formal permission before starting the interview (Appendix E). I will do my best to be as transparent as I can, but please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or concerns at any point throughout our meeting.
Consent form is given to the participant and signed before the interview starts.

**Demographic Questions:** The interview will start by asking the following demographic questions first. This is to help the researcher become more familiar with the participant and have an easier transition to the interview questions. It also enables the researcher to put the answers into a context.

1) Age:
2) Country of origin:
3) Level of education:
4) Employment status:
5) Marital status:
6) Number of children:
7) Length of living in the US:
8) Length of living in Southern California:
9) Number of years wearing the hijab:

**Interview Questions:**

1) How would you describe the current state of living in Southern California as an Arab Hijabi woman?
2) Do you think being a Muslim makes your experience of living in the Southern California any different from the non-Muslims? In what ways and why?
3) Have you ever felt you have been discriminated against? What do you think triggered the incident? What were the causes for the incident in your opinion? How has that impacted your life?
4) What barriers/struggles, if any, have you experienced or are experiencing as a veiled Arab Muslim woman related to your work/education?
5) What barriers/struggles, if any, have you experienced or are experiencing as a veiled Arab Muslim woman related to your social life and in the public?
6) Have you ever reported any incidents of discrimination to any authorities? Why? Do you think you would respond differently if something similar happens in the future? How?
**Closing Script:** We are done with our interview questions. Would you like to add anything or ask me any questions?

I will send our audio record to a professional transcriber, and this is a copy of our confidentially agreement for you to keep. This agreement ensures that he/she keeps our audio records and transcriptions safe and confidential.

- A copy of transcriptionist confidentiality agreement will be given to the participant (Appendix F).

Once I have the typed transcripts, I will meet with you once again for you to go through it and ensure everything is correct. You will also have a chance to add and omit any of your answers if you wish so. This meeting will be also voluntarily and should take approximately 30 minutes. Will you be willing to meet again to go through your transcription? Do you have any questions? Thank you very much for taking the time for meeting with me and participating in this study.
APPENDIX C–Pilot Interview Feedback Reflection Questions

According to Roberts (2010), “any time you create your own instrument or modify an existing one, it must be field tested” (p. 154). Anyone who is involved in the field or pilot test should hold similar characteristics to the main interview participants but cannot be part of the study (Roberts, 2010). This procedure helps the researcher in evaluating the validity of the instrument (Roberts, 2010) while also reflecting on her interview skills as well as ensuring the effectiveness of the questions and interview process. This questionnaire is adopted from Roberts (2010). The pilot participant has the option to answer them in writings or orally.

1) How did you feel during the interview?
2) What could I have done differently to improve the interview to make you feel more comfortable?
3) What do you think about the duration of the interview?
4) How did you feel about the questions, the wordings, and their sequence? Were they easy to understand? Would you recommend any changes?
5) Is there any question that you think should be added?
6) Is there anything else you would like to add?
Dear Sepideh Baniani,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at IRB.Brandman.edu

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

BUIRB
Academic Affairs
Brandman University
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618
buirb@brandman.edu
www.brandman.edu
A Member of the Chapman University System

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at buirb@brandman.edu.
APPENDIX E–Recruiting Participants’ E-Mail Communication

**Attachments:** Participants Consent Form, Participant Bill of Right, and Transcriptionist Confidentiality Form

**Message:** Hello there,

I am Sepideh Baniani, a doctoral candidate at Brandman University. I am working on completing my dissertation and am currently searching for 12 participants. I am writing to you because I was referred to you by your associate Islamic organization/center and was told you might be interested in participating in my study.

I really hope and appreciate it if you consider participating in this study if you meet all the following criteria. To participate in this study, the **candidate must:**

- Be Arab
- Be a Muslim woman
- Wear the Islamic head covering
- Be between the ages of 18 to 40 years old
- Live in Southern California area

The **purpose** of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18-40 years old) in the contemporary era.

The **methodology** for this study will be qualitative from the phenomenological perspective. A phenomenological study seeks to understand certain phenomenon through the lens of its participants and is heavily reliant on the individual interviews. I am very interested in exploring the lived experiences of this population in the contemporary time. Individual, face to face interviews will be administered as the primary source of data collection. The initial interview might take between 60-90 minutes. The interviewee will be choosing the time and location for the meeting. A follow up meeting for a maximum of 30 minutes or phone call might be needed.
I would like to assure you that your name and identity will remain anonymous and is strictly confidential. Equally important is that your participation is completely voluntarily, and if you ever change your mind, you can always withdraw from this study at any time. All participants will be identified with pseudo/fake names to protect their true identities.

Attached, you will find a Participant Consent Form which explains the confidentiality terms in details as well as the Participant Bill of Rights which outlines all the rights reserved for the research participants. The Transcriptionist Confidentiality Form is also attached. All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed, with the permission of the participants, as part of the data collection process and analysis. A professional third-party transcriber will have access to the audio recording for the sole purpose of transcription and is abide to the confidentiality terms outlined in the form.

If you agreed to participate after reading this email and attached documents, I will present the consent form to you to be signed in our interview meeting. To show my gratitude for your willingness to participate in this study and allocating your time, you will receive a $25 gift card after our initial interview session.

I apologize if this email may seem overwhelming; it is important that you make an informed decision if you are going to participate in this research study. I appreciate your time and consideration in advance. Please reply to this email if you meet the participants’ requirements and are interested in participating in this study. Also, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at bani4101@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx if you have any questions or concerns. You may also contact the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, by calling (949) 341-7641 or writing to 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618.

Respectfully,
Sepideh Baniani
APPENDIX F–Informed Consent Form

Responsible Investigator: Sepideh Baniani

Participant’s Number and Pseudo Name:

Title of Study: The Lived Experiences and Perceived Challenges of Young Arab Muslim Females with the Hijab in Southern California in the Contemporary Era

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges of Southern California Arab Muslim females who wear the Islamic head covering (18-40 years old) in the contemporary era.

This study will be an addition to the limited but growing body of literature about the lived experiences of Arab Muslim women who wear the hijab in an American society. Though there is a large body of research about the Muslim community, veiled Muslim women and their individual experiences are often overlooked. This study is an attempt to learn about the essence of the lived experiences of this population in the Southern California area through their individual lenses despite being viewed as one homogenous group by non-Muslim and the Western society. It is to show the shared traits and experiences young Arab Muslim women who wear the hijab might have and experience in Southern California while also exploring their individual experiences and highlighting their autonomy. The results of this study may help mental health professionals understand their clients who share similar traits. In addition, this study may help educators and law enforcement officials to have a better understanding of Arab Muslim women who wear the hijab as well as their life experiences and needs.

To participate in this study, this consent form must be knowingly and voluntarily signed at the bottom. Please mark your initial next to each stated condition below confirming you have read and understood each term.
I understand my participation in this study is knowingly and completely voluntarily. I understand I can refuse to participate in this study. If I decided to participate, I can withdraw from this study at any point during this process without giving any explanation or receiving penalties.

I understand all information gathered will be only used for scholarly purposes and solely for this particular study. I understand my identity will be kept anonymous and confidential, and a pseudo/fake name will be used instead.

I understand to participate in this study, I am subjected to an individual, face to face interview that takes about 60-90 minutes. I have the right to choose the location and time for the interview meetings. I also understand that there will be a follow up meeting of maximum 30 minutes or short phone calls to ensure the accuracy of the collected data and initial analysis.

I understand any administrated interviews will be audio recorded for transcription purposes and accuracy of the data. I understand my real name and identity will not be mentioned during the audio recording in an effort to keep my identity anonymous. I also understand the audio recordings will be sent to a professional third-party transcriber for transcription. The transcriptionist is fully aware of the confidentiality terms and conditions and has signed the confidentiality form prior to receiving any audio recordings.

I understand that the audio recordings and field notes will be only available to the researcher for the purpose of this study in a safe place, and they will be all destroyed after the completion of this study. Audio recordings will be deleted permanently and paper recordings will be shredded.

I understand I will receive a copy of my interview’s transcript at the follow up meeting, and I have the chance to read and approve it before it is used in the study and data analysis.

I understand I will receive a $25 gift card at the conclusion of the initial interview meeting as a sign of the researcher’s gratitude for my participation in this study and allocating my time. I understand the gift card is for me to keep once it is given to me, and
I will not be penalized for returning it once it is given to me, and in case I decided not to proceed with the study.

__ I understand the risk of participation in this study is minimal. However, I will immediately contact the researcher by calling her at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or emailing her at bani4101@mail.brandman.edu if I felt I am negatively affected by the study.

__ I understand for further information about participants’ rights, I may contact the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, by calling (949) 341-7641 or writing to 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618.

__ I have received a copy of this Consent Form, Participant’s Bill of Rights Form, and the signed Transcriptionist Confidentiality Form prior to the interview.

__ I have read and understood this consent form prior to signing it.

______________________________________  ______________________
Signature of Participants Responsible Party    Date

______________________________________  ______________________
Signature of Principal Investigator            Date
APPENDIX G–Transcriptionist Confidentiality Form

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: The Lived Experiences and Perceived Challenges of Young Arab Muslim Females with the Hijab in Southern California in the Contemporary Era

As the transcriber for the above titled research study, I____________________, fully understand the matters of confidentiality related to this study, participants of this study, and all received audio recordings related to this study. I will not share any of audio recordings or information regarding this study and its participants with anyone else other than the researcher, Sepideh Baniani. I will take all necessary measures to ensure the security and confidentiality of all participants’ information and audio recordings. I am responsible for destroying all the audio recordings and transcriptions within 30 days once they are all transcribed and I have received an email from the researcher of the study, Sepideh Baniani, requesting the destruction of the materials. I understand by signing this form, I could be held liable if I fail to meet the above conditions.

____________________________________  ______________________
Transcriptionist Signature             Date

____________________________________  ______________________
Signature of Principal Investigator     Date