Experiences of Graduate Muslim Students with Religious Microaggressions

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Abstract

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<u>Experiences of Graduate Muslim Students with Religious Microaggressions</u>

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The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of graduate Muslim students at a US Midwest institution of higher education with religious microaggressions. Although a significant amount of research has been conducted on racial microaggressions, few research studies have investigated religious microaggressions. None of the studies on religious microaggressions have examined the experiences of graduate Muslim students at an institution of higher education.

A qualitative design that used individual interviews was followed to collect data from 16 participants from different countries with different immigration statuses. Themes from studies by Nadal et al. (2010, 2012) about religious microaggressions and microaggressions against Muslims were used to analyze the data.

The findings indicate that all participants had experienced religious microaggressions in one way or another. Impacts and coping strategies were detected as well. While some of the findings aligned with Nadal et al.'s (2010, 2012) themes, others were identified as new themes. These included infrastructural microaggressions, and microaggressions resulting from institutional interactions. Based on the findings, recommendations are provided for institutions of higher education that promote diversity and inclusion.

Dedication

To my parents, who taught me to desire for others what I desire for myself. To my children, who were my strongest motivation to do this study. To my wife, who always believed in me.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Frans Doppen, who made this dissertation possible. Dr. Doppen served as my academic advisor, editor, mentor, and instructor. He provided constant support and feedback and helped with polishing my scholarly and academic skills.

Next, I would like to thank my friend and colleague, Bahman Shahri, who was the one who suggested the topic of this dissertation to me. Before Bahman suggested the topic, I had a basic knowledge of microaggressions but did not think about how Muslim students would face them. Because of him, I learned a lot about the concept and decided to pursue this as my dissertation topic.

I would also like to express my high appreciation to the participants who gave of their valuable time and endured the stress of recalling and telling some of their unpleasant memories to serve the purpose of the study.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Michael Kopish, Dr. Emmanuel Jean-Francois, and Dr. Greg Kessler, who provided their constant support and guidance, and contributed tremendously during the journey of finalizing this dissertation.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Since September 11, 2001, acts of terrorism have often been attributed to the rise

of "radical Islam" amidst popular expressions of Islamophobia. Hussain and Howard

(2017) argue that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, have created anti-Islamic

bigotry. The attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the airplane

crash in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, resulted in a total of 2,996 casualties, 30 of whom

were Muslims (Kobeisi, 2011). Today, 40% of the remains are still not identified (The

Guardian, 2017).

Islamophobia has driven some political leaders to identify Islam as a threat to

their country's national security. For example, the Trump administration considers

citizens from some predominantly Muslim countries a threat to national security. In the

United States (US), where they constitute less than 2% amongst a population of 320

million, Muslims are guaranteed freedom of religion under the First Amendment (Amira

& Doppen, 2019). However, provoking national controversy, on January 27, 2017,

Trump, arguing the imperative of homeland security and shortly after becoming

president, issued an "Executive Order protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry

into the United States" seeking to ban citizens from seven predominantly Muslim

countries from entering the United States. These countries included Iran, Iraq, Syria,

Yemen, Libya, Sudan, and Somalia (The BBC, 2017). On March 6, 2017, Trump issued a

new travel ban for citizens from six majority-Muslim countries (Johnson & Hauslohner,

2017). This included all seven countries in the first ban, except for Iraq (The CNN,

2017). On September 24, 2017, a third order was issued banning citizens from five countries that were included in the previous lists. While Sudan was removed, Chad, another predominantly Muslim country, was added to the list (Shear, 2017; Talty, 2017). However, the new order for the first time included countries that are not predominantly Islamic, i.e. Venezuela and North Korea.

Many perceive these bans to be part of an Islamophobic stance of the Trump administration (Patel & Levenson-Waldman, 2017; Panduranga, Patel, & Price, 2017; Green, 2017; Buchanan, 2017). Ali, Clifton, Duss, Fang, Keyes and Shakir (2011) have defined Islamophobia as an ''unfounded, irrational fear or hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from America's social, political, and civic life" (p. 9). According to Fahmy (2015), "Islamophobia allows for the racialization of Muslims into a subjective group whose experiences can be eliminated" (p. 64). This results in excluding Muslims from being part of America. Such exclusion is perpetuated by and facilitated through a prevailing surveillance culture embedded in state power (Fahmy, 2015).

As a result, Muslims in America are facing a significant level of discrimination today. A Gallup poll in 2009 revealed that almost half of all Muslim Americans (48%) reported experiencing some type of racial or religious discrimination (Gallup, 2009). The same source confirmed that American Muslims are far more likely to be discriminated against than other major religious groups such as Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and atheists. In a more recent survey, the Pew Research Center (2017) found that about

48% of a sample of 1,001 Muslims interviewed by phone, have experienced at least one incident of discrimination.

In the US, Islamophobia is directed at Muslims of all categories, including American and international Muslim graduate students. Approximately 100,000 international Muslim students attend an institution of higher education in the US. They constitute about 9% of the 1,078,822 international students in the US during the 2016-17 academic year. With a total of 52,611 students, most came from Saudi Arabia, followed by Iran with 12,643 students (Institute of International Education, 2017). While the Pew Research Center has reported that about 40% of all American Muslims have a college or postgraduate degree (2014), there is no clear statistic of the number of American Muslim students who are currently enrolled as graduate students. In fact, Muslims are neither accounted for in the US Census nor in Affirmative Action policies because they are a religious community, not a racial one (Shryock, 2013). At the same time, Arabs, who are routinely identified as Muslims, are defined as "white" in the US Census. Yet, their fragile white status fades once they are publicly identified as Arab or Muslim (Shryock, 2013). The same standard extends to institutions of higher education as there is no clear statistic of the number of students who are Muslim.

At the institution where this research is conducted, which is an institution of higher education in the United States Midwest, during the Fall 2016 semester there were 383 international students, both graduate, and undergraduate, from predominantly Muslim countries out of a total number 1,496 of international students (Office of Institutional Research, 2017). At 25.6% this was a percentage that is much higher when

compared to the 9% international Muslim students among the total number of international students in the US.

The total number of international graduate students from predominantly Muslim countries at this institution during the Fall 2016 semester was 220 out of a total number of international graduate students of 873, representing 25.5% of the total number of international graduate students (Office of Institutional Research, 2017). With 72 students, the largest number of graduate students came from Iran, followed by Saudi Arabia with 37 and Bangladesh with 22. It must be noted, however, that these numbers and percentages do not accurately represent whether all of these students were indeed Muslims,/ as the university does not track the enrollment of Muslim students from countries where Islam is either a major but not dominant religion, such as Nigeria and Ghana, or where it is a minority religion. No statistics are available about graduate native-born American Muslim students at this institution.

Considering the reported discrimination against Muslims in the United States as a result of Islamophobia, and the executive order preventing citizens of six predominantly Muslim countries (Iran, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, & Chad) from coming to the US, there may be subtle forms of discrimination that occur in different contexts and fit in the category of microaggressions.

Microaggressions refer to the "everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" (Sue et al., 2007). The hidden messages carried by microaggressions

may invalidate a group identity, demean them on a personal or group level, convey the

impression that they are not as equal human beings as the dominant group, and that they

do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to

inferior status and treatment (Sue, 2010). The power of microaggressions lies in their

invisibility to perpetrators and oftentimes the targets. All marginalized groups in a society

may become targets, including people of color, women, LGBTs, those with disabilities,

and religious minorities (Sue, 2010).

Sue et al. (2007) distinguish three types of racial microaggressions: microassaults,

microinsults, and microinvalidations. "A *microassault* is an explicit racial derogation

characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim

through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions" (p.274).

A microinsult is "characterized by communications that convey rudeness and

insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity. Microinsults represent

subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly convey a hidden insulting

message to the recipient of color" (p.274). *Microinvalidations* are "characterized by

communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or

experiential reality of a person of color" (p.274).

Microaggressions may extend to any marginalized group, including religious

minorities. Religion is one dimension of cultural identity that defines differences from the

dominant culture that lead to reduced self-status for many people in the United States

(Dupper, Forrest-Bank, & Lowry-Carusillo, 2014). Dupper, Forrest-Bank, and Lowry-

Carusillo (2014) argue that hatred towards individuals who belong to minority religious

groups is still prevalent in the US. The two largest religious groups with the highest prevalence of documented religion-based hate crimes in the United States include Jewish and Muslim individuals (Nadal, Issa, Griffin, Hamit, & Lyons, 2010). Nadal et al. (2010) define religious microaggressions as "subtle behavioral and verbal exchanges (both conscious and unconscious) that send denigrating messages to individuals of various religious groups" (p. 297). They used the template of racial microaggressions developed by Sue (2007) and adapted it to examine religious microaggressions. Nadal et al. furthermore define *religious microassaults* as "conscious comments or behaviors that are made to intentionally hurt, derogate, or humiliate an individual of a religious minority group." *Religious microinsults* are subtle behaviors that express messages of dislike, rudeness, and insensitivity because of some aspect related to a religious belief or appearance. Finally, *religious microinvalidations* are exchanges that negate the psychological experiences of individuals of religious minority groups (Nadal et al., 2010, p.297).

Statement of the Problem

Although there is extensive research on racial microaggressions, there is little research on religious microaggressions and, specifically, microaggressions against Muslims. One example is the book Sue edited in 2010 under the title of *Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics, and Impact*. While this book includes chapters on six different racial groups, it includes only one chapter on religious microaggressions directed at religious minority groups. Another example is related to research completed by Nadal in 2009 in the PsychINFO database in which he

uses the term "religious discrimination." He found there were only 26 matches with religious discrimination out of a total of 716 entries when he conducted a search on "racial discrimination" (Nadal, 2010). The number of entries on religious discrimination increased significantly when I researched the term in December 2017 as it totaled 446 out of 870 entries. A simultaneous search of "microaggressions" and "religious microaggressions" respectively yielded 46 and three entries.

Consequently, it can be inferred that there is little research on religious microaggressions as experienced by Muslims in the United States. A decade ago, Nadal (2008) indicated that there are no known studies on religious microaggressions or subtle forms of religious discrimination against Muslims in the US. In 2010, Edwards completed a quantitative study in which 80 Muslim participants responded to a survey. Her study focused on the Muslim community in general from a mere psychological perspective. Although Nadal et al. (2010) contributed a chapter about religious microaggressions in Sue's edited book (2010), it was not until 2012, that Nadal et al. conducted a research study on religious microaggressions in public middle and high schools. Their research resulted in six themes including: "(1) endorsing religious stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists, (2) pathology of the Muslim religion, (3) assumption of religious homogeneity, (4) exoticization, (5) Islamophobic or mocking language, and (6) alien in own land" (p. 22). All six themes were derived from robust examples endorsed by multiple participants in two focus groups. In 2017, Husain and Howard found that there was no focused research on religious microaggressions against Muslims in the field of social work which usually includes studies on microaggressions. In

addition, there is a big gap in the research literature on experiences with microaggressions by graduate Muslim students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of graduate Muslim students at an institution of higher education with religious microaggressions. The institution is located in the US Midwest and distinguished by its diverse campus, international community and beautiful Appalachian setting (US News, 2017). Graduate US and international Muslim students were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview to share their experiences regarding the hidden discrimination they might have experienced at different times and in different contexts. This study contributes to the knowledge that already exists about microaggressions in general. However, it will be the first of its kind to be completed in an institution of higher education. The study will provide new research findings for educators and policymakers to be considered in designing curriculum and policies regarding inclusion.

The study will consider six major categories of religious microaggressions introduced by Nadal et al. (2010) that focus primarily on religion as distinct from race, ethnicity, or other variables. These six categories include (1) endorsing religious stereotypes, (2) exoticization, (3) pathology of different religious groups, (4) assumption of one's own religious identity as the norm, (5) assumption of religious homogeneity, and (6) denial of religious prejudice. Other categories that are specific to microaggressions against Muslims will be considered as well. Nadal et al. (2012) list some themes within which incidents of religious microaggressions against Muslims occur. These themes are

(1) religious stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists; (2) pathologizing of the Muslim religion; (3) assumptions of religious homogeneity; (4) exoticizing Islam or Muslims; (5) Islamophobic or mocking language; and (6) alienation. For this reason, interviewees were selected from both among Muslims born in the United States and from countries that are predominantly Muslim, male as well as female students, speakers of different languages, different religious affiliations with Islam (for example, Sunni, Shiite), and different fields of study, including education, mathematics, linguistics, communications, and chemistry.

Significance of the Study

Totten (2013) posits that individuals of diverse cultures, religions, and social status founded the United States. He argues that the U.S. educational system knows that embracing diversity results in effective learning, as it is the best way to prepare a bright talent pool for tomorrow's scientific, technological, and societal leadership. There is no doubt that both graduate US and international Muslim students are part of this diversity. Identifying the importance of students who come from different countries to study in the US, Lobnibe (2009) has stated that attracting international students has become a priority for US universities, regardless of size and location. Kim and Kim (2010) created a list of benefits that international students bring to institutions of higher education in the United States. These include enhancing campus diversity by contributing different perspectives, adding global perspectives and talents through their research and academic work, and providing opportunities for cross-cultural sensitivity and understanding.

At the same time, a positive campus climate at institutions of higher education is important for students, faculty, and staff. The research literature has a major focus on

race when it comes to prejudice and discrimination on campus. Bowman and Smedley (2012), for example, have listed some of the characteristics of a positive racial campus climate. These include:

"the inclusion of students, faculty, and administrators of color; a curriculum that celebrates the heritage and contemporary challenges experienced by people of color; support for the recruitment, retention, and graduation of students of color; and a commitment to diversity in the university's mission" (Bowman & Smedley, 2012, p. 746).

A positive campus climate should focus on the inclusion of all marginalized groups, including those who belong to different races, religions, have a different sexual orientation, and so on. Muslim students constitute a category that is being marginalized on a religious basis. Recognizing the religious microaggressions against Muslim students is one way of promoting diversity and inclusion on campus.

Research Questions

This is study examines and analyzes how graduate Muslim students at an institution of higher education in the United States Midwest have experienced microaggressions as targets, how they have been impacted, and how they cope. The research questions are:

1. How do graduate Muslim students at an institution of higher education in the Midwest experience microaggressions as targets?

2. How are graduate Muslim students impacted by microaggressions?

3. What strategies do graduate Muslim students use to cope with impacts resulting from microaggressions?

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews allowed for obtaining deep knowledge about the experiences of the interviewees with religious microaggressions. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher/interviewer to add or replace existing questions as well as ask follow-up questions when necessary (Glesne, 2016). The responses obtained from the participants contribute knowledge that does not yet exist in the research literature about the experiences of graduate international and American Muslim students with microaggressions at an institution of higher education in the United States Midwest.

Personal Background

I was born and raised in a Muslim family and I am a Muslim myself. I have experienced discrimination and microaggressions because of my nationality in countries that border on my country of origin, Egypt. However, I did not know that such behaviors I have encountered amount to microaggressions. Comparing my feelings to those described in the research literature about targets of microaggressions, I could not decide whether they were microaggressions or not. I did not know whether or how to respond. When I came to the United States, and although I believe everyday personal and official interactions at all levels were very much better, on many occasions, I have wondered whether I was the target of religious microaggressions. For example, whether keeping me for extended time at the airport, eight out of ten times, when I have entered the US coming from Egypt, I am more checked than others. I once asked an immigration officer

directly whether he was conducting a more intensive check because my name is

Mohamed. His answer was, "It's because you are on F1 visa!" My next logical question

should have been, "Then why do you not scrutinize all passengers on F1 visas the same

way you are scrutinizing me?" However, I chose to just end it there. On a second

occasion, I realized how some of the looks my wife, who wears a hijab, and I got when

we went shopping drained our psychological and spiritual energies, as described by Sue

(2010). On a third occasion I witnessed what I consider to be a clear experience of

"microassaults" when a passerby yelled "ISIS" at me as I entered the Islamic center, the

day after the San Bernardino shooting on December 2, 2015.

At one time, speaking about discrimination against Muslims and Islamophobia

was difficult for me as I tend to be very emotional. However, after a lot of reflection, I

have decided that the best way to respond is to speak out and think logically and

academically because not addressing the issue will not end subtle or blatant

discrimination. In the academic year of 2017/2018, I was the president of the Muslim

Student Association at my university. Although I have had personal experiences with

microaggressions and personally know all participants in this study, I have been

cognizant not to interject myself in their responses. I have sought to examine their

experiences without any a priori assumptions.

Summary

Chapter One introduced background information about discrimination against

Muslims, Islamophobia, microaggressions, and types of religious microaggressions. It

included a statement of the problem, the purpose and significance of the study, the

research questions and methodology, and personal background narrative. Chapter Two will include a review of the research literature on microaggressions, types of microaggressions, types and categories of religious microaggressions, the effects of microaggressions, Islamophobia, discrimination and microaggressions against Muslims in America, and diversity in institutions of higher education in the United States. Chapter Three will discuss the methodology used to conduct this research study. While Chapter Four will present the findings, Chapter Five will include conclusions, suggestions for further research, and recommendations for institutions of higher education that promote diversity and inclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Microaggressions is a form of prejudice that is often described as modern racism (Levchak, 2018). They are mainly subtle and hidden. Sohi and Singh (2015) indicate that there has been a decline recently in overt blatant expressions of discrimination as they are being replaced by more subtle forms. These forms, as they indicate, can be described as microaggressions. Microaggressions can have a harmful impact on the life of students at different levels of education, including higher education.

Spencer (2017) argues that conversations that carry different forms of microaggressions might happen in different contexts, including in conversations with family members, friends, and co-workers at dinner tables, college parties, and in workrooms.

"They are represented in the memes on the Internet, the mascots for the teams we root for, television and movies, classrooms, and billboards. Microaggressions are learned through the dominant culture, which subtly teaches us to suspect, distrust, fear, and claim superiority in morals, behaviors, values, beliefs, and rationale over others. In fact, today we are still in need of education and research in the field of microaggressions and discrimination" (Spencer, 2017, p. 3).

Different taxonomies of microaggressions types have been developed. One of the fundamental taxonomies is the one developed by Sue et al. (2007a) in which he referred to three types of microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Huynh (2012) developed another taxonomy for ethnic microaggressions in which she

divided them into three types: emphasis on differences, denial of racial reality, and negative treatment. Furthermore, Nadal et al. (2010, 2012) developed two intertwined taxonomies about religious microaggressions and microaggressions against Muslims in specific. These different taxonomies will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

The chapter will also discuss the literature related to the impact of microaggressions, coping strategies, targets and perpetrators, microaggressions and freedom of expression, and intersectional microaggressions. Since graduate Muslim students are the focus of this study, it is important to make note of their historical and political background. This includes Islamophobia, the history of racism and the roots of anti-Muslim bigotry. Rippy and Newman (2006) have argued that in the aftermath of 9/11 American Muslims and Arabs have been equated to terrorism, a fate similar to that of Japanese Americans after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

What are Microaggressions?

The term "microaggressions" was first coined by Chester Pierce in the 1970s (Sue, 2010a). Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzales, and Willis (1977) conducted a study about hidden racism in TV commercials designed by whites against Black individuals. They described microaggressions as the chief vehicle for proracist behaviors and defined microaggressions as the "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are "put downs" of Blacks by offenders" (p. 64).

In 2008, Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Torino posited that microaggressions can be expressed towards marginalized groups in the society. Sue also focused on racial microaggressions and added Asian Americans as another main group that faces

microaggressions. In his book, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*, published in 2010, he focused on three forms of microaggressions based on race, gender, and sexual orientation.

Huynh (2012) defined ethnic microaggressions as a form of everyday, interpersonal discrimination that is ambiguous and difficult to recognize as discrimination. Her definition focuses on microaggressions that are group-based. She indicates that asking, for example, about someone's ethnic group may send the message that the individuals being addressed are different in a noticeable way. Sue also introduced an inclusive definition of microaggressions as "the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental dignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or groups" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273).

In this same context, Davis (1989) defined microaggressions as "stunning, automatic acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of White superiority and constitute a verification of Black inferiority" (p. 1576). Furthermore, microaggressions are exemplified by "dismissive and often innocuous comments, behaviors, or beliefs that minimize, exclude, or render insignificant" (Osanloo, 2015, p. 24).

According to Hughey, Rees, Goss, Rosino, and Lesser (2017), the term "microaggressions" has existed in the field of psychology since the 1970s. However, having originally been used to de describe dismissals toward people of color, in recent years the term has been subject to revision. Nagai (2017) argues that as institutions of higher education became increasingly committed to issues of diversity the concept

notably spread during the early 2000s. Various university campuses have now begun to surveil the presence of microaggressions including observing and reporting incidents of microaggressions intended to keep students of color emotionally and physically safe (Hughey et al., 2017).

Microaggressions against Different Groups

In his edited book *Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics, and Impact*, Sue (2010) included chapters written by different authors about different marginalized groups. The first half of the book includes chapters about racial and ethnic microaggressions. Watkins, LaBarrie, & Appio discuss Black undergraduate students and their experience with racial microaggressions. Rivera, Forquer, & Rangal discuss Latino Americans and their life experiences with microaggressions. Lin discusses forms of prejudice directed towards Asian Americans. Hill, Kim, & Williams discuss racial microaggressions against indigenous people. Johnston and Nadal explore multicultural microaggressions while Guzman, Trevino, Lubuguin, and Arian discuss microaggressions against scholars of color.

The second half extends the discussion to include additional socially devalued marginalized groups. Kim and Kim discuss the experiences of international students. Capodilupo, Nadal, Corman, Hamit, Lyons, and Weinberg discuss gender microaggressions. Nadal, Revira, and Corpus discuss sexual orientation and transgender microaggressions. Keller and Galgay focus on microaggressions against people with disabilities. Smith and Redington discuss microaggressions based on social class. And finally, Nadal et al. (2010) discuss religious microaggressions against religious

minorities, including Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Christian minority groups, as well as atheists and agnostics. The list remains open to including additional marginalized groups in any society.

Types of Microaggressions

Sue et al. (2007) have identified three types of microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. "A *microassault* is an explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions" (p. 274). Environmental microassaults include, for example, displaying the Confederate flag or burning a cross with the intent to intimidate or make members in other groups feel unwelcome (Sue et al., 2007). Verbal microassaults include describing African Americans as "niggers" or Chinese Americans as "Chinks" with the intent to make them feel they are "lesser human beings" (Sue, 2010a). According to Sue, this type of microaggressions is easier for the marginalized groups to deal with because its intent is clear.

A *microinsult* occurs when communications convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity. Microinsults are subtle and frequently unbeknownst to the perpetrator but clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient (Sue et al., 2007). According to Sue (2010a) common themes that can be described as microinsults center on race, gender, and sexual-orientation and include ascriptions to a lack of intelligence and second-class citizenship, pathologize cultural values, suggest criminality and include sexual objectification and assumptions of

abnormality (Sue, 2010a, pp. 32-33). *Ascription of intelligence* is a microinsult. For example, a comment such as, "You are a credit for your race," relates to aspects of intellect, competence, and capabilities (p. 35). *Second-class citizen* microinsults, such as ignoring a lesbian woman in the supermarket or workplace, contain unconscious messages that a group is of lesser worth, and less important (p. 35). *Pathologizing cultural values,* such as telling Latino students to "leave your cultural baggage outside of the classroom," are based on the assumption that White, male, and straight groups are the norm, while others of color, females, and LGBTs are deviant (p.35). *Criminality*, or assumption of criminal status, is based on the notion that a person of a specific race is dangerous, or likely to break the law; for example, a White man checking his wallet while passing a group of African Americans (p. 36). *Sexual objectification* occurs when women are transformed into objects at sexual disposal or to the benefit of men. *Playboy* and *Hustler* pictures of nude women are one such example (p. 36). *Assumptions of abnormality* are related to the perception that something about someone's race, gender, or sexual orientation is abnormal, deviant, or pathological, such as when students use the word 'gay' to describe the behavior of a fellow classmate (p. 37).

Microinvalidations include communications that "exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). They include alienation, color, gender, and sexual orientation blinders; denial of individual racism, sexism, or heterosexism; and the myth of meritocracy (Sue, 2010a, pp. 37-39). *Alienation* involves "being perceived as a perpetual foreigner or being an alien in one's own country" (Sue, 2010a, p. 37). For example, when Asian Americans are

complimented for speaking "good English" or asked where they were born, the hidden message or meta-communication is that "You are not American." Color, gender, and sexual-orientation blindness involve the unwillingness to acknowledge race, gender, or sexual orientation. A phrase like, "There is only one race, the human race," has a hidden message. They ask the receiver not to bring the topic of race into the discussion and imply that people are expected assimilate.

Denial of individual racism/sexism/heterosexism is another form of denial. Statements such as "I am not homophobic, I have a gay friend" may have a message like "I am immune to heterosexism." The myth of meritocracy confirms that race, gender, or sexual orientation do not play a role in success in life and that everyone has an equal opportunity. For example, those who subscribe to meritocracy do not recognize that higher unemployment rates, lower educational achievement, and poverty may be the result of systemic forces such as individual, institutional, and social racism.

Based on Sue (2007, 2010a), Huynh (2012) developed an ethnic microaggressions scale that represents three different types of subtle discrimination. They are *an emphasis on differences, denial of racial reality*, and *negative treatment. Emphasis on differences* includes the assumption that someone is a foreigner (p. 835). For example, considering Asian Americans or Arab Americans as "perpetual foreigners" by asking them, "Where are you from?"*Denial of racial reality* includes comments that dismiss or invalidate individuals of their reality of bias and discrimination by saying, for example, that they are too sensitive about racial matters (p. 835). *Negative treatment* includes treating members of some other groups as if they were second class citizens (p. 835). An example of

negative treatment is ignoring individuals in a store because they belong to a minority group.

Microaggressions, Discrimination, and Racism

Microaggressions are usually unintentional and unbeknownst to the perpetrator and leave the receiver in an uncertain state of mind thinking about the hidden message of an interaction, whether to respond or not and, if so, how to. The only type that is known to the perpetrator is the microassaults. This is because behavior towards the targets is intentional. In discussions on microaggressions, the terms 'discrimination' and 'racism' are always present. Although the terms, *microaggressions, discrimination, and racism* might overlap, there are some differences.

Clark, Anderson, Clark, and Williams (1999) defined discrimination is as "beliefs, attitudes, institutional arrangements and acts that tend to denigrate or deny equal treatment to individuals or groups based on racial characteristics or group affiliation" (p. 805). Furthermore, and as defined by FindLAW (2017), unlawful discrimination "in the context of civil rights law refers to the unfair or unequal treatment of an individual (or group) based on certain characteristics such as age, disability, ethnicity, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, and sexual orientation" (See http://employment.findlaw.com/employment-discrimination/employment-discrimination-overview.html). Regulations to protect these groups have been developed by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Racism, on the other hand, according to Garner (2009), is "the belief in the superiority of one race over another, which often results in discrimination and prejudice

towards people based on their race or ethnicity" (p. 2). According to the Union of International Associations [UIA] (2017), racist ideology "can be represented in many aspects of social life, as it can exist in social actions, practices, or political systems (e.g. Apartheid) that support the expression of prejudice or aversion in discriminatory practices." Associated social actions include "nativism, xenophobia, otherness, segregation, hierarchical ranking, supremacism, and related social phenomena" (See http://encyclopedia.uia.org/en/problem/134883). In sum, racism is a personal belief of superiority that can result in both discrimination and microaggressions by systems and individuals. Discrimination is a practice that can be supported or prevented by a policy or law. Microaggressions are interactions that might be intentional or unintentional, but they might not necessarily result from racism or result in discrimination. However, they are often described as hidden discrimination.

Racism might result in hate crimes. Hate crimes are "criminal actions intended to harm or intimidate individuals based on their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or minority group status" (Herek, Cogan, & Gillis, 1999, p. 945). They include violent assaults, murder, rape, and property crimes motivated by prejudice, as well as threats of violence or other acts of intimidation (Finn & McNeil, 1987). Hate crimes are especially serious because they are directed at an entire class of people. They attack a victim's identity and intimidate other group members (Herek, 1989).

Berk (2017) differentiates between microaggressions and macroaggressions as the latter are overt and include hate crimes. Hate crimes are defined by the Department of Justice and FBI (2012) as crimes that manifest "evidence of prejudice based on race,

gender and gender identity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity" (Berk, 2017, p. 65). These crimes include murder, rape, assault, arson, and destruction, damage, or vandalism of property. The spirit of microaggressions is the same as hate crimes, but the difference is a matter of scale and intent (Berk, 2017).

A Brief History of Racism

The term 'racism' became prominent about six centuries ago. Fernando (2017) states that the slave trade that flourished in the 15th century was the era that started the story of 'race' (p. 11). Jacques Barzun (1937;1965) coined the term 'race thinking" which refers to thinking of people in terms of physically and culturally recognizable groups instead of thinking of them as unique individuals who differ from each other.on an individual basis. The Christian armies that pushed back the Islamic from Spain in 1492 chose Muslim Moors and Jews as specific groups for prosecution and enforced large conversions of these groups (Fernando, 2017, p. 13). Columbus' voyage to the New World led to a genocide of indigenous peoples.

Starting in 1625, millions of Africans were enslaved and transported to the Americas to serve as free labor (p. 14). Slavery was abolished in the US until 1865. However, the freedom of African American remained compromised in their relationship with white people (p. 15). Hence, the post-Civil War era witnessed a continued rise in 'racism' directed at African American based on the notion that native peoples, emancipated Africans, Irish immigrants, and Jews were inferior (p. 39). By the time the Irish and the Jews were absorbed in the whiteness of the US, newcomers such as Muslims

from West Asia or the Middle East and brown-skinned people from Asia became new targets of racism (p. 41).

The civil rights movement of the 1960s resulted in the end of the state-sanctioned segregation as African Americans regained voting rights and access to other rights with no racial barriers (Fernando, p. 63). Hope for further progress arose when Obama was first elected in 2008 when he became the first black president ever to be elected. However, these hopes vanished when Trump was elected in 2016 (Fernando, p. 153). As a result of 9/11, according to Mishra (2017), we now live in an 'age of anger' characterized by a West-versus-the Rest attitude (p. 17). Within days after he was elected Trump made it clear that the war on terrorism is a war on Islam (Shariatmadari, 2017).

Terminology

Sue at al. (2007) argue that perpetrators of microaggressions might not be aware that they engage in microaggressive communications when they interact with racial and ethnic minorities (p. 271). In fact, the invisible nature of microaggressions might prevent perpetrators from realizing their role in creating dilemmas for minorities, and from creating disparities in different areas including employment, education, and health care (p. 272). As Sue (2005) explains, the power of microaggressions lies in a lack of awareness by perpetrators of what they are doing. In fact, most White Americans perceive themselves as good, moral, and decent people who believe in equality and democracy, and this is why it is difficult for them to believe that some of their interactions can be biased (Sue, 2004).

In many situations when a microaggressive interaction occurs, instead of reflecting on their own actions, perpetrators, or microaggressors, engage in self-preservation by arguing that their words or interactions were unintentional and they are offended as they seem to be accused of being racist (Huynh, 2016). They resist acknowledging and addressing their microaggressive acts as it is difficult for the empowered to become aware of their biased attitudes and behaviors (Wong, Derthick, David, Saw, & Okazaki, 2014). The perpetrator also often believes that the victim has overreacted or been overly sensitive (Sue et al., 2007).

Targets or victims of microaggressions, on the other hand, can be members of any marginalized group in the society (Sue, 2010b). In fact, different targeted groups experience different types of microaggressions (Edwards, 2010). Asian Americans, for example, experience microaggressions based mainly on suggested foreignness; Black Americans might face microinsults related to criminality; Muslims might face microassaults related to accusations of terrorism.

Targets of microaggressions question their experiences and perceptions. They might ask, "Did I just experience that because I am a gay/woman/Asian, or am I overreacting?" (Huynh, 2016, pp. 1-2). They are left to determine whether what they faced was really discrimination, decide how to respond, and risk being perceived as oversensitive (Sue, 2007). Sue (2010b) also observed that most targets of marginalized groups choose to do nothing because of different reasons. These include: attributional ambiguity as they cannot determine whether or not an offense has occurred; response indecision as they are not sure what is the best way to react; time-limited nature of

responding so by time response is considered the event might have changed or moved on to something else; denying experiential reality as targets might deny that their microaggressor friend or neighbor has engaged in an offensive action towards them; and impotency of actions as targets believe that their action will not change anything or will have minimal impact on the situation or they decide to save their energies (Sue, 2010b, pp. 17-18).

The terms "perpetrator" and "target" may well suggest an exaggeration of what occurs in a microaggressive interaction. Sue, who is often cited in different parts of this study and is a prominent voice in the research on microaggressions has coined some of the important terms related to the phenomenon. Perpetrator and target/victim are terms he has used repeatedly. However, in an introductory video that was published on the Columbia University Teachers College YouTube page (Columbia University Teachers College, 2013), he indicated that he hated to use the term "perpetrators" and now prefer to refer to "persons who deliver microaggressions". Hence, in Chapters Four and Five, the term "deliverer" will be used to refer to a person who engages microaggressive behavior, while the term "recipient" will be used to refer to a person who is subjected to such behavior. However, consistent with the established research literature, this chapter will continue to use the established terminology.

Microaggressions, Victimhood Culture, and Freedom of Expression

Campbell and Manning (2018) refer to targets of microaggressions as "complainants" and call those who give value to the concept "supporters" of the "microaggressions program" (p. 3). They argue that many of the statements and

behaviors described as microaggressions can be characterized as merely ordinary political views (p. 6). Yet, although in many cases complainants may misinterpret the behavior they face, their interpretation is more important than the intent of the actor (p.7). Campbell and Manning also object to the idea of focusing so much on micro offenses and suggest that many of these offenses should never be classified as microaggressions (pp. 8-9). They attached the term to three types of cultures: a culture of honor in which individuals are sensitive to such minor insults and handle conflicts aggressively, a culture of dignity in which individuals ignore such minor insults because they have thick skin and a culture of victimhood in which individuals take action (pp. 11-16). A culture of honor, as well as a culture of victimhood both, encourage taking a rigorous action.

Campbell and Manning (2018) also discuss the concept of freedom of speech as guaranteed by the First Amendment (p. 218). They included some acceptable content-based restrictions. These include specific categories such as "obscenity, child pornography, indecency, defamation, harassment, fighting words, true threats, incitement, copyright and trademark violations, speech that endangers national security, and the disclosure of personal kinds of personal information" (p. 218). They argued that if the government issued regulations based on the opinions of individuals, it would be "censorship in its purest form" (p. 219).

Feagin and Sikes (1994) have stated that they "don't think white people, in general, understand the full meaning of racist discriminatory behaviors directed toward Americans of African descent. They seem to see each act of discrimination or any act of violence as an "isolated" event" (p. 23). As Sue (2010a) has explained, a model based on

a European American perspective fails to understand the life experience of marginality
(p. 95). Both Campbell and Manning are white American males. Consequently, they
perfectly fit Feagin and Sikes's model. In fact, they not only fail to understand African
Americans' experiences with microaggressions, but they also fail to understand the
experiences of all other marginalized groups with microaggressions.

Furthermore, scholars on microaggressions have sought to describe the
experiences of different marginalized and minority groups, the impacts of such
experiences and, in a few studies, coping strategies. However, no scholar has explicitly
recommended a restriction on any particular form of speech. In fact, members of
marginalized groups have the right to speak out against experiences and statements that
they find offensive

Religious Microaggressions

Nadal at al. (2010) define religious microaggressions as "as subtle behavioral and
verbal exchanges (both conscious and unconscious) that send denigrating messages to
individuals of various religious groups" (p. 297). Dupper, Forrest-Bank, and Lowry-
Carusillo (2014) argue that the US is one of the most religiously diverse countries in the
world. They explain that religion is one aspect of cultural identity that distinguishes many
people from the dominant culture and might place them in a reduced status. In fact,
intolerance and hatred towards people who belong to a different minority faith are still
prevalent in the United States today. According to Bowman and Smedley (2012), due to
"Christian privilege in the United States, students from marginalized religions and those

who do not identify with any religion face significant challenges on university campuses"
(p. 745).

Nadal et al. (2010) examined religious microaggressions using the template
developed by Sue (2007). Religious groups targeted by microaggressions may include
Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists. The two largest religious groups with the
highest prevalence of documented religion-based hate crimes in the United States, they
argue, are Jews and Muslims. Non-religious groups can be included in this category as
well. They include agnostics, who believe there might be a higher power but they do not
follow any religion; atheists, who deny the existence of a higher power; and non-
religious/non-practicing individuals. An example of religious microaggressions is a
Christian wishing a Jewish or Muslim person a "Merry Christmas." The hidden message
here is that Christianity is the norm and that being non-Christian or nonreligious is
abnormal, inferior, or even evil (Nadal, 2008). Another example is when staring at a
Muslim in fear or suspicion (Nadal, 2008).

Religious microaggressions may overlap with racial or ethnic microaggressions
(Nadal et al., 2010). An example is an Arab American, dressed in Muslim garb, being
subjected to microaggressive treatment in a store.

Nadal et al. (2010) developed a taxonomy of six major religion-based categories.
They are:

- *Endorsing* religious stereotypes with statements or behaviors that communicate
  incorrect perceptions of certain religious groups. For example, stereotyping a Muslim
  person as a terrorist;

- *Exoticization* includes situations in which other religions are considered foreign. For example, an individual who dresses in a special religious garb is subjected to microaggressive treatment;

- *Pathology* of different religious groups includes considering practices in other religions as sinful. An example is telling a person that they believe in the wrong religion;

- *The assumption of One's Own Religious Identity* is believing that one's faith is the standard and the norm;

- *The assumption of Religious Homogeneity* is believing all members of a specific religion honor the same exact practices and hold the exact same beliefs. An example is believing that all Muslim women wear head scarfs;

- *Denial of Religious Prejudice* occurs when an individual claims that he or she is not religiously biased even if their behavior indicates otherwise (pp. 300-304).

Nadal (2010) argues that religious microaggressions can also be aligned with Sue's taxonomy of racial microaggressions. Religious microassaults are conscious behaviors that are intended to hurt, derogate, or humiliate individuals of a religious minority group. An example is calling a Jewish person a "cheap." Religious microinsults are subtle behaviors that express messages of dislike, rudeness, and insensitivity. They are often unconscious, and perpetrators may be unaware of the impact of these statements or behaviors on targets (Nadal, 2010). This might send the hidden message that this person is abnormal. Finally, religious microinvalidations are exchanges that deny the psychological experiences of individuals of religious minority groups (Nadal, 2010). An

example is a religious person telling a nonreligious person to "stop complaining about discrimination."

There a significant body of research on racial microaggressions, especially microaggressions against African Americans. Consequently, the vast majority of the research literature on microaggressions does not examine other types of inter-group prejudice (Thomas, 2008). However, Berk (2017) recently added eight other groups to race. They include ethnicity and nationality; gender; sexual orientation; religion; mental disability; socio-economic status; age generation; intersectional microaggressions; and hierarchical microaggressions in a workplace (Berk, 2017, p. 65).

Forrest-Bank and Dupper (2016) conducted a study on coping with religious minority status in US public schools. The participants were 50 middle and high school students with a Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, and Universalist Unitarian background. Their findings include seven themes: the importance of religious affiliation; the influence of parental religiosity; parents as advocates and expert consultant; having friends from other religions; response to negative incidents; perception of teachers; and the school culture need to change (p. 261).

Islamophobia

According to Bakali (2016), the term 'Islamophobia' was first used in France in 1925 by authors Etienne Dinet and Slima Ben Ibrahim when they introduced 'Islamophobic delirium' in reference to Western perceptions of Muslims. However, as Bakali confirms, the term was most influential when it was referenced in a report entitled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* by the Runnymede Trust in 1997. The report

described Islamophobia as the "shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam –

and therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims" (Runnymede Trust, 1997, p. 1).

Esposito and Mogahed (2007) referred to it as intolerance towards Muslims' religious

and cultural beliefs. Mohideen and Mohideen (2008) defined it as "the practice of

prejudice against Islam and the demonization and dehumanization of Muslims …

generally manifested in negative attitudes, discrimination, physical harassment and

vilification in the media" (p. 73).

Allen (2010) introduced a more comprehensive definition that considers the

historical roots of Islamophobia. He defines Islamophobia as:

> "[A]n ideology similar to racism that sustains negative meanings about Muslims
>
> and Islam contemporarily as it did historically, shaping Muslims and Islam as
>
> Other. It is represented less explicitly in daily relationships of power and results in
>
> exclusionary practices that disadvantage, prejudice or discriminate against
>
> Muslims and Islam in social, economic and political spheres. For such to be
>
> Islamophobia, however, an acknowledged 'Muslim' or 'Islamic' element – either
>
> explicit or implicit, or merely even nuanced through meanings that are
>
> 'theological', 'social', 'cultural', 'racial' and so on – must be present" (p. 190).

Ali, Clifton, Duss, Fang, Keyes, and Shakir (2011) defined Islamophobia as an

"unfounded, irrational fear or hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by

negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and

exclusion of Muslims from America's social, political, and civic life." According to

Fahmy (2015), "Islamophobia allows for the racialization of Muslims into a subjective

group whose experiences can be eliminated" (p. 64). This results in excluding Muslims from being part of American national identity. Such exclusion is perpetuated by and facilitated through various technologies, enabling a culture of surveillance, that has become embedded in state power (Fahmy, 2015). Surveillance of Muslims through state institutions, such as the CIA and FBI, then becomes the norm since they are not trusted as loyal citizens.

Historical Attitudes

Allan Austin, a historian, has estimated the number of Muslim slaves with roots in Senegambia in Africa at 30,000-40,000. They were brought to the 13 colonies between 1711 and 1808 when the United States officially outlawed the international, but not domestic, slave trade (Austin, 2012).

GhaneaBassiri (2013) argues that favorable opinions about Islam have declined since 9/11. He suggests that the majority of Americans lack a basic understanding of Islam and its teachings and that negative attitudes are due to current events and media reports that associate Islam with violence. In fact, the media's focus on violence-related matters attracts a larger audience. While it always includes a religious explanation of terrorism, it is not interested in other aspects related to the issue, such the US role in militarizing groups in Afghanistan in the war against the Soviets during the 1980s (GhaneaBassiri, 2013). At the same time, many among the political elite understand 9/11 in terms of Islam (GhaneaBassiri, 2013). To shed more light on how Islam has been alienated, more than six decades ago Herberg (1955) presented an interesting view on the relationship between religion in general and American national identity. He argued that

religious minorities have been able to gain recognition and acceptance by aligning their religion with US national interest. When the Cold War started, so he argued, the US became a "triple melting pot" of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. Hence, at the time, to "profess oneself a Buddhist, a Muslim, or anything but Protestant, Catholic, or Jew, even when one's Americanness [was] otherwise beyond question" implied "being foreign" (Herberg, 1955, p. 257).

Anti-Muslim Policies

In 1924, the National Origins Act focused on reducing immigration from non-White countries as an expression of concerns among many Anglo-Americans that immigrants with non-Western backgrounds would bring physical and ideological disease to the US (Curtis, 2013). Curtis IV (2013) traces the entanglement of Islam with American politics to 1800 when John Adams and Thomas Jefferson referred to each other as Mahometans. This was an accusation, among others, that they directed at each other in order to win the presidential election. The entanglement of Islam with American politics extended into the twentieth century with the appearance of The Nation of Islam, Mohamed Ali as a prominent Muslim opponent the Vietnam War, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the end of the Cold War with labeling Islam as a form of anti-Americanism, and finally 9/11.

Curtis (2013) believes that there is an important difference between studying Muslims as a group and Islam as an ideology between the 1960s and the post-9/11 era. In both eras, Muslims were considered dissenters. However, one difference is that the "dissenter" Muslim today is Sunni (p. 99), not a follower of Elijah Muhammad who

created the Nation of Islam movement in the 1960s defending the rights of Blacks only.

Today's Muslim, or the Sunni, includes larger groups that include immigrants from the

Middle East, who were at some point considered by Elijah Muhammad as Whites.

However, suppressing Islamic expressions that radically criticize the US is one aspect

that is similar between both eras (Curtis, 2013). The Islamophobic discourse controls the

way in which the state deals with Muslim dissent. The National Defense Authorization

Act of 1961, for example, includes clauses that allow the executive branch to indefinitely

detain foreigners and Americans accused of supporting terrorism without trial (Temple-

Raston, 2011). Obama's administration policy, represented in the "Strategic

Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the

United States," targeted many sites, including American public schools (Temple-Raston,

2011). According to this policy, teachers and students should be trained to identify

potential terrorists, those who use the word "infidel," as well as defend Osama bin Laden,

and watch extremist videos (Temple-Raston, 2011).

    While Hammer (2013) defines "Islamophobia" as the fear of Islam and/or

Muslims, he also includes other political and intellectual currents. As such he includes

> "politics in which Islam becomes a tool for negotiating political allegiance;
> imperial wars as an extension of colonial and neocolonial projects; racism and
> bigotry in response to changing demographics and political contexts; rethinking
> the nature and significance of feminism; political discrimination and exclusion as
> part of shifting state power; and civilizational discourse on moral and cultural
> superiority of "Western" powers including the US" (p. 108).

Hammer (2013) also introduced the perspective of a gendered Islamophobia describing Muslim men as violent terrorists against both the US and Muslim women and representing Muslim women as oppressed and silenced by Muslim men, Islam, and Muslim culture. The discourse on the oppression of Muslim women abroad has been also exploited to justify war and military intervention in other countries under the pretext of liberating women.

Shryock (2013) claims that Islamophobia also includes the assumption that Islam or some parts of Islam are intolerable and should not receive the equal treatment that comes with membership in a nation or state. In other words, it might include the inability or explicit refusal to let Muslims participate in constructing national identity. Today, Muslims in the United States are typically excluded from national identity, even when they are American-born citizens. Part of the Islamophobic discourse is based on the concept that Islam and Muslims do not belong in the West and cannot be loyal citizens in the Western countries in which they live.

Stereotypes also extend to the definition of a *good* Muslim. According to Shyrock (2013), these stereotypes include that when he is a man he tends to be Sufi, confirm that jihad is an inner contest and treat women as equal, and when she is a woman she tends to be highly educated, work outside the home and choose her husband freely. Good Muslims are also advocates for democracy, human rights, religious freedom, and opponents of armed conflict against the United States and Israel (Shryock, 2013). In addition, they tend to be converts to Islam, African, South Asian, Indonesian and Malaysian, and are less likely to be Arab (Shryock, 2013). While such traits are used to

describe safe and acceptable Muslims, such traits are lacking in many Muslims as here also those who believe in violence. The dilemma lies in the fact that neither model is fair and objective as each is meant to politicize Muslims and use them in conflict situations (Shryock, 2013). In reference to recent political developments in the US, Berk (2017) argues that discriminatory acts spiked dramatically after the 2016 presidential election as reflected in the harassment and intimidation of many minority groups, including Muslims.

Microaggressions against Muslim Students

Social conditions for American Muslims have deteriorated since 9/11 and the subsequent discourse on terrorism. However, Muslim experiences with hostility have not been well documented (Abdo, 2006). Unfortunately, prejudice against Muslims existed even prior to 9/11. Omeish (1999), for example, found that in academia, a majority of college-aged Muslims reported prejudice and discrimination as a common phenomenon.

According to Husain and Howard (2017), the "breaking news" cycle constantly reports every "horrific action of radical and extremist individuals and groups, most of them overseas, and influences the sentiments of average Americans, consuming that news in their living rooms, in doctors' office waiting lounges, airport boarding lounges, and on their smartphones" (p. 149). They posit that,

> [Most] recently, the rhetoric in the media and from elected officials has
> intensified due to the appearance overseas of a barbaric group identifying itself as
> the "Islamic State." The abhorrent ideology and inhuman actions of this group
> have been condemned by Muslim American organizations and leaders and

prominent Muslims around the world. However, a steady drumbeat persists in the United States, insisting that Muslim Americans do more to curtail the rise of violent extremism. (p. 149)

Nadal et al. (2012) have identified six themes related to microaggressions against Muslims based on their study of the experience of Muslim college students in the New York area. They are religious stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists; pathologizing of the Muslim religion; assumptions of religious homogeneity; exoticizing Islam or Muslims; Islamophobic or mocking language; and alienation.

Endorsing stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists occurs when non-Muslims assume that all Muslims are affiliated with terrorism in some way. An overt example is asking a woman with hijab whether she is hiding a bomb under her garb. Another subtle example is extensively checking a woman with hijab at an airport and eventually informing her that she did not look like the picture in her passport. All of these interactions assume the Muslims are violent and untrustworthy (pp. 22-23).

Pathologizing the Muslim religion includes the conscious and/or unconscious belief that there is something wrong and abnormal about Islam as a religion. An example is asking a woman with hijab, "Don't you feel hot with the thing you are wearing on your head?" This has the hidden message that this Muslim tradition is abnormal and weird (p. 24).

Assumptions of religious homogeneity occur when someone assumes that all Muslims have the same experiences, observe the same religious practices and that there are no differences between them. One example is assuming that all Muslims are of Arab

descent. Another example is assuming that all Muslims are strict in their practices and that all pray five times a day (pp. 24-25).

Exoticization occurs when someone asks a lot of questions about a religion, or when some view a specific religion as exotic or trendy. An example is a scene in The Office television episode in which a man asked a woman from Abu Dhabi to cover her face to show how she would be sexy in her culture (p. 25).

Islamophobic or mocking language occurs when people make fun of a religion or tease individuals who subscribe to it (p.26). An example is a student commenting on Islam during a presentation about world religions saying it is an evil religion, in the presence of Muslim students in the class.

Alienation includes experiences in which individuals face comments from others that they do not belong in the USA. An example is telling a woman with hijab to "Go back to your country" (p. 27).

In her quantitative study on microaggressions, based on responses collected from 80 Muslim participants whose ages ranged from 18 to 45, Edwards (2010) found evidence of covert prejudice against Muslims and that it was a common experience in the United States. She observed feelings of anger, and dejection.

Impact of Microaggressions

Sue et al. (2007) identified four dilemmas that perpetrators and targets of microaggressions experience. The first one refers to a class of racial realities in which Whites believe that minorities are doing better, and that discrimination is decreasing, while people of color believe that Whites believe they are superior, racially insensitive,

need to control everything, and treat others poorly because of their race. The second dilemma refers to the invisibility of unintentional expressions of bias. The perpetrators do not realize they are biased, and the targets wonder whether they experienced microaggressions or not. The third dilemma refers to the perceived minimal harm of microaggressions. The perpetrators believe that the victims are overreacting and are encouraged not to waste time with it. The fourth dilemma refers to a Catch-22 response to microaggressions in which the target feels uncertain about whether what he or she encountered was a deliberate or unintentional action, how they should react, and/or whether they should confront or let it go.

Sue (2010a) also developed a model that explains the impact of microaggressions on targets. The model starts with the incident itself, then perceiving it as "racially motivated," and then the reaction that includes thinking deeply about it, questioning what happened, emotionality, a desire to rescue the offender, and/or self-validation. After that comes interpreting the incident as treating the person as inferior, untrustworthy, or stereotypical. Finally, the consequence of developing feelings of powerlessness, invisibility, or pressure to represent one's group (Sue, 2010a, pp. 68-69).

According to Sue (2014), in the end, microaggressions assail the mental health of the recipient and eventually lead to greater degrees of loneliness, depression, anger, anxiety, lower sense of psychological well-being.

Davis, DeBlaere, Brubaker, Owen, Jordan, Hookand Van Tongeren (2016) correlate microaggressions with hypertension, mental health outcomes, social isolation, rumination, suppression, impulsive risk taking, hopelessness, negative self-schemas, risk-

taking behavioral expectancies (p. 483). For example, people of color may feel terrible receiving suspicious looks in stores and worry that any mistake they make may negatively impact all group members (Sue, 2010c). They have the burden of constant vigilance which drains their psychological and spiritual energies and suffer from chronic fatigue (Sue, 2010c). Sue (2010c) further explains that microaggressions impact the mental health of recipients negatively; create a hostile and invalidating work or campus environment; deepen stereotypes; cause physical health problems; devalue some social groups identities; decrease work productivity and problem-solving abilities; and are partially responsible for creating inequities in many fields including education, employment, and health care.

Berk (2017) lists ten impacts, including some listed by Sue (2010c). They are: creating feelings of isolation and exclusion; lowering individuals' productivity; devalue individuals' research, scholarship, and teaching abilities; undermining individuals' qualifications and credentials; subjecting individuals to unfair and biased review of performance appraisal and contract renewal; excluding from grants and professional development; driving individuals to do excessive services to be the face of diversity; resulting in feelings of being ignored, overlooked, overworked, under-protected; producing physical and mental problems; and creating a hostile campus climate (pp. 68-69). He concluded that in general such microaggressions can undermine diversity and inclusion practices, especially retention.

Rippy and Newman (2006) found a statistically significant relationship between perceived religious discrimination and subclinical paranoia in a study they conducted

among 152 Muslim Americans. Fenigstein and Vanable (1992) defined subclinical

paranoia as "a mode of thought marked by exaggerated self-referential biases that occurs

in normal everyday behavior. Such thinking is characterized by relatively stable

tendencies toward suspiciousness, feelings of ill will or resentment, mistrust, and belief in

external control or influence" (p. 128). Rippy and Newman (2006) also found that the

perceived discrimination of Muslim Americans is related to the expression of increased

vigilance and suspicion. Edwards (2010) found that anger was a strong emotion

experienced among the Muslim community members who participated in her study on

microaggressions against Muslims. Another impact that could influence Muslims who

face microaggressions is internalizing Islamophobic stereotypes (The Institute for Social

Policy and Understanding (ISPU), 2018).

Coping Strategies

Sue et al. (2007) have argued that the burden to cope with insults resulting from

microaggressions falls upon the minority group members who try to decide whether they

were insulted or not and whether to take these insults and assaults seriously. In her study

on managing multicultural microaggressions, Hunt (2014) found three basic strategies

that her participants used to cope with microaggressions. One strategy was

"normalizing" or "legitimizing," which meant not making a big deal out of things and

letting go (p. 82). Another strategy was to turn the situation into a teachable moment by

talking to a person the target of trusted and thinking about why some statements are

considered offensive and whether it would be comfortable to correct someone if

something similar would happen again (p. 84). A third strategy was "assimilation" which

meant trying to fit in. As described by Hunt, assimilation is a comfortable place where microaggressions can be looked from a different angle (p. 85).

Sue (2010a) also concluded that "the most frequent reaction to microaggressions seems to be doing nothing" (p. 55). As he explains, this happens for different reasons. They include: attributional ambiguity or the inability to determine whether a microaggression has occurred, response indecision or not knowing the best way or how to respond, time-limited responding as the incident is over before a response can be made, denying experiential reality or engaging in self-deception by believing the incident did not happen, impotency of actions or believing nothing will change, or fearing consequences (pp. 55-57). Sue (2010a) also introduced some themes that can be considered coping strategies in what he called "the reaction process." They include: "empowering and validating self" which refers to moving from blaming one's self to the blaming the aggressor and that the microaggressions happened because of the hostile nature of the perpetrator (p. 75). Another theme is rescuing offenders by finding an excuse for the perpetrators' behavior (p. 76).

In their study of coping strategies with racial microaggressions, Hernandez, Carranza, and Almeida (2010) identified eight themes. They are: following a process to identify thoughts, feelings and how to respond, taking care of self through exercise, meditation, taking time off, and thinking positively, using faith to overcome frustrations, confronting the aggressor with direct responses and being proactive by educating others, seeking support from White allies, keeping records and documenting experiences with

microaggressions in different places, being able to express concerns and describe experiences to mentors, and organizing public responses (pp.205-207).

Houshmand, Spanierman, and De Stefano (2017) categorized coping strategies into five categories overlapping with Hernandez et al. (2010). They are: a process of cautious deliberating with caution, coping collectively, resisting, reacting passively to protect oneself, and seeking spirituality (pp. 208-210). Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, and Hunt (2012) identified six coping strategies. They include: choosing one's battles based on cognitive decisions, resisting by using one's voice as power, collective coping by developing a support network, protecting one's self by finding ways to minimize the stress, and becoming desensitized and escape (pp. 60-64).

Intersectional Microaggressions

Nadal et al. (2015) argue that the research on microaggressions usually focuses on single identities. In other words, it focuses solely on one identity (being a woman, being a person of color, or being a person with disability) instead of focusing of exploring how multiple identities (being a person of color and with a disability, or a woman who belongs to a religious minority) might influence experiences with microaggressions. They refer to this type of microaggressions as intersectional microaggressions, subtle forms of discrimination that are influenced by more than one identity. While some limited quantitative research on intersectional microaggressions has been conducted, there is a significant lack of qualitative research.

Recently Nadal et al. (2015) reanalyzed data from six studies to examine intersectional microaggressions. One theme they identified was *gender specific*

expectations for Muslim women and men. Muslim participants described microaggressions that emerged from the intersection of both gender and religion. For example, a woman with hijab is often assumed to be forced to wear it. Also, because Muslim women are easily identified because of their dress, they experience microaggressions and overt discrimination based on their religion, gender, or both. Muslim men are believed to be joyless and on some occasions as inhumane as they appear to not mind raping young girls.

Husain and Howard (2017), in another example of intersectionality, argue that the history of Islam in America and its treatment of Muslims demonstrates the intertwining of bigotry rooted in religious difference as well as biological differences with Muslims of Arab origin.

Summary

This review of the research literature discussed in detail the meaning of microaggressions as developed by Sue (2007; 2008; 2010a; 2010b; 2014). He identified the three basic types of microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. While African Americans were the focus of original research on microaggressions, later other racial groups, such as Asian Americans and Native Americans, were included as well, further followed by LGBTs and research based on gender.

Religion has not been a focus of research on microaggressions. Nadal et al.'s (2010) themes of religious microaggressions of endorsing religious stereotypes, exoticization, pathology of different religions, assumptions of religious identity and

homogeneity, and denial of religious prejudice were included in the literature. Furthermore, themes related to microaggressions against Muslims of endorsing stereotypes of terrorism, pathologizing Islam, assumptions of Muslims homogeneity, Muslim exoticization, Islamophobic language, and alienation included in Nadal et al.'s (2012) study were discussed.

It is important as well to define Islamophobia and identify its roots in American history as it might explain microaggressive behavior towards Muslims in general. The impact of microaggressions on the mental and psychological health of individuals might potentially be part of the experiences with religious microaggressions among Muslim students in institutions of higher education in the US.

Tao, Owen, and Darinane (2017) observe that recent interest in the prevalence of microaggressions in educational settings has resulted in an emerging body of research among the college student population. Although different marginalized groups' experiences with microaggressions have been researched, the experience of graduate Muslim students has not been examined in the specific context of an institution of higher education. This study seeks to explore these experiences, their impact on graduate international Muslim students, and their coping strategies.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of graduate Muslim

students at an institution of higher education in the US Midwest with religious

microaggressions. Microaggressions are often described as hidden discrimination. Hence,

finding a methodology that reveals the experiences of the participants was a challenge.

Edwards (2010) has stated that research on microaggressions in general imposes

methodological challenges because the target is often unconscious of this form of

prejudice, as one defining characteristic of it is that it is always 'covert.' In many cases,

as Sue et al. (2007a) suggest, the target decides that it is better to let it go and not

acknowledge its occurrence. Wong, Derthik, David, Saw, and Okazaki (2014) have

indicated that one common approach in microaggressions research is using focus group

interviews to understand how the construct is shared among the participants who belong

to a specific marginalized group. Edwards (2010) has described it as a method that had

been "successful in identifying and categorizing instances of microaggressions as there

has never been a study on microaggressions that was conducted based on self-report

data" (p. 18). However, Kaplowits and Hoehn (2001) indicated that "individuals may feel

more comfortable volunteering controversial information unknown to researchers during

individual interview sessions rather than sharing that information in a focus group setting.

The group dynamics of focus groups may tend to encourage speculation about

information" (p. 245). However, individual interviews are more appropriate for asking

sensitive questions that people might be reluctant to discuss in a group setting (Milena,

Dainora, and Stanku, 2008, p. 1282). For these reasons, individual in-depth interviews were used to collect data in this study as they allow for identifying shared as well as unique personal experiences.

Research Questions

This study's main research question is:

1. How do graduate Muslim students at an institution of higher education in the Midwest experience microaggressions as recipients?

Two supporting research questions are:

2. How are graduate Muslim students impacted by microaggressions?

3. What strategies do graduate Muslim students use to cope with impacts resulting from microaggressions?

Research Design

Patton (2016) has described a research design simply as a plan. As he states, as long as the purpose is clear it will be easy to decide on the method of data collection. Conducting interviews, a qualitative research method, was used to conduct this study.

Phenomenology. A phenomenological approach was used to investigate the experiences of Muslim graduate students with religious microaggressions at a Midwestern institution of higher education. Yuksel and Yildirim (2015) argue that phenomenological research aims at finding the reality from "individuals' narratives of their experiences and feelings, and to produce an in-depth description of the phenomena" (p. 1). As van Manen (1990) elaborates, phenomenological research investigates the lived experience of participants with a phenomenon. Phenomenological studies start and stop

with lived experience which should be a meaningful representation of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

The essential goal of phenomenology is to understand human experiences. One phenomenological approach is based on going beyond primary responses (Pringle, Hendry, & McLafferty, 2011). This allows the researcher to reach an account of common experiences that exceed mere facts (Jones, 2001). As van Manen (1997) indicated, all phenomenological approaches have an interpretive element. In this context, reduction and imaginative variation are important to reach the essence of the phenomenon. As Moustakas (1994) and Yuskel & Yildirim (2015) explain, reduction refers to cleaning the raw data, while imaginative variation helps with finding possible meanings by using imagination. One way to describe studies that use a phenomenological approach to interpret the results is using the term hermeneutical.

On the other hand, Yuskel and Yildrim (2015) indicate that one common phenomenological approach is based on putting the researchers' personal judgments aside when they conduct phenomenological studies as their stances should be free of bias through a process called epoché (pp. 6-7). However, since an interpretive phenomenological approach is considered in this study as mentioned above, the epoché process will not be considered. In fact, the background of the researcher in this study as a graduate Muslim student at the same institution and a recipient of religious microaggressions makes it impossible to use the epoché process. On the contrary, this background helped him gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, and provide interpretations that are authentic and accurate to a larger extent.

Qualitative research. Patton (2016) highlights that qualitative inquiry is personal, as the researcher's interest, background, experience, training, capacity for empathy, and cross-cultural sensitivity matter a lot. He confirms that "qualitative inquiry aims at getting an in-depth, individualized, and contextually sensitive understanding" of an event (p. 7). Glesne (2016) argues that qualitative researchers seek to make sense of actions and narratives, and the ways in which they intersect. She also maintains that through inquiry, researchers seek, interpret, and share others' perspectives as well as their own. Ravitch and Carl (2016) explain that qualitative research is inductive as the researcher builds concepts, hypotheses, and theories from contextualized data. It is descriptive and analytic and seeks complexity and contextualization. In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument who pays attention to the process and relationships.

Setting

This study was conducted at a public institution for higher education in the United States Midwest. The total enrollment on the main campus of this university is approximately 23,000 students and consists of approximately 18,000 undergraduate and 5,000 graduate students. During the Fall 2017 semester, there were approximately 1,500 international students. The institution in this study is located in a small rural town with a population of about 24,000 (Web Archive, 2018). Hence, it is described as a college town as the institution where the study is conducted is the largest employer in town. The county where the institution is located is in Appalachia. Its economy was once dependent on mining and now largely depends on the university, local farmers and business upstarts.

The poverty rate in this county is above 25% (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2019) which is double of the average poverty rate of the US of 12.3% (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Most of the interactions included in this study are set at the institution although occurred in the local community beyond the institution.

At the same time, this institution of higher education has a large number of student organizations and clubs, including among many others, a Muslim student association. In February 2017, university students organized a protest against the immigration ban issued by the Trump administration which resulted in the arrest of 70 protesters. Although this event may well be representative of a general attitude towards supporting students who belong to minorities, this does not necessarily mean that it is representative of all students. According to a discussion between university officials and Muslim students, several incidents occurred in which Muslim students were the target of discriminatory behavior or microaggressions that were not officially reported.

Sampling

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Muslim graduate students with microaggressions. Hence, it was important to select participants from that specific population to obtain the necessary data. Consequently, purposeful or purposive sampling was used. According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), in purposeful sampling, the researcher specifies the characteristics of a population of interest and then tries to locate the individuals who meet these characteristics.

Patton (2016) likewise argues in favor of purposeful sampling. One such method that he presents involves a group characteristics sampling strategy. Its purpose is to

"select cases to create a specific information-rich group that can reveal and illuminate important group patterns" (p. 283). The basic strategy that was used in this study is maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling. This strategy aims at "capturing and describing the central themes that cut across a great deal of variation" (Patton, 2016, p. 283).

Participants

According to Baker and Edwards (2012), a small number of interviews between six and twelve might be valuable and represents an adequate number for research projects that are related to hard to access populations. Four more participants were added to the maximum number that Baker and Edwards suggested to ensure that more diverse backgrounds would be considered and to ensure that the categories emerging from the collected data would be saturated. Graduate students were the focus of this study. The reason is that the interpretation of their data by the researcher, as a Muslim graduate student himself, will be more credible since he already had some personal experiences with religious microaggressions.

Sixteen graduate Muslim students were interviewed for this study. Six of the participants were male and ten were female. They came from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Iraq (Kurdistan), Iran, Ghana, the Gambia, Benin, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. Two of the participants were US citizens with an Arab Iraqi and Somali heritage. The participants studied in the departments of linguistics, math, education, chemistry, biology, media arts, international development, and communication. Most of the participants identified themselves as Muslim without referring to a specific sect. Only

two participants identified themselves as Sunni Muslims. Two of the female participants did not wear hijab, while the other women did. Although one participant wore hijab at the time she was interviewed, a few weeks later she was observed in public without hijab. The ages of the participants ranged between 22 and 38.

The participants were recruited through a direct request to participate in the study. As the researcher has been involved with the Muslim student association at the university since 2012 and served as its president during the 2017-18 academic year, he knew a large number of the Muslim students at the institution. The selection considered participants from diverse backgrounds including gender, race, ethnicity, immigration status, educational disciplines, and observed religious symbols.

These elements were considered when selecting the participants for the study to develop common themes that might exist across the various perspectives on their experiences.

TABLE 1. Participants Self-Reported Gender, Geographic Origins, Ethnicity, Age, Level of Education, Immigration Status; Observed Religious Symbols.

Pseudonym	Gender	Geographic Origin	Ethnicity	Age	Level of Education	Immigration Status	Observed Religious Symbols
Tareq	Male	Arabia	Saudi	24	MA	F1	No
Zainab	Female	Africa	Somali American	32	PhD	Citizen	Hijab
Ammar	Male	West Africa	Hausa/ Benin	27	MA	F1	No
Lamiaa	Female	Arabia	Yemeni	36	MA	J1	Hijab
Siwa	Female	Persia	Iranian	34	PhD	J1	Hijab/No hijab
Razan	Female	Asia	Indonesian /Ache	33	PhD	F1	Hijab
Arwa	Female	Asia	Indonesian / East Java	34	MA	F1	No Hijab
Amani	Female	Africa	Kotokoli/ Ghana	27	MA	F1	Hijab
Rashid	Male	West Asia	Banglades hi	30	MA	F1	No
Karma	Female	Asia	Indonesian / Buginese	34	PhD	J1	Hijab
Alaa	Male	Arab	Iraqi American	27	PhD	Citizen	No
Samuel	Male	Africa	Gambian	30	MA	F1	No
Minna	Female	Arabia	Saudi	32	PhD	F1	No Hijab
Suzan	Female	Kurdistan	Iraqi	38	PhD	J1	Hijab

Table 1 Continued

Halah	Female	Arabia	Egyptian	28	MA	J1	Hijab
Mujib	Male	Arabia	Saudi	30	PhD	F1	No

Data Collection

Interviews. According to Patton (2016), interviewing is a method of collecting data that extracts data that are hard to reveal through observations. One basic reason for conducting interviews is when a researcher cannot see or can no longer see events and experiences of interest (Glesne, 2016). Glesne (2016) suggests that perceptions and attitudes towards a specific topic can be the focus of an interview. She differentiates between structured, semi-structured, and unstructured or conversational interviews. In structured interviews, questions are created by the researcher fully before the interview. When a researcher adds to or replaces pre-established questions, the interview becomes semi-structured. In the third case, the unstructured interview, the researcher develops the questions contemporaneously. Phenomenological interviews were conducted with each interviewee to collect data about their experiences with religious microaggressions. Such interviews focus on the lived experiences of the participants and seek to evoke comprehensive accounts of these experiences (Patton, 2016, p. 433).

Standardized open-ended questions were used in the interviews. This type of interview questions is used "when it is important to minimize variations in the questions posed to interviewees" (Patton, 2016, p. 440). This type of questions also allows for more

flexibility to ask clarifying follow up questions or when important questions emerge during the interview. Glesne (2016) also recommends that researchers should not confuse research questions with interview questions. The first is about things that a researcher wants to understand, while the second is about generating the data needed to understand these things (Glesne, 2016). Each digitally recorded interview was conducted in a private room on campus and they lasted between 20 minutes and 1 hour and 25 minutes.

Interview protocol. An interview protocol was developed to examine the participants' experiences with religious microaggressions (See Appendix A). They were asked to self-identify their religion, gender, geographic origins, ethnicity, age, level of education, immigration status. In addition, observed religious symbols such as wearing *hijab* were reported by the researcher. Next, the participants were asked about their experiences on campus in general and the challenges they might have faced. Furthermore, they were asked directly about their experiences with religious microaggressions in different contexts. These contexts included whether they were discriminated against, felt uncomfortable, heard derogatory language, were devalued, felt physically or emotionally unsafe, or pressured to behave in a certain way because of their religion. They were also asked to describe given scenarios, how they reacted, and how they felt. Some of the example questions include: "Please discuss the challenges, if any, that you face on campus as a "Muslim" student. How do you navigate these situations?" and "Think about a time when and where you felt you have been blatantly or subtly, discriminated against because of your religion."

A pilot interview was conducted first to examine whether any changes were needed for the rest of the interviews. Some minor changes were made. However, these changes did not change the content of the questions as they met the purpose of the interview. Two questions about the religious identity and academic degree level were added to confirm they have the basic requirements needed for the study. Also, since most of the participants were international students, a list of synonyms was prepared to use in case a participant did not understand a keyword in the question. For example, for "blatantly", one synonym or more of the following list of words were often used: "clearly, obviously, overtly, unmistakable" and for "subtle," one synonym or more of the following list was "indirect, vague, slight." The protocol itself was not changed, but such lists were ready to use when a participant did not understand the question because of a word.

Positionality

The researcher is a Muslim who was born and raised in a Muslim family in a predominantly Muslim country. He came to the United States for the first time in 2009 and since has encountered some personal incidents of religious microaggressions. He served the president of the Muslim student organization at the institution of higher education where the study was conducted. This enabled him to communicate with many members in the graduate Muslim students' community.

In prior interactions, he learned that several had faced experiences with religious microaggressions. Hence, when he identified participants for this research study, he expected that most of them, if not all of them, would have had experiences with religious

microaggressions. The researcher knew all of the 16 participants for some period of time before preparing the research proposal. This is one reason why all of the participants readily agreed to participate in the interview and felt comfortable talking about their experiences with religious microaggressions. The religious background of the researcher helped with being able to express sympathy during the interview and with analyzing the data.

Furthermore, the researcher himself experienced religious microaggressions, and was aware that the majority of participants had some similar experiences. Hence, the researcher presumed he would find incidents of religious microaggressions in the data collected from the participants. At the same time, he used the interpretational element of the phenomenological research approach. This was crucial in deciding whether the incidents were microaggressions, whether they were religious, and under which theme they should be included.

Data Analysis

Framework. This study sought to explore the experiences of graduate Muslim students with religious microaggressions, its impact, and the students' coping strategies. It aligned with the themes of religious microaggressions developed by Nadal et al. (2010, 2012). These themes include: stereotyping Muslims as terrorists, pathologizing Islam, assuming religious homogeneity, exoticizing Islam or Muslims, Islamophobic or mocking language, alienation, assuming one's own religious identity as the norm, and denying of religious prejudice. All of these themes were discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

For impacts, this study considered the following themes: internalizing Islamophobic stereotypes, creating feelings of exclusion, subclinical paranoia, constant vigilance, feelings of pressure to represent the group, feelings of inferiority, negative self-schema, feeling of and powerlessness and hopelessness (Berk, 2017; Davis et al., 2016; Edwards, 2010; Sue, 2010a, 2010b).

Finally, this research considered the following themes as coping strategies: normalizing/legitimizing, turning a situation into a teaching moment/confronting the deliverer, assimilation, protective coping/doing nothing, rescuing the offender, spirituality, and collective coping (Hernandez et al., 2010; Houshmand et al., 2017; Hunt, 2014; Lewis et al., 2012; Sue, 2010a).

Coding and analyzing. Each interview was transcribed. In a deductive analysis, data are fitted into an existing framework, while in an inductive analysis, themes are identified as they emerge from transcriptions of the interviews, (Patton, 2016, p. 541). Data analysis in this research study was based on a deductive process in order to find themes that fit the existing frameworks. However, new themes were added as well through an inductive process. Data analysis included identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling patterns and themes which emerged from the data (Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe this process as unitizing which refers to breaking the data down into "the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself" (p. 345).

Data analysis also included cross-case pattern analysis. This is "the description of actions, perceptions, experiences, relationships, and behaviors that are similar enough to

be considered a manifestation of the same thing" (Patton, 2016, p. 551). This supports the inductive analysis process. Furthermore, the generated themes were compared to each other. Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe this process as the constant comparative method. In this method, codes are compared to the "previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category" (p. 106). In this process, continuous revision, modification, and amendment are conducted until each incident can be assigned to the appropriate category.

Since this is a phenomenological study, elements that are not directly within the conscious experience of the participants were eliminated. This required reducing the data to meaning units, which are words or phrases that describe themes within a phenomenon. During phenomenological reduction, "the researcher eliminates overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions. Phenomenological reduction involves "cleaning the raw data" (Yuksel and Yildirim, 2015, p. 7). This is followed by an imaginative variation through which structural themes are derived. As Moustakas (1994) describes it, "the task of imaginative variation is to seek possible meaning through the utilization of imagination" (p. 85).

With that considered, the steps of phenomenological data analysis, as detailed by Yuksel and Yildirim (2015), were followed. These steps included listing all relevant experiences, reduction of experiences, thematic clustering, comparing themes to literature, describing experiences using verbatim excerpts, imaginative variation, constructing composite structural description, and synthesizing the narratives of the group as a whole (Yuksel and Yildirim, 2015, pp. 5-6).

Trustworthiness

According to Glesne (2016), qualitative research must seek connections between trustworthiness and reflexivity which is an awareness of self in the situation of action. She argues that reflexive thought requires inquiry into the trustworthiness of methods, interpretations, and representations. It is mainly, as Glesne explains, about how the researcher knows that his or her interpretation of the collected data is right.

Data collected from the interviews were interpreted and categorized through a framework that was developed from Nadal et al. (2010, 2012). Nadal's et al.'s 2010 themes addressed religious microaggressions in general, while the 2012 themes specifically addressed Muslims. Themes derived from both studies included: endorsing stereotypes about Muslims; pathologizing the Muslim religion; assuming religious homogeneity; exoticizing Islam or Muslims; Islamophobic or mocking language; alienation, denying religious prejudice.

Patton (2016) states that the credibility of qualitative work depends on four elements: systematic, in-depth fieldwork that yields high quality data; systematic and conscientious analysis of data with attention to issues of credibility; credibility of the inquirer, which depends on training, experience, track records, status, and presentation of self; and readers' and users' philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry (p. 653). Each participant was asked to respond to the same questions to ensure systemic data collection.

In the same context, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that credibility depends on the degree to which the interpretations by a qualitative researcher are "credible to the

constructors of the original multiple realities" (p. 296). Hence, they proposed four criteria

for judging the soundness of qualitative research and explicitly offered these as an

alternative to more traditional quantitatively-oriented criteria. According to Krefting

(1990), Lincoln and Guba argued that their four criteria "better reflect the underlying

assumptions involved in qualitative research. They presented credibility as an alternative

to internal validity; transferability as an alternative to external validity; dependability as

an alternative to reliability; and confirmability as an alternative to objectivity" (p. 216).

Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggest that Lincoln and Guba's standards can be used to

assess validity in qualitative research. To them, *credibility* is "the researcher's ability to

take into account all of the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal

with patterns that are not easily explained" (p. 188). One reason the researcher is credible

because he is a graduate Muslim student who has had personal experiences with religious

microaggressions. The second criterion, *transferability,* which is "the way in which

qualitative studies can be applicable or transferable to broader contexts while still

maintaining their context-specific richness" (p. 189). This study is transferable as it can

be conducted among any other similar communities in a higher institution of education.

The third criterion, *dependability*, entails that the researcher has a reasoned argument for

how he or she is collecting the data, and that the data are consistent with his or her

argument. This notion also means that "data are dependable in the sense that they are

answering (the) research question(s)" (p. 189). To meet this criterion, this research study

included in-depth semi-structured interviews. Finally, the fourth criterion, *confirmability*,

means that the research findings should be able to be confirmed by the scholarly community.

Delimitations

A delimitation of this study was that all participants were graduate students at an institution of higher education in the United States' Midwest. There are other populations of Muslims within institutions of higher education context that were not examined. These populations include undergraduate students, faculty and staff, Muslims who cover their faces or wear *a niqab (*a cover of all or part of the face – See Appendix C). and more Muslim students who are US citizens. These populations need to be examined to get a more comprehensive picture of the different types of microaggressions experienced by Muslim students, faculty, and staff.

Another delimitation is the short time available to conduct the study. The researcher had only one hour of direct communication with each participant to explore their experiences with microaggressions. It might have been difficult for some participants to remember so the incidents they had encountered. While they might have recalled some incidents, they might have forgotten some other perhaps even more powerful incidents.

A third delimitation was limiting data collection to individual interviews. The purpose was to allow the participants to be comfortable to share sensitive information or experiences. However, focus-group interview data might have yielded additional findings.

Limitations

The primary question of this research study was about investigating the experiences of graduate Muslim students with religious microaggressions. The data generated from the interviews sufficed to answer this question. There were two secondary research questions about the impact of microaggressions and the coping strategies used by the participants. Although there was some data that helped generate responses to both questions, the central focus of this study remained on the experiences themselves. The reason for this focus was that the research was aimed at examining the topic from an educator's perspective to help reduce experiences with microaggressions and hence create a more inclusive educational environment. The interviews were designed to specifically examine the impact of microaggressions and subsequent coping strategies.

A second limitation was that the participants might not have reported all incidents of religious microaggressions they have experienced. Most were not familiar with the concept of microaggressions, and that the one-hour long interviews may have been too short for them to grasp the concept and recall all or most of the incidents they might have encountered.

Another limitation is the gender imbalance among the participants as ten were female and six were male. In the same context, one difference to be considered between the two populations is that females wearing hijab are instantly identifiable as Muslims. This imbalance made it difficult to decide whether specific types of microaggressions were due to gender or simply because they were easily identifiable as Muslims. The imbalance extended to the number of participants with US citizenship as well as only two

participants were US citizens. Furthermore, 14 of the 16 participants did not express whether they were Sunni and Sha'aite. Only two participants expressed they were Sunni Muslims, while the others simply referred to themselves as Muslim. Although two of the participants were known to the researcher to be Shi'ite, they did not express such and it did not seem to have influenced their responses.

 A final limitation was not including an important category of participants, which was graduate students who wear a *niqab*, or a cloth that covers part or all of the face. It differs from *hijab*, as *hijab* is used in this study to refer to covering the hair only (See Appendix C). The reason for not accessing this group is the cultural sensitivities that hindered them from having a face to face individual interviews with a male stranger.

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting this research study, the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was received. The researcher wanted to make sure no risks would affect the participants. All participants were required to sign a consent form which explained the purpose of the study, that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point during the interview. They were also informed that after the interview they could request their data not to be included.

The researcher also made sure to respect the privacy of the participants, and to ensure the confidentiality of their identities. For this reason, all participants were assigned a pseudonym. In addition, details about their respective departments were not included.

Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive review of the methodology used to complete this study as well as a justification for a qualitative methodology. Semi-structured individual interviews were used to collect data about experiences with religious microaggressions from 16 graduate Muslim students. The reason for selecting this methodology was to allow the participants to feel comfortable revealing controversial and sensitive information. The researcher's role, the data analysis process, trustworthiness, delimitations, and limitations, as well as ethical considerations, were discussed. Chapter Four will present the findings of this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study aimed at exploring the experience of graduate Muslim students at an institution of higher education in the US Midwest with religious microaggressions, how they are impacted by such experiences, and what strategies they use to cope with religious microaggressions. Sixteen graduate Muslim graduate students were interviewed for this study. Six of the participants were male and ten were female. They came from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Iraq (Kurdistan), Iran, Ghana, the Gambia, Benin, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. Two of the participants were US citizens with Arab Iraqi and Somali heritages. After reviewing the interviews conducted with 16 participants, the data was reduced. All participants reported having experienced incidents of religious microaggressions of one type or the other. Themes emerged and can be grouped into three categories. These categories are (1) experiences with religious microaggressions, (2) the impact of microaggressions, and (3) strategies used to cope with microaggressions. The themes under these categories respond to the research questions:

1. *How do graduate Muslim students at an institution of higher education in the Midwest experience microaggressions as targets?*

2. *How are graduate Muslim students impacted by microaggressions?*

3. *What strategies do graduate Muslim students use to cope with impacts resulting from microaggressions?*

Experiences with Religious Microaggressions

In response to the first and primary question of this research study, "*How do graduate Muslim students at an institution of higher education in the Midwest experience*

microaggressions as targets?", twelve themes emerged as experiences with religious microaggressions. Eight of these themes already existed in the prior research literature. These are: (1) Endorsing religious stereotypes, including four sub-themes, (a) terrorism, (b) oppression of women, (c) dishonesty, (d) hatred, (e) closed-mindedness, (2) Islamophobic and mocking language, (3) Pathology of Muslim religion, (4) Incidents in the public, (5) Exoticization, (6) Assumption of homogeneity, (7) Assumption on one's identity as the norm, and (8) Alienation. Although the first theme of endorsing religious stereotypes exists in the prior research literature, only one subtheme "terrorism" existed; the other four subthemes were new. Four new themes emerged; they are: (9) Infrastructural microaggressions, including five sub-themes, (a) prayers, (b) halal food, (c) alcohol, (d) the university facilities, (e) Muslim celebrations, (10) Microaggressions because of national events, (11) Microaggressions resulting from institutional interactions, and (12) Enforcing one's identity or explanation of religion. Table 2 illustrates the number of incidents attached to each theme and the gender identity of the targets.

Table 2: Incidents of Religious Microaggressions

	Theme	No. of Incidents*	Male	Female
Existing Themes	1. Endorsing religious stereotypes			
	a. Terrorism	4	1	2
	b. Oppression of women	5	2	3
	c. Dishonesty	2	1	1
	d. Hatred	1	0	1
	e. Closed-mindedness	2	1	1
	2. Islamophobic and mocking language	9	2	4
	3. Pathology of the Muslim religion	9	2	5
	4. Incidents in the public	7	1	4
	5. Exoticization	6	1	4
	6. Assumption of homogeneity	6	0	4
	7. Assumption of one's identity as the norm	5	1	4
	8. Alienation	4	1	2
New Themes	9. Infrastructural microaggressions			
	a. Prayer	15	5	8
	b. Halal food	6	1	3
	c. Alcohol	6	2	4
	d. University facilities	3	1	2
	e. Muslim celebrations	1	0	1
	10. Microaggressions because of national events	12	2	5
	11. Microaggressions resulting from institutional interactions	10	2	5

Table 2 Continued

12. Enforcing one's identity or explanation of religion	5	0	4
Total No. of Incidents	118		

* Some participants experienced more than one incident. Hence, the number of incidents might exceed the total number of participants within each theme.

Endorsing religious stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. Connecting terrorism with Islam and Muslims was a stereotype that Nadal et al. (2012) included as an independent theme. The participants in this study identified terrorism as a stereotype. Other stereotypes they identified included oppressing women, dishonesty, and hating others who believe in other religions. These were 12 incidents in total.

Terrorism. This means endorsing the stereotype that the majority of Muslims are terrorists. One participant wondered why Islamic political movements are considered terrorist while other movements that are not related to Islam are described as activism and sometimes revolutionary when some violence is included. Another reported a comment on a Facebook post by the Muslim Student Association at the university which included photos of a social gathering captioned with "Terrorists." The same participant who was a member of the Association expressed his discomfort with an annual 9/11 march ending at the Islamic center in town. Mujib said,

> I felt I have to be there because I am Muslim. If I was not Muslim, I think I was not going to be there because of the whole idea. Some people who considered themselves to be Muslims did it, but it doesn't mean I did it. I know people are trying to take away the tragedy to give a new experience that now we are together,

but it gives a feeling that they are reminding themselves that we did it each time they end at the Islamic center. Why don't they start from there and end it somewhere else? We did not do it. I did not do it, and I don't have to say, "Hey, we did not do it."

Minna related an experience her daughter had at her school.

She told me, "Mom, I hate school." I asked, "Why?" She replied, "Because in the social studies class, the teacher showed a video about 9/11 and ISIS." Three of her friends, boys, looked at her. One of them left. She told me, "I was uncomfortable sitting there. I hate the class. I hate school.

Oppression of women. This stereotype maintains that women are oppressed in Muslim communities either due to religious teachings and/or controlling men.

Razan was talking about how she planned to go home after finishing her Ph.D. when she was asked, "How are you going to adapt when you go home? You are already free here." Whoever asked the question assumed that she would not be free in her home country.

Karma also shared her experience with a panelist who came to participate in a discussion about hijab during World Hijab Day. She said,

We wanted to discuss the format of the discussion, and the purpose of the event was to support women who chose to wear hijab. But she said "I don't agree with you, and I am against it. And I don't want to frame because it will restrict my freedom of speech.

The panelist in question was not wearing hijab and came from a predominantly Muslim country. She was invited to discuss the diversity of Muslim women. However, the discussion changed from supporting those who chose to wear hijab to whether the act itself of wearing hijab was right or wrong, and how it implies women's oppression.

The third incident can be related to the second one even though it happened at an institutional level. World Hijab Day was sponsored by offices and departments at the university. Many of the female attendees who showed up to provide support wore hijab as a sign of solidarity. However, some of the sponsors after this incident decided to stop their sponsorship because they claimed that support for women who wear hijab might offend those who chose not to wear it or those who were not Muslims. As Mujib who was involved in the preparation for the next annual event explained,

> One of the faculty members said, "I don't know if I am going to wear hijab this time.", because of the women that came last year. It feels like they say hijab is controlling women. They said, "We are offending women who don't wear hijab."

This reflects an inaccurate evaluation by some parties who represent the university and can be considered a setback in supporting this specific minority of women who choose to wear hijab.

Closed-mindedness. In general, this refers to the notion that Muslims are not flexible when it comes to some modern activities, including activism and medical examinations. For example, there is a claim that a Muslim woman who wears hijab cannot be a rights activist or a feminist, and that Muslim men do not allow doctors see the private parts of their wives and female relatives.

Halah said,

> I get a lot of questions from students, about hijab and me working … I don't know why people don't understand the idea of being a feminist and a women's rights defender and wearing hijab and being religious.

The questions being asked are a reflection of the stereotype that Muslim women who choose to wear hijab are against women's rights and consequently cannot defend them.

Another participant, Samuel, said,

A speaker was talking about Muslim communities, and stated, "If you go on campaigns to talk to women about cervical cancer, there are men, like Imams, who don't allow them because they don't accept another person sees their wives' private parts." I felt she really did not know what she was talking about, and that she was just making noise.

This is an example of how stereotypes are reaffirmed. The speakers talked about an incident as if everybody in that specific community was doing the same and gave the impression that Muslims in different communities are behaving likewise.

Dishonesty. This indicates that Muslims who were raised in Muslim communities are liars and/or cheaters. As Halah narrated,

We had a fight, me and my roommate who was a graduate student, and she told me that "Yes, I know where you are coming from, and your culture and your religion, you say stuff and you don't do it. You are not that truthful.

Halah could have been a liar or not, but when she fought with her roommate, the roommate chose to connect what she considered to be a lie to the culture and religion of the participant. However, telling lies is not necessarily a result of believing in a specific religion.

Alaa related how a candidate for a teaching job in his department commented on Muslim students,

Since she was from a predominantly Muslim country, during the interview, we mentioned how "We have a good population of Muslim students in our department," and she said that she did not like Muslim students as all of them are

cheaters or whatever. She was being interviewed to be a professor. Thankfully, she did not get the job.

The interviewee made the instantaneous statement that Muslim students are cheaters. Cheaters can be Muslims or can belong to any religion or believe in no religion at all. However, the applicant made the statement that all Muslim students are cheaters. This can even go beyond stereotyping to discrimination.

Hatred. This stereotype suggests that Islam and Muslims promote hatred against those who do not believe in Islam. Minna related an incident with her neighbor who was also her children's teacher. She said,

> She had a question. She did not tell me directly that the question was coming from her, but she told me that her husband told her that there was something in the Qur'an that they hate Christians, and if anyone was not Muslim, they should kill them. And I told her "No!" Go home and ask your husband where he found this, highlight it, and bring it with you tomorrow. And then I told her, "If you go to the Islamic center, you can get an English version of the Qur'an and read it. If you find it, highlight it and come talk to me.

The teacher used the Holy Book of Muslims, the Qur'an, to confirm the stereotype that Muslims hate those who are not. Although the teacher had known Minna for a while and there had been no signs that Minna hated her, she still accepted the notion that Muslims hate non-Muslims. The teacher did not also clarify whether her friend read this directly in the Qur'an, or whether someone interpreted or told her about it. This is how stereotypes are typically affirmed.

Islamophobic and mocking language. This theme involves instances in which people make fun of a religion or the believers of this religion or describe it as something that should be feared (Nadal et al., 2012). Six participants experienced situations that can

be described as Islamophobic or that included mocking remarks. Language was not the only medium of communication, as those Islamophobic attitudes were conveyed through specific behaviors and body language as well.

Three female participants with hijab reported that they were screamed at by car passengers in different locations across town. They could not tell what the screamers were saying specifically. The three participants were international students attending classes at the university. Karma narrated,

> I usually take my son with me and go to pick up my other son on the street. A couple of times, a car stops, and they screamed hard to me, and my son cried. I did not know what they said.

A disparaging behavior could be in the form of someone spitting beside the target. One female participant who wears a hijab narrated a similar situation while she was at a local restaurant. As Halah said:

> I was eating and sitting by myself. I was next to the trash can, and one of the students, I think, he came and he threw the trash and then he spit on the floor beside me, and then left. His friends were laughing, and they went away. I did not understand what was happening.

Islamophobic remarks could be made as funny comments or as statements during casual discussions. Tareq shared his experience of being stopped at airports. His colleague said: "Yeah, sometimes they wanna keep the bad people outside of the country." Tareq said that he "felt as if she was saying okay, they are trying to keep the terrorists away. I wasn't comfortable with the way she said it, and the look that she had on her face."

The same participant also received a mocking remark when he took a driving test. As he was having a conversation with the officer about some test takers who come from specific countries in the Middle East, the officer said: "You guys better watch your bags." The message that the participant received was, "So it's dangerous for me to leave my bag, as he was just putting it in a context like just bring your bag because you are an Arab." Islamophobic remarks are made to justify voting for a specific individual to become the US president. As Samuel stated,

> There was a guy who offered to buy us alcohol, and we told him we don't drink. So we continued to play pool and talking with him and told him that we are Muslims, and he was like, "Really? There are problems with Muslims and that's why we voted for Trump. You guys are Muslims? But you don't have the turbans!"

Pathologizing Islam. This theme refers to the conscious or subconscious belief that there is something wrong about the religion of Islam (Nadal et al., 2010). This includes describing Muslims as bad people or that wearing hijab or fasting is wrong, or even highlighting what is believed and described by a public speaker to be mistaken in the religion of Islam or in the Holy Book of Muslims. About half of the participants reported incidents in which Islam was pathologized in some way.

Suzan described two incidents her daughter faced at school. The first incident occurred when her daughter's teacher showed a video about 9/11 and stated that it was Muslims who did this and that they were bad people. The second incident occurred when the same teacher read a book to the class and criticized Islam. As Suzan said,

> The book is about a child that was tortured in Sudan when the north and south were fighting. The teacher was reading the book in a way that we as Muslims are

so unfair to women. We are torturing whoever is not Muslim. We force people to be Muslim. We kill all Christian people. My daughter said the book did not say Islam was bad or anything, but the teacher did." Eventually, students came to [my] daughter and told her "We know Muslims are bad, but you are a good example."

Rashid described how he felt when a speaker was talking about Islam. He said,

The talk was organized by a university organization, and the speaker was pointing fingers to mistakes in Islam, the Holy Qur'an, and the Prophet. He said that we should be careful about accepting everything in Islam. He said that we should forsake the medieval beliefs for the sake of science and technology.

Amani also talked about how her friend from Africa country converted to Christianity and kept arguing that Islam is a bad religion, "He is constantly like, Muslims are aggressive. Look at all these issues around the world." Minna reported how a teacher told her daughter at school, "Did you know, your religion is completely wrong?" Mujib related an incident in which missionaries visited him at home and in seeing his wife in hijab said, "It is not supposed to be that way. It is too much."

Incidents in the public. This category refers to incidents that happen in public areas, including at airports, on public transportation, or on the street. In general, these incidents occur off campus. Six participants reported that they experienced some type of microaggression in the form of extensive checking at the airport or being humiliated on public transportation or on the street. Halah, for example, was on a bus to Cleveland and was having a conversation with her friend in Arabic when,

One lady came out of nowhere, and she kept shouting at us that we should not be speaking our fucking language, and that we should be speaking in English because we are in the United States. When we started replying to her, no one intervened, and she said she would slap us in the face.

This incident was an obvious attack. One factor was the physical appearance of Halah

and her friend as they both wore hijab. This example could also be themed under

enforcing one's identity. Halah also shared her experiences at the airport and how she

now hates airports.

> I hate airports in the United States. I have traveled through airports in six countries. I haven't been humiliated except for in the United States. One time they searched a family with a member with hijab and they searched me individually. They found a packet of biscuits which I brought from Kroger, they told me I had to open it. I told him, "Fine." The officer, who was African American, took it from me and threw it away on the floor.

This official's reaction was clearly humiliating and as an international student, Halah

thought she could not react in any way.

Exoticization. This theme includes considering a religion as foreign to a given

country. In one case, it is considering Islam as a religion foreign to the USA. The theme

as explained by Nadal et al. (2012) includes asking multiple and excessive questions

about a religion or some of its practices. Five participants narrated situations in which

they were asked questions about their practices. Two were asked about why they wore

hijab or a scarf on their heads. One participant was asked about fasting and for how long.

Another participant asked her host to say the prayer. When she was done, the host started

asking her questions. As Arwa described it:

> So I needed to pray, and hoped it was not weird. It was on Christmas Day actually, because they wanted to just gather. And after I prayed, he said, can I ask you questions about praying? Why did you do this, and what is the benefit for you and all of these things. But it was never like an attack, it was just questioning and really curiosity I would say rather than attack.

Exoticization can also include situations in which statements are made that Islam does not belong in specific cultures. Ammar referred to a discussion with a friend who described both Islam and Christianity as foreign to Africans.

> So there is someone who asked me why we Africans like this religion so much, Christianity and Muslim, that we are neglecting our traditional religion that was there before the arrival of Christianity or Islam.

Exoticization can also be extreme. For example, considering Christianity and Judaism as normal religions in the USA, and assuming the right to talk about both while considering Islam a strange religion and denying a Muslim the right to talk about Christianity and Judaism. As Lamiaa narrated:

> It was an interfaith session about how women are treated in different religions. And because we had a Jewish community in our country, and I could see how they were treated, I made a general statement about how the Abrahamic religions treat women the same. All of the sudden, a woman jumped and said: "Don't generalize! Don't speak on our behalf."

Mocking language can also be expressed in academic settings by using unnecessary examples about Muslims to explain the content. A female participant who did not wear hijab reported that a professor talked negatively about Muslims in her class about six times. Whenever the professor mentioned the word Muslim, she looked directly at her. As Minna narrated,

> The professor mentioned an example about a Muslim guy who found out his wife was cheating or something and she's Muslim, and the professor said I think according to the principles of Islam, they always want to be perfect, but sometimes they do the opposite things. For me, it's not even related to the subject which was behavior management.

Assumption of homogeneity. This type of microaggressions happens when others assume that all members of a specific group, such as Muslims, all share the same experiences. Individual differences and backgrounds are not considered (Nadal et al., 2012). The participants reported five incidents that can be identified as incidents of assuming homogeneity. One participant was assumed she couldn't drive, because until recently, women were not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia. Razan was told, "But you guys are not allowed to drive. Women cannot drive in your country." That was a wrong assumption because it was the only country that had this condition and the participant was from another country.

Other assumptions included that all Muslim women are forced to wear hijab, or that all Muslim women wear hijab, or that all Muslim women who choose to wear hijab wear it the same way, or that wearing hijab is not compatible with human rights. For example, Minna who does not wear hijab, stated, "When I tell them I am from Saudi Arabia, they look at me like, Oh, really? Are you sure you are from Saudi Arabia? Why don't you cover your head?" The assumption here was that all Muslim women wear hijab or that all Muslim women from a specific country should all be wearing hijab. The fact is there are many Muslim women who choose not to wear hijab.

Assumption of one's identity as the norm. This microaggression occurs when individuals assume that others around them belong to their own faith and follow the same exact habits. Because the United States is considered a predominantly Christian country, people sometimes forget that there are other world religions (Nadal, 2008). The participants in this study reported five incidents in which individuals assumed they

followed their faith. These individuals were surprised when the participants stated they did not drink or have a boyfriend or wanted to go to the mosque. They also assumed that only one type of clothing was acceptable for all students. One example was offered by Arwa, "Some friends would be like, "Oh, you don't drink? Why?" You know they would just kind of think you are weird or something like that. I do remember being asked why I don't drink, or why I don't eat pork." Another example is when Minna related a situation that happened to her daughter at school, "Because my daughter doesn't have a boyfriend, her friends think she is stupid. Sometimes they ask her if she is lesbian. They assume this is the only reason she is not interested in boys."

Alienation. As Sue et al. (2007) have explained, many individuals who are born or have lived a significant amount of their lives in the US are treated as if they do not belong or as foreigners. Two of the 16 participants were US citizens and both related incidents in which they were treated as if they were alien residents.

As Zainab explained,

At the graduate office, I needed to submit a document. When it was my turn, I went to the desk and she was like, "Okay, international student," and she grabs the form and hands it to me and I am like, "No, I am domestic."

The official assumed that Zainab was international because she was not white, and because she wore a scarf. She subconsciously gave her the international student form instead of first checking.

Alaa also experienced a similar incident, "In my first year I went back to Iraq. At the time, someone has pointed out, what if I have problems getting a visa coming back. I

was, "Oh no, no, no. I am a US citizen." Although this participant had lived in the US most of his life and acquired US citizenship, he was still treated as a foreigner.

Infrastructural microaggressions. This theme includes types of microaggressions that exist because of the nature ofa university infrastructure, including its operating system, facilities, and academic calendar, as these oftentimes do not accommodate for the religious needs of Muslim students. In the majority of the cases discussed, no person was specifically involved but rather the infrastructure as a whole. This includes praying times and locations, the availability of halal food, gathering at places where providing alcohol is the only main service being offered as part of the service, and recreation facilities not accommodating women who wear hijab.

Praying. Observing Muslims are required to perform five prayers each day. These prayers are distributed during the day time depending on the position of the sun. Each prayer has a range of time with a beginning and ending during which the prayer should be performed. Each prayer takes from three to ten minutes. The first prayer starts at dawn. The second one occurs when the sun passes its zenith. The third occurs when the shadow of an object is the same as the object itself. The fourth starts at sunset while the fifth starts when the red line is gone from the west side in the sky. The prayer includes bowing in which the forehead touches the floor many times depending on the length of the prayer. Friday prayer, which happens at the second prayer time every week, is the special prayer of the week that male Muslims are highly recommended to attend. Male Muslims can pray anywhere where it is clean, while females need to be out of sight. Usually, they

prefer to pray in specified places such a mosque to avoid curious looks or being considered odd if they perform it in a public area.

Ablution or "Wodhou" is required before prayer as it represents minor cleaning so the prayer can be correct. Nearly all participants complained about encountering difficulties with praying. These difficulties include having an appropriate place to pray, having class at the time of Friday (Jumu'ah) prayer or during class at other times, and the difficulty to clean oneself before prayer. The following are some quotes from the participants:

Halah stated,

My only problem is praying. I want to pray, and I don't find a place. The only place here is in the library, but my classes are far, and I don't have the time. So I pray wherever, but it's not comfortable for me because I am a woman, and I should be praying in a private place.

Rashid also mentioned,

One challenge is the time and place of my prayers. On Friday, the campus is not closed like our country, and sometimes even during classes, there is no break. I cannot tell I have the prayer, and I feel troubled. The other problem is the space for prayer. There is one mosque close to the university, and if you want to do a prayer inside an academic building you don't find a place.

In the same context, Suzan related,

Sometimes praying is difficult, especially when you want to do ablution. Sometimes, they come to the bathroom, and they see me washing my face. Immediately they ask me if I am ok. I answer yes, I am ok.

Samuel also narrated,

I have a course that I need to take to graduate, but the course is on Friday, Jumu'ah, prayer time. So throughout the semester, I didn't attend Jumu'ah prayers.

And Arwa mentioned,

I pray in my office. But I feel worried if I am praying and somebody walks into the office. I do feel that slight fear that people would think I am weird or something like that.

Halal food. According to the Halal Food Authority, halal an Arabic word that meaning that it is permissible or allowed. For meat to be halal, the animal or poultry needs to be slaughtered alive by a Muslim or someone from "People of the Book," i.e. Christians and Jews (See Appendix C). Eating pork or consuming any food that is made with it is prohibited for Muslims. This theme is related to the non-availability or scarcity of halal food in the dining halls affiliated with the university or in town. It also includes being invited sometimes to events at the university where the only type of meat provided is pork. The majority of the participants reported having difficulty finding halal food. The following are some quotes.

Zainab mentioned,

There aren't really many options for halal food here. Walmart started selling halal chicken, but it is always expensive. If I want steak, they don't have steak. So I have to adapt my options for halal food.

Rashid also stated,

When I eat at a restaurant, I usually ask if the meat is pork or beef. I cannot tell by just looking at it. I have to ask.

Razan related,

When they have programs, and we are there as Muslims. They buy pizza, but all pepperoni. This is offending you know!

And Amani said,

One of the challenges here is food. When you look for meat, you look for halal meat, but you hardly see anything that is halal.

Alcohol. Drinking alcohol is prohibited for Muslims. Some Muslim students follow even more restrictive guidelines, including not being physically close to alcohol. Thus, being invited to gatherings arranged at bars can be extremely inconvenient for them. The theme is related to having most of the social gatherings related to academic programs scheduled at places where the primary product is alcohol or alcohol is included on the menu at university events. In many cases, this is not convenient for Muslim students. More than half of the participants reported incidents in which they were invited to such gatherings. They did not feel comfortable. By not attending, they felt they lost some academic benefits such as connecting with professors and mentors, being introduced to grants and professional opportunities, and so on. The following are some representative quotes from the participants.

Zainab said,

In the first year in the doctoral program, there were social gatherings arranged by the department. Their meeting locations were always at a bar. It's against my religion to drink alcohol. I don't feel safe, nor [do I] ever want to attend or go to a bar. And they're like, 'Oh, well, we didn't know this'.

Alaa also mentioned,

One of the challenges is drinking. Even, my department, even professors and graduate students, they will go out to a bar or whatever. And we even have little events here on campus, where we have a seminar with a guest speaker. In the end, they might have cheese, crackers, and wine.

Minna stated as well,

We cannot drink beer or anything. A department invited me once to a bar. At the beginning, I didn't know the invitation was to a bar. But after I went there, it was

my first time. I just ordered Sprite, and then left after 15 minutes. I did not want to be rude, but I [also] did not want to stay because of the alcohol.

The university facilities. This theme includes the lack of access to some facilities at the university because of religious reasons. These facilities include the gymnasium and the swimming pool. Restrooms were also mentioned once. Two female participants mentioned how they wanted to use the gymnasium but they were not able to do so because they felt awkward covering most of their body parts while being there and because they did not feel comfortable exercising in a place that is shared with male students.

As Siwa explained,

It is difficult for me to use the gym. It's a little hard because you have to cover yourself and then go to the gym. Maybe sometimes if you are covering yourself, you will be judged by some person. Sometimes it's the way they are looking at me. I think for them it's a little weird.

Suzan expressed how she was not able to use the swimming pool: "I very much love swimming. I can't swim because it's all mixed." Another participant explained how it might be difficult sometimes for Muslim students to use the restroom because many of Muslim students need private access to water for a cleansing ritual.

As Samuel stated,

In the bathrooms here, there is no provision for water, for example. As a Muslim, I would need water. I have to go to the waste bin to get a bottle to clean. If you are building a structure for students who come from all over the world, you should consider their different backgrounds, including Muslim students.

Muslim celebrations. This includes the university not recognizing Muslim holidays and that all Muslim students, if they want to celebrate, have to contact their

professors individually to seek permission. However, when permission is given, they often end up missing the content.

As Razan expressed,

I feel sad sometimes when I need to celebrate Eid. Why do not they give us some time to celebrate the Muslim days at the university level? I feel sometimes, I have to run to the class or something, even though the professor will excuse us from attending on that day.

Microaggressions because of national events. This theme includes incidents in which the participants experienced microaggressions because of national events circulated in the media as well as sometimes in direct contact with others. The participants referenced 12 incidents in which they felt there was bias against Muslims in the media or on certain dates like 9/11, or in the aftermath of some national political events such as the presidential elections or the travel ban resolution. For example, Lamiaa related how the travel ban affected her, "The administrative ban of Trump prevented me from visiting Yemen. Everyone was recommending because there was no guarantee I could come back. I felt like being held in a cage, in a golden prison." Although the ban did not target her personally, she was influenced by it and consequently felt she could not travel because she was afraid she would not be allowed to return to the United States. Zainab gave another example when she expressed how she felt about Donald Trump's election in 2016, "There were moments where I felt unsafe. The day that Trump was elected as president, that night and the day after I stayed home because I knew I would not be safe on campus." While none of the participants had any direct

interaction with Trump or any of his supporters, his Islamophobic remarks and the fact

that he won, made the participants fearful of appearing in public.

Incidents also happened on 9/11. As Razan recalled, "On 9/11 remembrance, I got

a lot of screaming on the streets a few times." While she did not explain what the

screaming was about, she clearly recalled that the screams were connected to this special

day.

Microaggressions resulting from institutional interactions. This category

includes incidents in which the participants experienced microaggressions in different

contexts at the university in direct contact with professors, administrators, or leaders in

the classroom, during university gatherings, or on campus in general. The participants

reported ten incidents in which they felt they experienced microaggressions in some way.

One participant reported that her professor dealt harshly with her. As Suzan, who was

wearing hijab, explained, "I took a class with a professor, and I thought she was harsh

with me. When I went to her to ask for clarifications, she kind of shouted at me."

Although the professor never commented on that, Suzan could not think of any other

reason for the harsh treatment except for the scarf she put on, especially since no one else

was treated the way she was.

Another incident occurred when a professor selected an assignment of a

participant and decided to share and discuss it with the rest of the class. As Karma

narrated,

> The professor said, "We are going to discuss your assignment in class." She
> printed a copy of my whole paper to everyone. The professor did not ask for

my permission. She did not explain why her assignment was discussed in public. No other assignments were discussed.

Karma was not sure why the professor did this or whether it was her intention to criticize her assignment in public. She thought that this action by the professor was unusual as no other classmates' assignments were chosen.

Another incident occurred when some of the university departments stopped their support for an event dedicated to women who wear hijab. As Mujib explained, "For the past two years, we had co-sponsors for World Hijab Day. All of the sudden, they decided to back off without giving very good reasons." The reason behind stopping this support was unclear. Mujib interpreted this decision as backing off from supporting this group of Muslim women.

One last example occurred during a gathering to celebrate diversity and encourage inclusion. As Halah narrated,

> One of the students was talking about her experience at the airport with the diversity and inclusion group, and then she announced that she finally became a citizen so now she did not have to deal with the hassle. They applauded and said, "Yay, finally." So, is the only way to be treated like a human being to have American citizenship?

Although the speaker expressed her happiness in becoming a US citizen, and how this might relieve her from constant checking at the airports and grant her rights, it sent the wrong message that citizenship is the only way to guarantee one's human rights.

Enforcing one's identity or explanation of religion. Unlike the assumption of homogeneity, here deliverers are aware of the identity of their target but still want them

to follow their norm or tell them what to do when it comes to the specific practices of the target's religion. One example was mentioned by Minna. As she said,

> I heard a teacher in the resource room talking about a Muslim kid who refused to sing something about Christmas. He refused to draw a Christmas tree and drew a palm tree instead. The teacher commented, "If they don't like Christmas, they can leave and go back to their country. This is a Christian majority country."

The teacher clearly implied that even those who do not believe in Christianity, such as Muslim students, should follow the norms related to Christmas, a religious Christian holiday, as long as they live in the US. Another example was shared by Razan, "Every time they gather, they drink. "Oh, you are here. Why don't you drink?" Although they knew she was Muslim and did not drink, they nonetheless invited her many times.

Impact of Religious Microaggressions

The incidents of religious microaggressions the participants in this study have experienced have impacted them in different ways. However, not all expressed the impact they felt. While all ten female participants expressed the impact of one or more incidents, only two of the six male participants each expressed the impact of one incident.

In response to the second question "*How are graduate Muslim students impacted by microaggressions?",* which was a secondary one, ten themes emerged. Nine themes already existed in prior research literature. They are: (1) General negative feelings, (2) Subclinical paranoia, (3) Negative self-schema, (4) Feeling of powerlessness and hopelessness, (5) Feeling of exclusion and isolation, (6) Feeling inferior, (7) Constant vigilance, (8) Internalizing Islamophobic stereotypes, (9) Feeling the pressure to represent the group. One new theme emerged: (9) Feeling afraid to go to the mosque.

Table 3: Impact of Religious Microaggressions

	Theme	No. of Incidents*	Male	Female
Existing Themes	1. General negative feelings	12	1	8
	2. Subclinical paranoia	6	0	5
	3. Negative self-schema	5	0	3
	4. Feeling of powerlessness and hopelessness	5	0	4
	5. Feeling of exclusion	5	0	3
	6. Feeling inferior	5	0	3
	7. Constant vigilance	5	0	5
	8. Internalizing Islamophobic stereotypes	4	0	3
	9. Feeling the pressure to represent the group	1	0	1
New Theme	10. Feeling afraid to go to the mosque	2	1	1

* Some participants experienced more than one incident. Hence, the number of incidents might exceed the total number of participants within each theme.

Developing negative feelings. Developing negative feelings includes expressing negative feelings immediately after an incident. Such feelings include fear, shock, frustration, embarrassment, disappointment, sadness, feeling bad, feeling weird, insult, and anger. Ten participants reported having one or more of such feelings. Whereas Razan expressed, "I felt fear because they could have a gun," Siwa stated that she "felt

frustrated because [we] were five Muslim students and we were asked to attend the colloquium at the time of prayer." She referred to weekly mandatory meetings arranged by her department that failed to consider that the meeting time conflicted with Friday prayer, even more so as they were nearing the end of their third semester as graduate students. Amani felt embarrassed when the comment was made, "Oh, really you are Muslim?" Rashid stated how he feels sad sometimes when reading Islamophobic comments, "I feel very sad when I see racial comments about Muslims in the media."

Subclinical paranoia. Rippy and Newman (2006) listed subclinical paranoia as one possible impact the recipients of microaggressions might suffer from. As defined by Fenigstein and Vanable (1992), subclinical paranoia is "a mode of thinking that is characterized by relatively stable tendencies toward suspiciousness, feelings of ill-will or resentment, mistrust, and belief in external control or influence" (p. 128). Five participants revealed feelings that are linked to subclinical paranoia as they thought that Americans hate Muslims even if they smile and show respect and cannot be trusted. For example, Suzan commented on the situation her daughter faced in school saying, "The problem is not making our children uncomfortable, but it is what they teach other students about us. For no reason, they hate us." She was concerned about what American students learn about Muslims and concluded that teachers hate "us" Muslims for no reason.

Also, Karma decided not to participate in an academic competition, "because I believe[d] I [was] not going to win." She did not trust the professors who ran the competition and decided, based on her experience, that it did not matter whether her

paper was the best because she had developed the feeling that the committee of judges could not be trusted to be fair.

Arwa also reported how she felt people around her might support the travel ban, "After the travel ban, I felt maybe people are feeling the same thing, but they are just hiding and not saying that to you." This feeling might have developed because the President, although he had failed to win the popular vote but won the majority of the Electoral College, issued the travel ban.

Negative self-schema. A negative self-schema refers to developing negative beliefs about one's self and the world. Three participants related situations in which negative-self schema can be detected. For example, Suzan related the comment of her daughter about her classmates at school, "My daughter asked me, "when are you going to graduate? Nobody likes me, nobody plays with me because I am a Muslim, because I have a scarf." In this example, the daughter developed the feeling that nobody likes her because of her scarf. Another example was referenced by Lamiaa, "Being a Muslim woman makes an invisible barrier between you and your colleagues because they already have stereotypes about Muslims." She imagined a barrier between her and her colleagues. And while she referenced no specific incidents, she nonetheless developed this personal feeling as a result of her daily interactions with her colleagues.

Feeling of powerlessness and hopelessness. Feeling powerless and hopeless suggests one cannot do anything to change the situation or that nothing is going to change and that as such microaggressive or discriminatory behavior will always exist. Sometimes there is also an overwhelming fear of the reaction of the microaggressions producer if the

recipient responds. Four participants reported similar feelings. As Minna was talking about how her professor dealt harshly with her, she intimated, "I was afraid if I tell the professor anything, she would be mad or angry." Halah related another example as she described her feelings about the way she had been treated at airports, "At the airport, I felt like they could do anything and there will be no consequences for them because they have the right to do this. They are officers. They are the police." This serves as a clear example of developing a feeling of powerlessness. Also, Arwa mentioned how she felt "isolated" when the travel ban issued by the US administration targeted a specific group of people. Although the participant was not a native of any of the seven countries affected by the ban, she felt like she was personally targeted and powerless to do anything about it.

Feeling of exclusion. Davis, DeBlaere, Brubaker, Owen, Jordan, Hook, and Van Tongeren (2016), as well as Berk (2017), correlate microaggressions with social exclusion. Three participants related feelings of exclusion. As Minna stated, "I don't think I would need to participate. I just want to be quiet." This was due to the feeling that her professor dealt with her in a negative way because she was a Muslim. This led her to desire to just want to be silent.

Zainab also mentioned how she was not going to the social gatherings arranged by her department, "I was automatically not attending and being part of the community." This was because all gatherings were held at a bar. Her needs were excluded, and as a result, she was isolated from a community she wanted to be a member in.

Feeling inferior. Feeling inferior refers to developing a feeling that Muslims as a group are inferior to other groups such as Christians or Americans in general. Three participants related emotions that led them to develop feelings of inferiority. For example, Razan commented on the travel ban against seven Muslim countries, "They see us as less human. But it is not only Muslim students who fight for that." The ban made her think that these seven countries represent all Muslims and that the people from these countries were banned because they were less human in the eyes of the US administration than those who live in the United States or other parts of the world.

Siwa also described her feelings when wearing hijab in comparison to those who do not wear it, "Here I think people who do not wear hijab are very more comfortable than me." Her statement carries a sense of inferiority since she felt less comfortable only because of wearing hijab.

Constant vigilance. Constant vigilance is an impact that drains the recipients' psychological and spiritual energies and causes them to suffer chronic fatigue (Sue, 2010c). Recipients are constantly alert to any type of treatment that might be different and go through constant analysis to decide whether it was indeed different and, if so, whether it was because they were Muslim. Five participants described feelings of constant vigilance. For example, Zainab said, "So, on 9/11 I don't have the emotional capacity to deal with someone or an attack of any sort." This response suggests that while on a normal day she might expect an attack at any moment on 9/11 she did not feel capable of dealing with it.

Arwa also commented on how she felt about discussing different topics with others, "You see the news, and you see all these frat boys rallying, and I feel like I have to be careful if I want to discuss things with Americans because I don't know." She felt she had to carefully watch her words all the time because she was afraid of the reaction and the political opinions of the people she might be talking with.

Siwa went even further in trying to hide her identity by putting a hat on her scarf, "So I put my hat on my head, so nobody can see if I am wearing hijab, or if I am Muslim or not." She was constantly vigilant of what might happen if people were to recognize her scarf and realize she was Muslim.

Internalizing Islamophobic stereotypes. This theme is compatible with a recent report on American Muslims issued by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU). The report indicates that some Muslims, like other minority groups, suffer from self-stigmatization and that they sometimes adopt popular stereotypes about their own community (ISPU, 2018, p. 5).

Some participants in this study reported how they reacted in a way that could be interpreted as internalizing Islamophobic stereotypes. For example, Siwa stated,

> When there is a mass shooting somewhere in the country, some will think it is going to be from Muslims. At this time, I am very careful about myself. For example, when I want to pass by some people, I don't want to keep my hand in my pocket, because maybe they feel I want to do something bad.

Siwa felt that she had to take out her hand out of her pocket when passing by people, so they could see that she was not hiding a weapon. By responding this way, she adopted the stereotype that Muslims are terrorists who use weapons to hurt others. She did this in

front of someone who might have not even thought that way. This could result from the way the media present Muslims. Another example was what Minna told about her daughter, "My daughter was so mad when her teacher knew she was Muslim. She said, "Yeah, now he knows I am Muslim I am sure he doesn't like me." In this example, the daughter feared that her teacher would know about her identity as a Muslim. She felt that consequently he would not like her because Muslims do not deserve to be liked.

The Pressure to represent the group. As a consequence of incidents of microaggressions, the recipient might feel pressure to represent the group (Sue, 2010a, p. 69). Only one participant related this type of feeling. As Lamiaa expressed, "I really appreciate that they want to explore and discover, that they were not judgmental, and they wanted to learn from a Muslim person." In this incident, Lamiaa welcomed clarifying questions about Islam and felt she was a representative of Muslims having to respond to these questions and expose any misleading information.

Being afraid to go to the mosque. Being afraid to go to mosque represents the feeling that a person will not be safe in his or her Muslim house of worship as it can be a target of hatred against Muslims at any point of time. Two participants made similar statements about being afraid to worship in the mosque. As Arwa said, "I felt so much hatred [against the] Muslim faith that sometimes I feel scared going to the mosque because it is almost like a target, especially with the gun violence here." Ammar also stated, "I always go to pray in the mosque, but I don't feel safe. I feel that at any point someone will come and open fire." Both Arwa and Ammar clearly stated they felt that someone might enter the mosque at any time and start shooting. Ammar even mentioned

that his Muslim friend refrained from coming to the mosque at all because he expected a shooting might happen at any time.

Coping Strategies

Almost all participants reported strategies they use to cope with microaggressions. In response to the third question "*What strategies do graduate Muslim students use to cope with impacts resulting from microaggressions?",* which was secondary, nine themes emerged. Seven of these themes already existed in the prior research literature. These are: (1) Turning the situation into a teachable moment and confronting the aggressor, (2) Protective coping, (3) Collective coping, (4) Normalizing and legitimizing, (5) Rescuing the offender, (6) Spirituality, and (7) Assimilation. Two new themes emerged. They are: (8) Sharing the good experiences, and (9) Comparing to home country.

Table 4. Coping Strategies Used to Cope with Microaggressions

	Theme	No. of Incidents*	Male	Female
Existing Themes	1. Turning the situation into a teachable moment/ Confronting the deliverer	15	1	7
	2. Protective coping - doing nothing	12	1	7
	3. Collective coping	8	1	5
	4. Normalizing/Legitimizing	6	2	2
	5. Rescuing the offender	5	1	3
	6. Spirituality	3	1	2
	7. Assimilation	3	1	2
New Themes	8. Sharing positive experiences	13	2	9
	9. Comparing to home country	2	1	1

* Some participants experienced more than one incident. Hence, the number of incidents might exceed the total number of the participants within each theme.

Turning the situations into teachable moments/Confronting the deliverer.
Turning the situations into teachable moments refer to talking to a trustworthy individual and explain how to feel comfortable correcting someone after a microaggressive incident. (Hunt, 2010). This includes turning the situation into a teachable moment (Hernandez, Carranza, and Almeida, 2010). Eight participants reported having a teachable moment. This included responding to speakers in classes and during public talks, responding to professors, having conversations with friends to clarify concepts, emailing a responsible person, and even being proactive and including materials about microaggressions in

classes. SAMUEL stated, "Maybe you don't understand. You are just going with "You

are Muslims. You don't just make block statements about people that you don't know

much about." He directly addressed a speaker during a public talk when she made a

generalization about Muslim communities and how "all" Muslim men are not open for

others to examine their women for medical purposes. Lamia also mentioned how she

dealt with her friends who had questions about Islam, "So, I talked with them, not in

detail or deeply. I was just responding to their questions and also invited them a couple of

times to attend some of the Muslim celebrations." She preferred to turn these situations

into teachable moments and educating others about what they wanted to know. Karma

decided to confront her biased professor.

> So, I went to the professor who shared my assignment in front of the class and asked her, "I want to ask you right now, when you printed my assignment that time, the whole paper, why did you so that?" And she responded "Did I do that?!

When Karma decided to go and ask the professor directly to explain why she did that, the

professor did not admit to such, and seemingly pretended she did not remember what she

did. Being proactive, Zainab stated,

> So I would start with having segments, examples, illustrations, reading materials that are incorporated to talk about microaggressions to my students, and talk about microaggression stories.

Zainab, who was also a teaching assistant, had already read enough about

microaggressions to be able to decide how to educate her students.

Protective coping - doing nothing. Protective coping refers to a mechanism that

creates a distance after incidents by focusing on other things such as work, studying, et

cetera. (Houshmand, Spanierman, and De Stefano, 2017). It can also mean simply not

being able to decide whether the incident included a form of bias or how to respond (Sue,

2010a). Doing nothing, or not responding at all, occurred on a few occasions when the

participants were unable to adequately respond to curiosity questions and felt that these

questions were not genuine and that answering them would be a waste of time. Eight

participants reported incidents relative to protective coping. They either chose to avoid,

stayed quiet, did not respond, or stated that they would not talk to anyone. Zainab stated,

> I don't take that pressure. It often happens in the classrooms when we are talking
> about the misrepresentation of Islam in media. Like somebody is lecturing and
> then everybody would pause and just stare at me as if I had to speak. I definitely
> have to speak at some point but don't look at me like I have to.

Zainab was familiar with the term "microaggressions" and one strategy she chose was to

decide that she does not have to respond to all questions and that she can withstand the

pressure to represent Islam and Muslims. Karma used a similar strategy,

> When I was in summer school, a lot of my colleagues would ask me, why are you
> wearing hijab? And you are working in human rights? But I felt like I was not
> obligated to answer all of these questions. You should go and read. I don't have to
> explain to them.

Karma also had read about microaggressions and reflected on incidents she had faced and

decided that she does not have to answer all questions. Suzan stated, "I never ask [the

professor] any questions. I was not comfortable asking her questions." As a result, Zainab

chose to be quiet and not ask questions in order to avoid embarrassment and discomfort.

She decided to "cut her [professor] from my life once I was done with the course."

Collective coping. Collective coping refers to relying on one's own social support

network to seek support from friends, family, and partners (Lewis, Mendenhall,

Harwood, & Hunt, 2012, p. 62). Five participants reported they felt more comfortable

after joining communities of Muslims or when they joined a class whose professor was

Muslim. As Arwa stated, "I think that is one of the great things about being Muslim when

you see another Muslim, you just have this instant connection."

Amani also reported, "I met people that I did not know they were Muslim. Then I found

out and I tried to approach them." Karma described how she felt when she joined a class

whose professor was Muslim,

> I talked with a Muslim professor and sought advice about what should be done.
> In a Muslim professor class, I feel I was being appreciated. I did the same effort
> and I felt appreciated for my academic skills. I am so lucky because in my
> department there is a Muslim professor. It changed a lot of things.

Normalizing/Legitimizing. Normalizing/legitimizing refers minimizing

microaggressions by not making "a big deal" out of them and letting go (Hunt, 2010).

Four participants reported this strategy. Alaa stated, "I am getting used to it. Not

expressing my disagreement, but I think it helped me develop a thicker skin. At the

beginning, it always irritated me, but it was students being dumb rather than anything

else." As such, he learned to develop a "thicker skin." Mujib mentioned, "Well, the first

time it was strange, but I got over it. I don't know if there is a big benefit to reporting

that. I am not that kind of guy who tries to take sympathy from people." Karma also

reported that she did not "want to think [she] was treated differently" and rather let go.

Rescuing the offender. Rescuing the offender refers to finding an excuse for the

deliverer (Sue, 2010a, p. 76). Four participants offered excuses for individuals who made

comments that were reflective of or were involved in incidents of microaggression. As

Razan stated, "I don't blame them because they don't know yet. It needs time and

process. This is my role as a Muslim to share the experience." Lamiaa also excused

someone who confronted her in a public talk, "I realized I should speak on my behalf

only and respect her existence. (About a woman who asked her to talk about Islam only

in a seminar).

Spirituality. Spirituality refers to thinking of a higher spiritual purpose in order to

endure an incident of microaggressions (Hernandez, Carranza, & Almeida, 2010;

Houshmand, Spanierman, & De Stefano, 2017). Three participants referred to how a

microaggressive incident might be a test, how they should not feel in the face of

challenges, and how they should be good representatives of Islam. As Razan mentioned,

"I am a Muslim. So, I know it is hard, but it tests me to be a real Muslim." She

considered inappropriate incidents as tests to make her a better Muslim. Also, Arwa

stated,

> I don't personally feel the challenge to be a Muslim here because I honestly
> believe that every part of the world belongs to God. So, you can be Muslim
> anywhere and you don't necessarily have to feel like there is a challenge.

In this incident, it can be inferred that she was ready to be a Muslim anywhere even if in

some places such as the US present some unpleasant situations because, in the end, the

country still belongs to God.

Assimilation. Assimilation means trying to fit in. As described by Hunt (2010),

assimilation is a comfortable place where microaggressions can be looked at from a

different angle (p. 85). Three participants reported narratives that can be described as

assimilation. Referring to eating meat that was not labeled halal, Rashid mentioned that

he "started doing that after [he] came here. I did not do that in my home country". As

such he admitted to adapting some of his eating habits to fit in with a community not familiar with halal meat. Zainab also stated, "I usually do not wear the usual hijab at the airport [so as] to get less attention. I usually pray before going to the airport, so they don't stop me." To not appear significantly different from other women she adjusted her hijab style. Siwa took off her hijab completely to avoid any association between her and Islam.

Sharing positive stories. Another strategy is sharing positive experiences in order to feel supported, accepted, and appreciated. Although all participants reported having experienced incidents of microaggressions, eleven out of the sixteen participants also reported positive experiences. As they talked about their negative experiences, they also recalled the good ones. For example, Siwa reported,

> I talked about how we fast. And somebody from India told me that, "Oh, we have some fast, some days that we were on fast." And some Christians said, "We have something like that, but not like you the fast for us. It's a little different.

Asking about specific practices in the religion can also be considered as exoticization. Fasting can also be perceived as torture and subsequently categorized as pathologizing Islam. However, in this instance, it was considered a teachable moment for cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue. Tareq averred, "There are even people coming trying to learn about Islam and stuff, and that's actually somehow encouraging, you know, to show who you really are and just to practice yourself." He considered receiving questions about Islam as an encouragement to clarify his religious identity and feel accepted. Amani reported a similar incident,

> For instance, there was a time when we were planning on going out together as a group of friends, I'm the only Muslim amongst them, and we're thinking of swimming and they're just discussing swimsuits, and I'm like, "Hey, I can't do

swimsuits. But, find out from the people that own the resort if they allow swimming in anything because I can't do swimsuits.

Fortunately, her friends wanted to accommodate their Muslim friend and the place where they planned to go ended up being open to everyone without having any conditions on bathing attire. Zainab also reported,

I know that my advisor on those days that I've disclosed a discomfort, she's like, I will drive to campus and take you home. You don't have to walk, right. There have been many times that people have gone above and beyond.

This participant's advisor was proactive and offered to drive her and be with her when she felt she was under duress.

Comparing to home country. Comparing to home country means recalling times when the participants used to practice Islam in their predominantly Muslim countries. They remembered how carrying out religious practices was easier and how they did not have to confront some of the challenges that they now face in the US. Two participants reminisced about their lives as Muslims in their home countries. Ammar stated,

So, in my country, it mainly has to do with my religious practices. I used to do a lot of praying. After sunset especially, I used to do a lot of prayers. I told you I used to wake up a lot in the middle of the night, usually at 2 or 3 [o'clock] to pray. But it is so different here.

Ammar indicated that sometimes he does not have enough time go to the mosque and is worried that while there about becoming a target of violence. Razan also mentioned that "It is very nice to me to practice in my country because everything is available. No one watches me, no one shouts at me, especially as I am wearing hijab. Since wearing hijab in her home country is considered normal no one would stare at her while in public.

Other Findings

    Intersectionality

    Intersectional microaggressions. Nadal et al. (2015) have argued that research on microaggressions generally focuses only on one identity of the recipient. They introduced intersectional microaggressions as a type of microaggressions in which subtle discrimination is influenced by more than one identity. One example they presented is the perception that all women who wear hijab are forced to do so. This is an example of the intersection between gender and religion.

    This current study focuses on religious microaggressions against Muslim students. The participants received questions that specifically investigated the type of microaggressions they experienced because of belonging to this specific group. However, some participants reported incidents that could be categorized under other types of microaggressions as well. These categories included microaggressions related to race, gender, or being an international student. Fourteen of the 16 participants were international students. They reported some incidents in which they were subjected to microaggressions that can be interpreted in the light of their proficiency level in English. As Karma noted,

> You know that my language may be compared to [that of] other students, they are better in using English, but I'm quite confident with my academic skills.

Microaggressions against international students extend also to referring to where they come from. As Tareq expressed,

> Well, it kind of is because of their religion, maybe, or where I come from. It's actually hard to draw the line between whether it's the way you look or it is actually your religion.

Some participants also expressed their confusion about why they felt discriminated against. They wondered whether it was because of their religion or race. As AMMAR mentioned,

> So, it's interesting, the only time I felt like I was either discriminated without-- because of either black or Muslim was really... I don't know why I felt about it. It was just recently. I applied to a religious initiative by the new president, ten days later when they tell me, unfortunately, I haven't been selected. I don't know if, it's probably has something to do with either maybe your race or religion.

Zainab also offered a potential example of the intersection between religion, and race/color. As she noted,

> Like you can't assume just because I don't look white or I don't have what would it be considered as what you perceive to be domestic for you to just assume that.

Zainab referred to not being white and how wearing hijab she could be easily recognized as a Muslim and assumed to not be American.

Other examples, such as when female participants were screamed at on the street can also be interpreted as intersections between religion and gender. The screamers were boys who screamed at them because they were females walking alone or with a little child. The religion aspect was also clear since they wore hijab.

Intersectional religious themes. There were many incidents that can fit in more than one of the emerging themes. Those incidents were categorized depending on what seemed to be the most prominent theme. One example is when Samuel was offered alcohol while playing pool. When the individual who offered alcohol found out later that

Samuel and his friend were Muslims, he said, "Really? There are problems with Muslims and that's why we voted for Trump. Are you two really Muslim? But you don't have the turban?" This incident can be associated with four different themes of experiences with microaggressions. It is associated with the *Islamophobic language* theme because the deliverer stated that there were problems with Muslims. The incident can also be associated with *assuming one's identity as the norm* because the deliverer offered alcohol assuming that they would also consume alcohol, and he was surprised when they announced they were Muslims. Also, the statement that Samuel and his friend did not wear a turban can be associated with the *assumption of homogeneity* as not all Muslims wear turbans. Finally, mentioning how the deliverer voted for Trump because there were problems with Muslims can be interpreted as *feelings of microaggressions because of national events*.

In another incident, Razan was told, "Women, how are you going to adapt when you go home? You are already free here." This statement can be associated with three different themes. It endorses *the stereotype of oppression of women* in Muslim communities because the deliverer assumed she will not be free when she goes back to her country. The incident can also fit the theme of the *assumption of homogeneity*. Although some Muslim women might be oppressed in their communities, it does not mean that all Muslim women are oppressed. The third theme under which this incident can fit is *enforcing one's identity* because the deliverer first assumed that Razan was free in the US and, secondly, that she should stay here to remain free.

Furthermore, all incidents included under infrastructural microaggressions can be categorized under *assuming one's identity as the norm*. This is because all of the incidents include aspects connected to the infrastructure and the operating system that meets the needs of the dominant group without considering the essential religious needs of Muslim students.

Deliverers

Most of the deliverers were assumed to be white Americans. According to Sue (2010a), microaggressions usually come from the dominant group which in the case of the US is composed of white Americans. However, there were deliverers who were not white and belonged to other marginalized groups who themselves are exposed to microaggressions as well. These included African Americans, international students, and even Muslims. The incidents which these deliverers were part of were considered incidents of microaggressions because the deliverers joined the dominant group in engaging in microaggressions against a marginalized group, i.e. Muslim students in this study. For example, the officer at the airport who threw a packet of biscuits of Halah on the floor was African American. Also, the person who was surprised to know that Amani was Muslim was an international student. Finally, the person who transferred an event of supporting Muslim women who chose to wear hijab to a discussion about whether wearing hijab is right or wrong came from a predominantly Muslim country.

Summary

Chapter Four presented the findings in three main categories. The first category analyzed the experiences of Muslim graduate students with religious microaggressions.

The second category analyzed the impact of microaggressions on those students. The third category analyzed the strategies that these students used to cope with microaggressions. While some of the themes already exist in the research literature, new themes emerged in each category. New themes in the category of experiences were: infrastructural microaggressions, endorsing religious stereotypes of oppression of women, dishonesty, and hatred, enforcing one's identity, microaggressions resulting from national events, and institutional interactions. A new theme in the category of impact was: feeling afraid to go to the mosque. Two new themes in the category of coping strategies were: comparing to home countries and sharing positive experiences. Other findings that did not fit the aforementioned categories were included as well. These included themes related to intersectionality and deliverers. The implications of the findings and recommendations for future research will be presented in Chapter Five.

Chapter 5: Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter will present a summary of the findings that emerged under three basic categories. These are: experiences of graduate Muslim students with religious microaggressions, the impact of these microaggressions, and the strategies used to cope with them. New themes will be highlighted as well as implications, and suggestions for future research. In addition, the chapter will present recommendations for how institutions of higher education can be more inclusive of Muslim students. These recommendations consider the different stakeholders including the university administration, faculty, staff, and students.

Summary of the Findings

Experiences with religious microaggressions. In the category of experiences with microaggressions, 12 themes emerged. Nadal et al. (2010, 2012) already introduced Islamophobic and mocking language, exoticization, pathology of the Muslim religion, assumption of homogeneity, alienation, and assumption of one's identity as the norm. Although one of the themes, "denial of religious prejudice," was not detected in the data analysis of this study, the results confirmed that the rest of Nadal's themes (2010, 2012) exist as forms of religious microaggressions. At the same time, there were also new themes that emerged through data analysis. These included: infrastructural microaggressions, enforcing one's identity and explanation of religion, feelings of microaggressions because of national events, and microaggressions resulting from institutional interactions. Two of these themes were directly connected with the status of the participants as graduate students. They are: Infrastructural microaggressions and

Microaggressions because of institutional interactions. All four new themes can be added to Nadal's framework (2010, 2012) for future studies on religious microaggressions, specifically against Muslims, or against other minority groups in general.

Furthermore, while there were incidents that have previously been described in Sue's taxonomy, in this research study they were introduced under a new separate general theme of incidents in public without applying Sue's taxonomy, as it did not fit the specific type of religious microaggressions against Muslims. Nadal et al. (2010) also introduced enforcing religious stereotypes but only in the context of terrorism. New sub-themes that emerged included: oppression of women, dishonesty, and hatred. There was no significant difference in the experiences between women who wore hijab and those who did not, as the latter were known to the deliverers to be Muslims.

Impact of microaggressions. While suggested by Nadal (2012) as an area for future studies, this research study on the impact of religious microaggressions against graduate Muslim students constitutes a new field of research that has not been investigated before. The participants in this study reported the impact of religious microaggressions as part of general experiences that had had with microaggressions even though no distinct section in the interview protocol was designed to specifically address the impact of religious microaggressions.

With regard to the findings, all ten female participants reported how they were impacted in one way or more by the microaggressions they experienced. However, only two out of the six male participants each reported a single impact. The participants reported the impact as part of experiences with microaggressions related by the

participants even though no distinct section in the interview protocol was designed to address impact. The female participants reported negative feelings 36 times. Wearing hijab was a key element that impacted them as they were easily identified as Muslim because of their appearance. The male participants, on the other hand, were not recognized until revealed themselves as Muslim. Even when they reported an experience with microaggressions, in the interviews they merely expressed the fact that they were impacted without disclosing how. All themes related to impact were already part of the existing research literature except for one: Being afraid to go to the mosque. The framework designed to explore the impact of microaggressions, including this new theme, can be used for future studies that focus on religious microaggressions against Muslims.

Strategies used to cope with microaggressions. The strategies used to cope with religious microaggressions was another new category suggested by Nadal (2012) as an area for future study. Almost all participants reported strategies they used to address experiences with microaggressions. The number of female narratives related to coping strategies is significantly larger than that of the male narratives. Seven themes emerged that already exist in the research literature. Two new themes emerged as new coping strategies: Comparing to home countries and Sharing positive experiences. Sharing experiences that they considered pleasant was the most reported strategy. The framework designed to explore the coping strategies, including these two new themes, can be used for future studies that focus on coping strategies that are not only used by Muslim students but also by others.

Implications

This study sought to close a gap in the research on religious microaggressions against Muslims. It is the first of its kind to be conducted among graduate Muslim students at an institution of higher education. This resulted in two new themes of experiences with religious microaggressions that are directly related to institutions of higher education. They are: infrastructural microaggressions, and the microaggressions resulting from institutional interactions.

All participants in this study had experienced some type of religious microaggressions at the university, in town, or in other locations such as at airports. The significance of this research study lies in revealing the microaggressions that graduate Muslim students experience. From an educator's perspective, identifying these types of microaggressions helps in the efforts dedicated to reducing incidents of microaggressions to create a more friendly and inclusive learning environment for all students. However, most notably it is the role of psychologists and counselors to advise Muslim students about how to respond to incidents of microaggressions.

Individual interviews were used to collect data. The method was successful in collecting stories of religious microaggressions because of two attributes of the researcher. One of the attributes of the researcher was that he himself was a Muslim who had experienced incidents of religious microaggressions. This enabled him to understand the participants' experiences and express empathy. The second attribute was that he knew all participants personally as he had served as president of the Muslim student organization at the institution for the duration of one year.

The findings of this study should inform administrators and policymakers at institutions of higher education in the US about some of the challenges that Muslim students face. This will help them with developing better policies related to diversity and inclusion.

Deciding what terminology to use was a major challenge. Historically, most of the research literature has used the term "perpetrators" to describe a person who delivers microaggressions. However, the term has too many negative connotations to describe the deliverer who on many occasions might have merely had good intentions. For this reason, the term "deliverer" was preferred. Consequently, for the purpose of Chapter Four and Chapter Five, the person who received microaggressions has been referred to as the "recipient".

Finally, Muslim students faced challenges that are related in one way or another to one or more concepts and practices. These included: *hijab, niqab, halal food, Islamic prayer,* and *wudhu*. One challenge was to clearly communicate these terms that exist in the Islamic culture, but generally are not known to non-Muslims or individuals who do not live a predominantly Muslim country. Unless these terms are clearly communicated at US institutions of higher education and to non-Muslims, it will be difficult to understand the needs of Muslim students. These terms were explained as they appeared in the study as well presented in a separate appendix (See Appendix 3).

Future Research

The findings in this study suggest the following future research that may contribute to a further in-depth understanding of religious microaggressions:

A mixed method study: This study was based on a qualitative research approach that used semi-structured individual interviews to collect data. For future research, a quantitative component might be needed in a mixed methods study to reach out to more participants through surveys.

Using both individual and focus group interviews: Many studies on microaggressions have used focus group interviews to collect data. The findings in this research study suggest that individual interviews are an effective additional method of collecting data. A future qualitative study should include both individual and focus group interviews with same group participants.

Adding an educational component with a longer time frame to investigate: Most in this study reported at the beginning of the interview that they had not experienced any type of discrimination. However, when questions addressed specific hypothetical situations, they started to recollect incidents which they felt discriminated against. Prior to the interviews, a workshop could be added to future studies to introduce the concept of religious microaggressions.

Investigating experiences of K-12 students: An important category that should be studied as well is K-12 Muslims students and their parents. The two participants who had K-12 children both reported two to three incidents in which their children experienced explicit incidents of microaggressions.

Awareness of resources on campus: A future study should also address awareness among Muslim students and other religious minorities of resources available on campus

and the effectiveness of outreach efforts. Although such resources exist, on many occasions the participants in this study lacked awareness.

Investigating the intentions of the deliverers. There is a need for research focused on the intentions of the deliverers, that is, why they behaved the way they did. As discussed above, deliverers may have good as well as bad intentions. Such research on intentions may well result in new recommendations for both deliverers and recipients.

Investigating intersectionality. This study focused on religious microaggressions. However, other components of identity that might intersect with religious microaggressions, such as gender, race, immigration status, and others, should be researched as well.

Recommendations

If a university administration and community is genuinely interested in advocating diversity, and in including everyone, its procedures need to be inclusive of Muslims, and differ according to the type of religious microaggressions. The institution of higher education the participants of this study attended recently publicized a statement that it does not discriminate against any person in employment or educational opportunities because of race, color, religion, age, national origin, ethnicity, national ancestry, sex, pregnancy, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, military service or veteran status, mental or physical disability, or genetic information (University Policy, 2018). Furthermore, as part of its strategic plan, it for the first time appointed a vice-president whose role it is to specifically address issues related to diversity and inclusion.

Although this constitutes a step in a positive direction at this institution, including Muslim students needs to be a focus at all institutions of higher education. Although not necessarily limited to Muslim students, the following recommendations to address religious microaggressions need to be made a priority.

A clear definition of diversity and inclusion: Institutions of higher education need to adopt a clear definition of diversity and inclusion that is known to and circulated among all of its departments and bodies concerned with the issue. Developing a clear definition will make it easier to set goals, policies, strategies, and procedures that can be followed and implemented.

Raising awareness of microaggressions among faculty, staff, and administrators: To be able to help Muslim students and be more inclusive, faculty, staff, and administrators at institutions of higher education need to be aware the challenges that these students face before taking action. A short online course or a well-designed workshop could help in raising awareness.

Raising the awareness of microaggressions among students: Awareness among students can be raised by requiring a general course or a series of workshops in which experiential learning is a basic component. Kopish, Shahri, and Amira (2018) indicated that collaboration with campus student organizations and programs can create unique opportunities for experiential learning. Hence, different partner organizations that include religious minorities such as Muslims, Jews, and other religious minorities, LGBT, women's organizations, and others could participate and host students.

Familiarizing students with available resources: Available resources should be highlighted and made readily accessible to all students and specifically those who might experience incidents of microaggressions. Centers should offer advice on how to react to instances of microaggressions and decide when it is necessary to report to the police or other authorities.

Legal advice for on and off campus incidents: A legal advisor who has experience with immigration issues and the types of harassment could be of great help as well. Such an advisor should be readily accessible for immediate assistance.

Funding an advisor for Muslim students and other religious minorities: A funded advisor for Muslim students and other religious minorities could develop an outreach strategy, identify challenges that they may face, and offer support across the university. Although Muslim student organizations often exist, its members are usually volunteers, and mostly international. This poses two significant challenges: not knowing what to do in many cases and not being able to commit enough time to take action when necessary. Having a salaried individual to address this need would make a significant difference.

Dealing with infrastructural microaggressions: Administrators should address infrastructural microaggressions, including, amongst others, providing readily accessible meditation rooms for all students, excusing the students from attending class during religious holidays, providing halal food, and planning social gatherings in non-alcoholic locations.

The role of Muslim student associations: Muslim student organizations at institutions of higher education, if they exist, can also help with providing the Muslim students with additional options for prayer, ablution, and halal food and publicizing these options.

Highlighting the concept of freedom of speech: Students whether from the US or different regions of the world should be reminded of and familiarized with the concept of freedom of speech. Deliverers might argue that they can say whatever they want as part of their freedom of speech. Recipients, however, should know they have the same freedom of speech and should not be reluctant to respond and confront what they consider an offense.

Taking a positive attitude towards international students: Institutions of higher education should take public action to make international students feel they are welcome on campus and that their scholarship is appreciated. This important especially important when a significant part of US national sentiment is to consider immigrants a threat to national security.

Reaching out to schools and training teachers: Some of the teachers at local schools surrounding institutions of higher education need to better understand the concept of diversity and inclusion. These institutions should not only educate their pre-service teachers about diversity and inclusion but reach out to in-service teachers in the surrounding region as well.

Final Thoughts

As members of the Muslim community, all participants in this study reported experiences of religious microaggressions. The most prevalent theme involved

infrastructural microaggressions which have not been reported in prior research on religious microaggressions against Muslims. Another theme that was not reported involved feelings related to national associated with Muslims, including 9/11 remembrances, the travel ban, and the 2016 presidential elections. An interesting coping strategy not reported in prior research about microaggressions was sharing positive experiences along with negative ones.

It is almost impossible to eliminate religious microaggressions against Muslim students. The findings in this research study can help with implementing steps at different institutions of higher education to reduce the number of incidents of microaggressions and hence creating a more inclusive learning environment. This research can be repeated at other institutions of higher education to confirm the findings of this study and explore other unique challenges that Muslim students perhaps face. In the end, it will help all institutions concerned about diversity and inclusion.

Unfortunately, it is not realistic to expect religious microaggressions to end in the near future. Other research designs, such as a workshop approach or with a longitudinal time frame, may perhaps serve to better identify and counter incidents of religious microaggressions. The ultimate goal of new research should be to make institutions of higher education more inclusive of not only Muslim students but of other religious minorities as well.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Survey questions

1. Are you Muslim?
2. Are you a graduate student?
3. Self-identify your gender, age, race, ethnicity, immigration status, religious background, level of education, and field of study. (Nadal, 2011)
4. When did you start practicing Islam? Where? For how long?
5. Tell me about your experience as a Muslim here on campus! (Hunt, 2014)
6. Have you ever been asked, "Where are you from?" How did you feel? How did you react?
7. Have you ever been asked about your religion/ if you were Muslim? How did you feel? How did you react?
8. Discuss how do you believe your experiences differ, or not, from other students on campus. (Hunt, 2014)
9. Please discuss the challenges, if any, that you face on campus as a "Muslim" student. How do you navigate these situations? (Hunt, 2014)

    Follow up: Did you have to do practices in a different way? What are they? Why? - Did you have to abstain from specific practices? What are they? Why?
10. Think about a time when and where you felt
    a. **you have been blatantly, /subtly**, discriminated against because of your religion.
    b. **someone known to profess another religion has made you feel uncomfortable because of your religio**n,
    c. **someone made a disparaging remark or used derogatory language about your religion.**
    d. **someone's behavior made you feel uncomfortable, hurt or devalued because of your religion**.
    e. **there was an event where you felt physically or emotionally unsafe because of your religion**
    f. **there was an event where you felt pressured to act a certain way because of your religion**.
    g. **there were any hidden bias or discrimination in other situations different from the mentioned before**.

Describe the scenario as best as you can. a. What was the action that led you to conclude it was about your religion? b. How did you react in this situation? c. What did you perceive the message to be conveyed to you? d. How did you feel after the event? (Nadal et al., 2012). *Adapted from Hunt (2014); Nadal et al. (2012); and Nadal (2011).*

Appendix B: Consent Form

Adult Consent Form With Signature

Title of Research: Microaggressions against Muslim Graduate Students

Researcher: Mohamed Amira

IRB number: 18-F-27

You are being asked by an Ohio University researcher to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks of the research project. It also explains how your personal information/biospecimens will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Summary of Study

The purpose of the study is to explore your experiences with religious microaggressions, which are hidden biases/discriminations, on and off campus. The influences of such experiences on you, as well as the strategies you used to cope with the effects, will be explored as well.

The study will involve an interview (for about an hour) that will be audio-recorded and transcribed later for data analysis.

Explanation of the Study

- This study is being done because there is a gap in literature concerning the experiences of Muslim graduate students with religious microaggressions.
- If you agree to participate, you will be asked to be interviewed to explore such experiences.
- Your participation is completely voluntary, and there is no obligation whatsoever to go through the interview if you choose not to participate.
- You can freely abstain from answering any question and you can withdraw at any moment during the interview without having to clarify the reasons.
- After the interview, you can ask for your data to be removed and not be used in the study if you choose to.
- Your participation in the interview will last for about one hour. You will be asked to verify your responses in the transcription of the interview within one month from the interview.
- The interview will be audio-recorded.
- In case you feel you need it, you can visit the Counseling and Psychological Services on Campus (Hudson Health Center, 3rd floor – Tel: (740)593-1616), or contact the Muslim Students Association at Ohio University (muslimst@ohio.edu).

A copy of this consent form will be sent to you by email.

Risks and Discomforts

You might feel uncomfortable recalling some of the experiences or incidents that include microaggressions.

Benefits

None Anticipated at the personal level. However, this study is important to a better atmosphere on campus, and to promoting diversity and inclusion of marginalized/minority groups.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by myself.

Your names will be coded. This means that your real names will not be used in the study itself, or any discussions about it. The master codes will be destroyed by April 2019.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* The Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* The Institutional Review Board (IRB), a committee that oversees the research at Ohio University.

Compensation

A non-alcoholic hot or cold drink that is worth $2.00 to $5.00 will be offered.

Future Use Statement

Identifiers will be removed from data collected, and after such removal, the data may be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you or your legally authorized representative.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the investigator *[Mohamed Amira,* ma591912@ohio.edu*, Cell: (740) 47-1130* or the advisor *[Dr. Frans Doppen,* doppen@ohio.edu*]*.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered;
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction;
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study;
- you are 18 years of age or older;
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary;
- you may leave the study at any time; if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature_____

Printed Name_____

Version Date: *[07/13/18]*

Appendix C: Islamic Terms and Concepts

Hijab   Hijab is referred to by various names, some of the most common of which are veil or headscarf. Most Muslims who wear the covering call it a hijab, an Arabic word meaning "cover." Some Muslim women wear hijab because they believe that God has instructed women to wear it as a means of fulfilling His commandment for modesty (Arabs in America, 2019).

Niqab   The niqab is a face-covering that covers the mouth and nose but leaves the eyes clear (Arabs in America, 2019). In this study, it was referred to as a face-covering that covers part of or all the face.

Alcohol and Pork   Both alcohol and pork are forbidden by Islam. Islamic law strictly prohibits the consumption, sale, and purchase of alcohol by Muslims, although in rare cases its use is permitted for medicinal purposes (Oxford Islamic Studies, 2019).

Halal   The word 'halal' literally means permissible. To make meat halal or permissible, an animal or poultry has to be slaughtered in a ritual way. This requires that the animal should not be dead prior to slaughter, a Muslim (or someone from the People of the Book – Jews and Christians) should perform the slaughter, and any blood should be completely drained from the carcass (Halal Food Authority, 2019).

Prayers   Observing Muslims are required to perform five prayers each day. These prayers are distributed during the day time depending on the position of the sun. Each prayer has a range of time with a beginning and ending during which the prayer should be performed. Each prayer takes from three to ten minutes. The first prayer starts at dawn. The second one occurs when the sun passes its zenith. The third occurs when the shadow of an object is the same as the object itself. The fourth starts at sunset while the fifth starts when the red line is gone from the west side in the sky. The prayer includes bowing in which the forehead touches the floor many times depending on the length of the prayer. Friday prayer, which happens at the second prayer time every week, is the special prayer of the week that male Muslims are highly recommended to attend. Male Muslims can pray anywhere where it is clean, while females need to be out of sight. Usually, they prefer to pray in specified places such a mosque to avoid curious looks or being considered odd if they perform it in a public area.

Ablution   Ablution or "Wodhou" is required before prayer as it represents minor cleansing so the prayer can be correct.