Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women’s experiences in Canadian higher education:
A case study at one Ontario university campus

by

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Abstract

Seven women that identify as Muslim, Pakistani and Canadian in varying capacities participated in this qualitative research to discuss how their cultural and/or religious norms shaped their educational and career aspirations and overall decision-making. Areas of discussion included identity formation, understandings of culture and religion, familial influences on educational and career pursuits and overall experiences and interactions with faculty, peers and student service providers. This research brings together Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) Theory of Identity Development and feminist critical understandings of intersectionality (Collins, 1990; Knudson, 2005) and Orientalism (Said, 1978) in order to theoretically frame the students’ experiences. The research constitutes a major contribution from the Canadian perspective in terms of theory development as well as practical implications for faculty and campus services to ensure that students experience a learning environment that is supportive and inclusive.
Acknowledgements

I am wholeheartedly grateful to the seven participants that took part in my research and believed in the work that I am doing. I am touched with the life stories each of you shared with me and trusted me to use as narratives in this research. Your rich stories not only helped this research but also enlightened me along the way and showed me the complexities of identifying as Muslim, Pakistani and Canadian women. I hope I have done justice to your stories and I hope your reflections live on.

I feel very privileged to have met and worked with Dr. Peter Dietsche and Dr. Linda Muzzin, during my time at OISE. The support that I have felt from both of you, while I worked through this MA in a part-time capacity will always be remembered as without your faith in my abilities, I would not have been able to transition from the M.Ed to the MA in Higher Education. In each of your courses that I took, you fueled and inspired me to pursue my research interests.

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Linda, thank you so very much for giving me the opportunity to take a very rigorous course in theory where I found my comfort and desire to dig deeper within critical feminist theories. Theory is a very uncomfortable area for many researchers but your theoretical background helped me to find my willingness to challenge my understandings – often an uncomfortable process, but one that was very worthwhile. The courses that I took with you
both, Peter and Linda, inspired me to take on a big task – bringing together mainstream student development theory and critical feminist perspectives. I did not think it would be possible and it is still a work in progress for me. Thank you both for being amazing mentors. I will never forget all of the support I received from the both of you during my MA.

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**Introduction**

I am Muslim. I identify with a Pakistani heritage. I was born and raised in Canada and thus identify as Canadian. I can read, write and speak English. I am fluent in Urdu and Punjabi and can read Arabic. I wear a hijab and do so by choice. I am from a middle-class family. I am working on my graduate degree. I work full time. I can control my money. I will have a say in who I marry. I am a woman and I speak for myself.

These are some of the identities I have chosen to classify myself with, which are also the foundation to why I decided to explore the research topic on Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women’s experiences in one of the mid-sized universities in Toronto, Ontario Canada. From my personal experiences, as an academic advisor at the Academic Advising & Career Centre at the University of Toronto Scarborough, I was not encouraged by my immediate family and extended family to pursue my Master of Arts in Higher Education because of the expectation that I acquire the minimum education required to get a ‘good job’ and then go on to fulfill the cultural norm of getting married. Beyond that I was told I would intimidate potential suitors because of being considered more or ‘too’ educated than them. Initially, I thought I was the only one that was experiencing this phenomenon. But as I interacted with more students in my capacity in advising and counseling, I met many young women who openly spoke about parental/familial pressures of completing their education so that they could get married, among fulfilling other cultural expectations. Other students I met talked about the familial pressures impacting their educational progress, which made it difficult for them to balance their life demands.

Students have told me about their feelings of not being able to identify with the service providers on campus. They find it challenging to express themselves without feeling
as if they are being seen as 'weird' or 'primitive.' Thus, another motivation for me to conduct this research was to seek understanding and overall cultural sensitivity for students who need to talk about these issues in order to sort out their concerns. My commitment is to prevent as much negative impact on their educational realities.

As a person who identifies as a Muslim Pakistani – Canadian woman, who has and is continually experiencing higher education in Canada, I am taking a ‘within’ or ‘insider’ view, because I am looking to conduct research on/in my ‘own’ community. This has been a concern in academia in the past, which assumed that being ‘too involved’ and not ‘neutral’ was unscientific, (Ahmad, 2003; Hamdon, 2010, Ryan, 2005). However, feminist and anti-racist theoretical perspectives challenge this antiquated view and have led me to believe that I should explore this area because of the potential positive influence I can have when topics of this sort are explored, researched and problematized.
Chapter 1:

Background of the “problem” and rationale

The topic for this research is the exploration of the lives of women who identify as Muslim Pakistani-Canadian (MPC) in Ontario, specifically in Toronto’s higher education system. I am most interested in learning about how the cultural and/or religious norms and expectations that this group of women are socialized or required to align to and how these impact their overall educational experiences and career aspirations. When referring to ‘experiences’ in higher education, I will refer specifically to experiences or interactions with faculty, student service providers and peers in and outside the classroom setting. This area of research is purposeful and timely in Canada as most research existing in this area is from the British context.

On a personal level, this area of research is important because I identify as a MPC woman, who has and continues to participate in higher education in Toronto. This research provides me with an avenue to reflect on my experiences and how they may be similar or different from my counterparts. In addition to being a student, I am a full-time academic advisor in the Division of Student Affairs at the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC). In this position, I am privileged to serve a very diverse student body that includes the Muslim Pakistani-Canadian demographic, which is why I have chosen UTSC as the focus point of my research. As a practitioner in the higher education field, my research can address this group of women’s experiences in postsecondary education (PSE). Accordingly, this research is important for the purposes of student services and thus student development because the ideas associated with diversity can be addressed from an ‘insiders’ perspective.
Research questions

In order to explore the conditions and/or relations shaping the experiences of MPC women in higher education, the following research questions have been addressed throughout my work, according to participant accounts,

1. What are the conditions or relations that affect the experiences of MPC women in Ontario’s PSE?
2. Are these experiences shaped by cultural and/or religious norms/expectations?
3. Do the conditions or relations shaping these student’s experiences in PSE also work to impact their career aspirations?
4. Are these student’s experiences effected by their interactions with peers, faculty and by utilizing student services and if so, how?

Themes in the literature

In this section of the chapter, I will highlight relevant literature on the experiences of MPC women in higher education. To begin with, I have included statistics from Statistics Canada to provide context to readers about the numbers of South Asians, including Pakistanis, in Canadian society. After this, the literature reviewed demonstrates how Islam and Pakistani culture are often interpreted interchangeably, which can be problematic for students trying to find a sense of belonging amongst their peers and overall educational environment. This point of culture and religion is tied closely to how families then shape decision-making when it comes to education, career and marital requirements for young Muslim Pakistani women, at least as researched in the British context. Lastly, the three areas or experiences of students in higher education, including faculty, staff and peer relations, will be discussed in order to show how the previous findings about family and culture are connected to how higher education is shaped by women that identify as Muslim and Pakistani, in various countries including, Britain, Australia and America.
A sketch of Pakistanis amongst South Asians in the Canadian context

The term South Asian combines groups of people from numerous regions in South Asia. In Ahmad’s (2001) work in the British context, South Asian women are “composed of women born in Britain whose families are originally from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh” (282). The term South Asian is also framed within a larger understanding of the term ‘visible minority,’ which, according to Lindsay and Almey (2006), in a report for Statistics Canada, includes non-Aboriginal and non-white people who identify with Chinese, South Asian, Black, Arab, West Asian, Filipino, Southeast Asian, Latin American, Japanese and Korean populations (239). Narrowing in on South Asian Canadians, the profile of this population is defined as people who report ancestry from South Asia from at least one of: Bangladesh, Bengal, East India, Goa, Gujarat, Kashmir, Pakistan, Punjab, Nepal, Sinhal and Sri Lanka (Lindsay, 2007: 8).

Statistics from the 2001 Census and 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey illustrate that South Asian Canadians are the largest non-European ethnic group in Canada, making up 963 000 Canadians (which is about 3% of the population), residing mostly in Vancouver, British Colombia and Toronto, Ontario (Lindsay, 2007: 9-10). Of the population, 15% are between the ages of 15 and 24 compared to 13% of the rest of the Canadian population (Lindsay, 2007: 11). This is noteworthy because this age group is relevant to the topic being explored in this research. Furthermore, 61% of South Asian Canadians over the age of 15 tend to be married (Lindsay, 2007: 12). With regards to educational attainment and employment trends, Lindsay’s (2007) report shows that in 2001, 25% of South Asian Canadians aged 15 and over

1 Throughout this thesis I will use single quotes (‘’) for terms or phrases that I am problematizing, while using double quotes (""") to signify when I am quoting from text or transcript. This is a useful acknowledgement because “the unproblematized use of these words [i.e. ‘West’, ‘the Muslim woman’ and etc.] can reinforce stereotypes that serve to regulate the individual or group, keeping members in and aliens out…” (Hamdon, 2010:43).
had a bachelor’s degree or post-graduate degree, compared to 15% of the overall Canadian population; along with 9% of South Asian Canadian adults obtaining a master’s degree or doctorate, exceeding the 5% of the overall population. The gender difference in educational attainment for South Asian Canadians in 2001 was that 28% of men had a university degree, compared to 23% of South Asian Canadian women (13). This difference was also evident in employment outside the home: 70% of South Asian Canadian men over the age of 15, while only 54% of women were employed in 2001 (Lindsay, 2007:14).

As noted, the majority of the literature compiled is outside of the North American context and primarily from Britain. Thus in the next section, literature referring to women with a Pakistani origin, as part of South Asian and Muslim studies from regions outside of Canada will be reviewed to sketch a picture of their experiences in higher education.

**Religion and culture practiced interchangeably**

One of the themes or issues that has been consistently referred to across various resources is how Pakistani (or South Asian) culture and Islam are interpreted by those who identify with these groups; as well as how identities shape the perceptions, actions and interactions of those who do not identify as Pakistani and/or Muslim. In two of the studies conducted by Abbas (2002, 2003) in British higher education, it is shown that certain familial interpretations of Islam have led Muslim Pakistani-British students to have an “I can’t do this and I can’t do that” mentality, which then shapes the types of activities (i.e. going to the Pub night) that students engage in with their peers (295). However, I would argue that the students highlighted in this research adhered more to Islamic values over Pakistani values. In the literature these terms are often used interchangeably thereby contributing to problematic
interpretations by peers and instructors of how Pakistani-Muslim female students are supposed to behave (as being docile) and dress (in cultural clothing) (Abbas, 2002). As a consequence, this can be seen as reinforcing stereotypical notions of how Pakistani women living outside of regions in South Asia are constructed, which in turn impacts their levels of satisfaction with higher education.

In addition to noting how religion and culture are often conflated as if they are synonymous, it is important to acknowledge the diversity in how Muslim Pakistani individuals identify with their culture and religion. Hamdon’s (2010) participants had a very difficult time identifying what it means to be Muslim; however, there was an understanding that religious identity is shaped by and varies according to intersecting identities such as culture, class and gender. In Hamdon’s (2010) research, the participants decided to adopt an understanding that focused on the political issues and concerns that arise for Muslims rather than finding a static understanding of what it means to be Muslim because of the varying conceptualizations that shaped their lived experiences. Similarly to Hamdon’s (2010) analysis, Ruby (2006) illustrated the complexities of the meanings that some women hold when it comes to wearing the hijab -- a form of religious identity for many Muslim women. Hijab symbolized a variety of positive meanings for the women including a confirmation of their Muslim identities; ability to control their lives; and achieving a status of being considered respectable. Ruby (2006) concludes,

2 The hijab is interpreted in several different ways including physical forms of garments such as headscarves and modest clothing which may not include covering the head (Ruby, 2006). However, it is important to note that, even the way the headscarf may be worn or ‘modest’ may be interpreted varies across cultures and regions/countries (Cole and Ahmadi, 2003:48).
While the hijab holds multiple meanings for Muslim women, mainstream North American society’s perception of the hijab is usually negative, and the practice is often presented in the Canadian media without proper cultural and historical reference. Unlike the participants’ views, the depiction of the hijab in Canada suggests that there is only one form of the hijab, that is, as a symbol of the oppression of Muslim women (p.64-65).

Pakistani identities and how these conceptualizations vary for women in higher education are specifically referred to here, I would argue that these “voices of the hijab” (Ruby, 2006: 54), which shape how women live out their experiences in all realms of their lives, including education are very important.

*Parental influence on educational and career planning*

Abbas’ (2003) follow up study on how religious and cultural norms impact the education of South Asian women shows that both in culture and religion, parents and daughters value education and parents motivate their daughters to pursue higher education. This support for further education has been echoed by other researchers as well in the British context. Ahmad (2001) and Tyrer and Ahmad’s (2006) research counters notions that show South Asian and Muslim families as oppressive or acting as overall barriers to furthering education for their daughters. Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) found that not only are families supportive of higher education, but they also encourage career planning. Muslim South Asian women have voiced several reasons why their parents encourage higher education including, prioritizing support for their daughter’s personal interests and career aspirations; encouraging personal and financial independence; and attracting increased number of suitors seeking marriage (Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006).
In many families the qualifications gained by a daughter were viewed as an ‘insurance policy’ because this allows a woman to ‘stand on her two feet,’ should she need to arise to support her husband and his family. For example, this support may be needed if her future husband is ill or has lost his job. From the perspective of Muslim South Asian British parents, having an educated daughter is also representative of a prestigious social status for families, which gives them the ability to describe themselves as ‘liberal’ and ‘modern’, which counters the stereotypical patriarchal assumptions that act as obstacles for the mobility of their daughters (Abbas, 2002; Ahmad, 2001).

Expectations of marriage and educational planning

Despite the motivation and encouragement that parents display, with fathers being even more determined than mothers to see their daughters excel academically, families with a South Asian origin have been found to see and encourage education only to a certain point (Abbas, 2003). This is especially true for families with mothers who have achieved lower levels of education themselves and thus want to see that their daughters have choices. The goal is to ensure that they are not reliant on their future husband or in laws (Ahmad, 2001). As previously mentioned, education is seen as a factor to attract favourable future suitors. However, women have also highlighted the ‘pressure’ to get married to prevent the risk of becoming ‘too educated’ for potential suitors. This observation is based on the experiences of highly educated unmarried women in their familial social circles and can be seen to reinforce the gendered nature of marital norms (Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006: 15). The whole idea of a collectivist society is emphasized here due to considerable pressure that comes from cultural
(not religious) norms that restrict women from doing or pursuing certain endeavors such as education to conform with expectations of community members (Basit, 1997).

It can be argued that experiencing such patriarchal norms and values, Muslim South Asian - British (or even Canadian) women continue to be marginalized, preventing them from pursuing the various educational avenues available to them (Abbas, 2003). For some young Muslim and already married participants of Tyrer and Ahmad’s (2006) research, caring for their children, elderly or ill parents/in laws delayed their opportunities to explore higher education and often their university location and areas of study were shaped by their caring responsibilities. This thus impacted their overall educational experiences.

However, there is an indication that there has been some positive change in these attitudes, demonstrated by how arranged marriages in Britain (which ‘traditionally’ are marriages matched by family members or social networks for young men and women) are transforming and/or even being delayed altogether because of entrance to higher education (Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006). This is also evident in the Canadian context, where research shows that South Asians raised in Canada integrate Western values when it comes to excelling in school and work. This has contributed to their transition away from the ‘traditional’ arranged marriage to one where the mate is chosen by the individual, but parental approval/input is still desired by the son or daughter (Ahmad and Reid, 2008).

Faculty-student experiences

It is important to consider how women with a Pakistani origin are perceived by non-Muslim South Asian peers, faculty and staff, since these attitudes may shape and further complicate their experiences in higher education. Research from the Australian context
exemplifies how some Muslim women students feel singled out by professors because of their ethnic and religious affiliations. In one Australian example cited, a professor referred to a Muslim woman student in a lecture by highlighting the student’s ethnicity by saying “Hello my Turkish girl” (Asmar, Proude and Inge, 2004: 54).

Similarly, students in the Canadian context have experienced difficulties with teachers and administrators in their secondary school systems. In Saskatchewan, for instance, Muslim females from diverse backgrounds, have voiced being discriminated against by their teachers in high school, where they have been isolated or completely ignored when they began wearing the hijab. One student recalls being ignored by her art teacher when trying to engage her teacher in dialogue on more than one occasion (Ruby, 2006). Furthermore, in Montreal in 1994, students were sent home by officials in school because they wore a hijab and they were told they could not attend the school if they did not remove their head covering. And in Quebec in 1995, the largest teachers’ union in the province (Centrale de l’enseignement du Quebec (CEQ)) voted to ban the hijab in schools (Ruby, 2006). The three examples provided from the Canadian context are clear in demonstrating that high school experiences communicate to Muslim women (including Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women), that they do not belong and may be risking their relationship with faculty in their post-secondary institutes because of choosing to wear the hijab.

Student service provider-student experiences

Hijab-wearing students also report high levels of ‘cultural discomfort’ and not feeling satisfied with student services (i.e. difficulty obtaining a prayer facility if requested) (Asmar, Proude and Inge, 2004: 59). In the British context, Muslim South Asian women have
experienced anti-Muslim racism in connection to wearing a hijab, which marks these women as, “alien, non-liberal, or oppressed.” They have also been subject to verbal abuse travelling to and within the university where they experience staff who withhold student services from them. For example, being ‘othered’ because of the hijab has been described by students who have been restricted in career service appointments where they are not encouraged to pursue professions such as medicine (Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006: 19-21). When some women did get appointments, they reported feeling disappointed with meeting career advisors in their institutions because of the university staff lack of understanding of the barriers facing Muslim women inside and outside of the university (Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006: 31).

Peer-to-peer experiences

Switching to the American context, it has been observed that Muslim women students, identifying with ethnicities such as Pakistani, Egyptian, and Turkish illustrates that there is a belief that the hijab is an indicator of being a ‘good’ Muslim, a perception clearly shaped by cultural, societal, community, parental and peer pressures. Alternatively, other Muslim students believe that modesty can be achieved without wearing a hijab. Some American students have felt that being an ‘effective’ Muslim should replace trying to be a ‘good’ Muslim; for example, one participant in this research felt that non-Muslim students were more willing to listen and were receptive to her ideas and open to discussing and learning about Islam once she had stopped wearing a hijab (Cole and Ahmadi, 2003: 62). Similarly, Cole and Ahmadi’s (2003) research demonstrates that wearing a hijab is misunderstood by non-Muslims and may be seen as women’s inferiority to men (in terms of being conservative and submissive to their husbands) in the campus environment. Thus it has
been argued that in American settings, peer interaction is often shaped by fear and suspicion, which constructs feelings of alienation, isolation and ethnocentric assumptions towards Muslim women wearing the hijab (Cole and Ahmadi, 2003).

Other American students have talked about their religious obligations and how avoiding social activities with peers to places like pubs; or females not interacting intimately with males (and vice versa) removed them from certain social circles. However this behaviour strengthened their religiosity, which was empowering for them and their education (Cole and Ahmadi, 2003). Canadian participants in Ruby’s (2006) research in Saskatchewan echoed the results of Cole and Ahmadi’s (2003) research when they stated that the hijab has made it easier for them to stay away from “un-Islamic practices” (Ruby, 2006: 60).

Furthermore, Ruby’s (2006) research also found that the hijab served as an identity symbol for those choosing to wear it. Participants in her research felt a community orientation with other women who wear the hijab because to them it demonstrates a similarity and support for the attitudes, values and beliefs that link them to their community of believers. One women interviewed stated that, “if I see a woman in a hijab, I know she is Muslim and it creates a sense of community…which is a nice feeling” (Ruby, 2006: 60). On the other hand, despite the benefits of being able to connect to other Muslims, Hamdon (2010) acknowledges that a sense of community or ‘sisterhood’ is not universal in her work amongst Muslim women. That is, wearing a hijab could work to further marginalize those that are already at the margins of both communities (Muslims and non-Muslims; Pakistanis and non-Pakistanis; and Canadians and non-Canadians).³

³This interpretation is based on the work of theorists like bell hooks (1981) and can be understood in relation to ‘internal Orientalism’ as discussed below in relation to theory (hooks cited in Hamdon, 2010).
Hijab-wearing Muslim women acknowledge a difference between undergraduate and graduate students and their understandings towards Muslim women. Graduate students were considered more open to diversity. Also it has been found that positive class experiences can be used by Muslim women as a vehicle to counter ideas associated with matriarchal submissiveness and patriarchal domination (Cole and Ahmadi, 2003). Although not specifically focused on the experiences of Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women, Mostafa’s (2006) research on the graduate school experiences of five Arab Muslims at the University of Alberta suggests that the openness of peers allows Muslim students to clarify misconceptions that exist about Muslims in the ‘West’. This in turn has helped to strengthen their relations both academically and socially with their peers. The data demonstrates the wide variance in experiences from the undergraduate to graduate levels of education. That is, Muslim South Asian (Pakistani) – British, Australian, American and Canadian women students’ experiences in higher education reveal the complexities associated with the various categories that this group of students identifies with. Therefore, the array of experiences work simultaneously and holistically to impact their overall educational aspirations and attainment.

Limitations of literature reviewed

The majority of the research that focuses specifically on higher educational experiences is mainly limited to the British context; Cole and Ahmadi (2003) highlight the experiences of Muslim women in the American context. But even their study, the focus is on the diverse backgrounds with which Muslims identify; thus I turned to the broader literature in order to provide the context that is necessary to situate Muslims and Islam. For example, I have included the research by Hamdon (2010) showcasing the work that she has done as a
part of a Coalition in Edmonton\footnote{\textit{The Coalition} was created in response to September 11, 2001 and the vision is “to work with the Muslim community in Edmonton to help improve the lives of Muslims in the region and to enhance their contribution to society at large.” The mission of this organization is to “strive to speak and act on behalf of Edmonton Muslims with fellow Canadians in a manner that…enhances understanding of Islam and Muslims in matters of public policy, education, peace and safety” (Hamdon, 2010:10).}, Alberta Canada to address countering the singular Muslim identity that has been internalized by mainstream society. This topic is important for this research on Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women’s experiences because it uses a Canadian lens and problematizes the many taken-for-granted or normalized ideas associated with Muslims in Canadian society. Similarly, Ruby’s (2006) work on immigrant Canadian women’s experiences has also been highlighted to situate the hijab, an often contentious issue for many Muslims even in the educational realm in Canada.

Some observations about the terminology used through the literature reviewed is in order. Specifically, umbrella terms such as, ‘South Asian’ and ‘Muslim’ mask the diversity that exists within these classifications. Even though ‘South Asian’ is often defined to show the various ethnicities, religions and regions it encompasses, research rarely focuses on one ethnicity, religion and/or region, which then detracts from achieving a focused understanding of the experiences that are being presented. Even using the label ‘Muslim’ ignores the differing sects and ethnicities that shape the culturally defined interpretations of Islam. To address these problems, my research focuses in specifically on Pakistani women. On the other hand, I have left the category of ‘Muslim’ open, (which can include many different sects such as Sunni, Shiite, Ismaeli). It is worth noting that the majority of Muslims with a Pakistani heritage are Sunni (the largest sect of Islam), and so I did not request participants to specify their sects. This is an important consideration because distinguishing sects can be problematic and can marginalize sects because Sunni Muslims generally tend to dominate numerically and are perceived to hold the “fundamental truth” (Hamdon, 2010: 69).
Hamdon (2010) includes the following table in her research to help readers with understanding the variances in beliefs among Muslim sects.

*Table 1*
*Schema for understanding perceived sectarian differences from Hamdon (2010)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differences in Practices</th>
<th>Sunni Sect</th>
<th>Shi’a Sect</th>
<th>Ismaili Sect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily Prayer</td>
<td>5 times/day</td>
<td>5 times/day; timings differ from Sunnis</td>
<td>3 times/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shahada (Muslim declaration of belief)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs regarding Abraham’s (Peace Be Upon Him) sacrifice</td>
<td>Asked to sacrifice son Ishmael</td>
<td>Asked to sacrifice son Ishmael</td>
<td>Asked to sacrifice son Isaac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing of Hijab</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the research reviewed above was atheoretical which makes it difficult to determine the lens or perspective to which the researcher is aligned. As a result, researchers with clear theoretical positions, such as Hamdon (2010) and Ruby (2006) are valuable in providing a theoretical framework through which the literature could be problematized. The theoretical frameworks unfolding throughout this research on the experiences of MPC women will be reflective of Hamdon (2010) and Ruby’s (2006) theorizing about intersectionality and Orientalism. And I will argue that these critical theoretical frameworks facilitate a deeper understanding of how familial, cultural and potentially religious norms and expectations shape decisions MPC women make when it comes to their educational and career aspirations.

These two theories deriving from a feminist anti-racist critical paradigm will be explored further in the next chapter. The literature reviewed here does not take into
consideration mainstream student development theories to explain how different relations and experiences with faculty, staff and peers impact the overall university experiences of students and how these interactions can and do shape educational and career endeavours that Muslim Pakistani (or South Asian) – Canadian women pursue. Therefore, the next chapter will also address this by arguing that a mainstream student development theory needs to be considered together with feminist anti-racist critical theories in order to provide a holistic understanding of the narratives that are included by the women that participated in this research.
CHAPTER 2:

Theoretical Frameworks

I believe that it is important to bring various mainstream student development and critical theoretical lenses together. My goal in attempting this is to provide researchers, administrators, practitioners and even students exploring this area of study with an intricate way of learning about the women that decided to take part in this research. This will become evident below as I bring the two sets of theoretical frameworks together and not necessarily combining them. Specifically I will argue that it is possible to supplement Arthur Chickering’s (1969, 1993) *Theory on Identity Development*, with feminist critical anti-racist approaches to understanding lived experiences using intersectionality and Orientalism; and that these approaches provides a deeper understanding about how diverse students experience higher education, while working to maintain family, cultural and/or religious ideals.

Highlighting the importance of both lenses was required to address the two facets of the student experience – the personal family experience and the student experience.

**Student development theory and mainstream interpretation**

As noted, the majority of the literature that has been reviewed is atheoretical. Here I have decided to start with a mainstream epistemological stance. As a student affairs professional, I am often exposed and expected to embrace and align to classical ‘student development’ theory. We as academic advisors and career counselors, situate ourselves in relation to the work of Arthur Chickering and Linda Reisser (1993), who have conceptualized a psychosocial theory that focuses on “developmental tasks,” building from Erik Erikson’s work (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). In Chickering’s (1969) foundational
work, he identified six vectors of identity development to explain how students go through their college/university experiences. The initial six were updated to seven vectors, when Chickering and Reisser (1993) revised their work, and thus the vectors they theorize that development or growth occur along.

The first vector discussed by these mainstream researchers is “achieving confidence,” or developing intellectual confidence and knowledge acquisition during the time students are in their post-secondary institution. The second vector highlighted by the theorists includes being able to “manage emotions.” When this happens, then development occurs and students can manage or control their emotions by developing appropriate responses for handling emotions that may be negative. This allows for development along the vector because students are able to respond with relief, care and optimism. A third vector along which development is theorized to occur is when students are able to “move through autonomy toward interdependence.” This movement results in student development because balance is achieved between what the researchers label the need to be independent and the need to belong. When students are able to cultivate “mature interpersonal relationships,” they demonstrate development, according to Chickering and Reisser (1993), because they become aware of differences in ideas, peoples, backgrounds and values. When students develop along the vector of “establishing an identity,” they are seen as being able to form a sense of self through historical, social and cultural contexts (i.e. through family and ethnic heritage). The vector of “developing a purpose” is said to unfold as students set career goals and “developing integrity” happens when there is a rebalance of values and beliefs (Chickering and Reisser, 1969, 1993).
Chickering and Reisser (1993) built on their original work and developed a theory that the higher education environment can facilitate development along the vectors identified above. What is theorized is a web of factors that work simultaneously and bidirectionally. The areas of the higher educational environment that can contribute to the development along vectors include: consistent institutional objectives, policies, practices and activities; institutional size that allows for student participation; student-faculty relationships in and out of the classroom; curriculum that integrates content and processes; flexible teaching mechanisms that allow for student engagement in learning; student communities and friendships that are diverse in attitudes and backgrounds; student development programs that collaborate with faculty.

My understanding of student development theory has been shaped by my experiences of working in student affairs, serving the student body at UTSC for the past five years in varying capacities – as a personal support assistant for students with diverse disabilities, as a program coordinator for a first year transition orientation, as a front line representative for academic and career services and now as an academic advisor. Through this journey, I have been exposed to the varying philosophical understandings that contribute to ‘the student experience’. I question, however, speaking as if there is only one experience – the mainstream one.

As student affairs professionals, we are conditioned to make all of the environmental facets of higher education more inclusive so we can contribute to a happier, engaging student experience. As a result, we collaborate with and connect students to faculty, help students understand their values and overall purpose and informing students of policies, practices and regulations so that they can develop their identities during their time with us at UTSC.
Therefore, the keywords used throughout mainstream student development theory include words like: development, growth, engagement, relationship building and diversity. In my experience this has become the everyday language of student affairs; however, any application I have witnessed of this or any student development theory to the lived realities of the students I work with and for on a day to day basis seems to only scratch the surface using mainstream ideas. My first approach to theorizing the experiences of students has been based on working with the students that come in and out of the services I provide and this has been a very important starting point for my research.

Using statistics, for example, to highlight the demographic of students, I would argue does not reflect the difficulties that students experience because the power struggles or marginalization that racialized students may experience in interactions with faculty, students and/or peers. Furthermore, even though Chickering and Reisser (2003) have emphasized the importance of ‘developing an identity’, acknowledging family and ethnic background, as readers or advisors and counselors, we are not alerted using their theory to the tensions or power dynamics that play out in families that can and do impact the development across the vector of establishing an identity. For example, take the argument by Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) that “too much” education for women is not encouraged as it may not be beneficial when trying to obtain the best suitor. This type of tension, which I know very well myself, may deter a young Muslim Pakistani - Canadian woman from pursuing a graduate degree and can also impact the relationships she has with staff, faculty and her parents overall. This type of negative relationship is echoed in the critical research on women who tried to get appointments with career counselors to only find out that the counselor did not understand
the barriers that certain women face in and outside of the university environment (Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006).

Thus while it is easy to appreciate theorists such as Chickering and Reisser (1993) and their explanations of the experiences of white students in higher education, it is clear to me that mainstream theoretical work does not conceptualize or deconstruct the actual marginalization that students experience – especially when they define themselves by their race, class, gender, religion, ability, nationality, immigration status and sexuality, among other relations or conditions.

**Feminist critical interpretations**

Throughout my journey of choosing a theoretical stance for my research, I have continued to fall toward the ‘right side’ of Guba and Lincoln’s (2005) paradigm chart where I would classify myself as a critical and more specifically feminist, anti-racist and emancipatory researcher. Through my coursework at OISE, I have begun to understand my emphasis on learning about critical researchers that highlight difference. Though a bit dated in their work on the ‘one-world framework’, the book Dhurvarajan and Vickers (2002) was one of the first that I encountered in this genre. They refer to the experiences/standpoints of women at the margins of mainstream understandings. Their strategy to work towards countering this isolation of women at the margins is to de-emphasize difference by drawing on the one world framework which focuses on inclusivity of diversified experiences locally and globally. Using this text as a launch pad, I explored and reviewed Lim and Herrera-Sobek’s (2000) analysis of difference amongst faculty, administrators and graduate students

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5 With the work in TPS1802: Theory in Higher Education, I used the following chart to navigate my understandings through Guba and Lincoln’s (2005) conceptualizations of theoretical frameworks: http://www.wordsinspace.net/course_material/mrm/mrmreadings/GubaLincolnChart.pdf
in higher education and how gender, race and sexuality play out for people not fitting the
ideal white heterosexual, tenured male demographic.

As I went on to bring these two texts into dialogue, I have been able identify the
shortcomings of the approach both book compilations took when highlighting the importance
of difference. Both texts were unable to demonstrate how identities such as race, class, and
gender; along with other conditions and relations are interconnected or intersect to impact
lived experiences which then creates, recreates and maintains marginalization. This explicit
acknowledgement of the micro world is thus very important. One way to keep this theoretical
point central is to refer back to the classical work of theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins
(1990). Through Black feminist scholarship that countered the dominant Eurocentric
feminism of the 1980s, this intersectionality was emphasized by Collins (1990). She labeled
the interlocking oppressions experienced by women of colour the “matrix of domination” and
argued that socially constructed identities, such as race, class and gender, among other
conditions, worked simultaneously and bidirectionally (not hierarchically) to impact lived
realities of women. This theoretical advance went beyond just comparing the similarities and
differences of oppressions, and is, I argue an important aspect of understanding the lived
realities of MPC women in higher education.

Other feminist anti-racist scholars have also reinforced this theoretical advance about
the interlocking nature of gender, race and class. Contemporary feminism asks us to move
beyond a gendered focus or lens, analyzing only the differences between men and women;
the goal is a holistic approach or theoretical framework which encourages the analysis of the
complexity of power dynamics. This conceptualization equips researchers with a tool to
understand how ‘otherness’ or marginalization is created and reinforced in particular settings
What the concept of intersectionality works to achieve theoretically is bringing the experiences and perspectives of those at the margins of society to the center or core of experiences. As a result, intersectionality counters ideas that universalize, homogenize and essentialize women’s lived realities because the differences between and among women include oppressions that are “simultaneous and linked” (Choo and Ferree, 2010:132).

Intersectionality is the framework that informs Ahmad’s (2001) research on the academic achievements of British Muslim women. She argues that “developing an understanding of some of the ways that gender, race, ethnicity, class and religion can intersect and interact with internal dimensions of the ‘self’ at any given moment are crucial challenges to be addressed” (269-70). Abbas (2002) also points out that educational achievements of South Asians are shaped by a “complex web of factors” such as class, effectiveness of schools, gender, ethnocentricity on the part of instructors [or student services], institutional racism and parental religion and cultural affiliations (292). Theoretically, intersectionality as a framework is beneficial to embrace in this context because it allows the complexities of these students to be highlighted instead of relying on simplistic/reductionist assumptions that then shape how Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women experience higher education.

The studies referred to in this research integrate social class with culture, religion, and gender because of the intersectionality approach utilized. For example, Abbas’ (2003) research shows that Muslim South Asian women from the working class are marginalized because their parents may continue to align to a more cultural patriarchal interpretation of Islam. This specific circumstance may thus not reproduce how Islam encourages the
empowerment of both men and women through education. Further marginalization of these women may also occur once they begin university if they are coming from schools that underprepared them for the transition to the university context. And there may well be the further obstacle of student services that are lacking to support their circumstances (Tyrer and Ahmadi, 2006). In contrast, women from families with a higher socioeconomic status have been found to be close to Islam, but not encountering cultural interpretations of their religion that may curtail their educational endeavours (Abbas, 2002).

In addition to the concept of intersectionality, a broadly relevant theoretical critical perspective useful in my research is postcolonial thought. My peers in a recent theory course were enthusiastic about using Edward Said’s (1978) work as a way of explaining the ‘othering’ that many students have and continue to experience because they are at the margins of their higher educational journey. Said (1978) coined the term Orientalism to show how European-Westerners have ideologically constructed the ‘Orient’ in relation to romanticism and exoticism. According to Said’s (1978) theorizing, the articulation of the Orient gave and continues to give strength to the ‘West’ by creating a (fictitious) binary between the East (Orient) and the ‘West’ (Occident). In other words, it is a hegemony that creates, recreates and reinforces the ‘free’, ‘civilized’, and ‘progressive’ Occident in a hierarchical binary as superior to the ‘primitive’, ‘static’, and ‘barbaric’ Orient which in turn, facilitates the legitimization of the Occident’s imposition over the Orient to ‘help’ with civilizing or overcoming the supposed irrationality exhibited by the Orient (Said, 1978). Echoes of this can be found in Hamdon’s (2010) contemporary research and analysis of media portrayals of Muslim (often conflated with Arab) women which suggest that hijab-wearing Muslim women need to be protected from the Muslim man’s sex drive; and
secondly, a dichotomy of Muslim women/non-Muslim women – an “us” versus “them” differentiation. The representation of the Oriental woman, or in this case, Muslim Pakistani-Canadian woman, is constructed as needing liberation, by the rational, progressive and civilized white man because of the oppression imposed on her in the Orient (or in this case, her Orient family at home), which is assumed to contribute to her passivity, backwardness and lack of voice. She is constantly being assumed as the victim waiting to be freed from her culture and religion while, the white Western women is considered to be self-defined and liberated. As part of these contrasting stereotypes, Orientalism essentializes and legitimizes the homogenization of Muslim women (Choo and Ferree, 2010; Hamdon, 2010, Said, 1978).

Hamdon’s (2010) book on *Islamophobia and the Question of Muslim Identity: The Politics of Difference and Solidarity* demonstrates a key critical understanding of how Orientalism plays out in relation to essentialism which is defined as, “the belief that there are properties essential to [every member of a category] and which [all members] share” (Stone cited in Hamdon, 2010: 42). Consequently, when a framework of essentialism is employed, “properties” or characteristics attributed to categories are assumed to be biological or ‘natural’ rather than based on social construction. This is why the Muslim identity and Muslim women are constructed as a homogenized group that is ‘suffering’, which then reinforces the dichotomy or binary of either being a part of or member of the category or not. Building on the understandings of Orientalism and essentialism is racialization which is argued to be a project of essentialism, according to anti-racist scholar Joshi (2006). Racialization of identities, specifically Muslims, occurs when phonotypical, religious and cultural characteristics are assigned to all Muslims. As a consequence, all South Asian and Arab characteristics (i.e. having dark or brown skin), become attributed to being Muslim,
when in actuality, not all South Asians or Arabs are Muslim. What is important about how racialization occurs is the discrimination it fuels for Muslims and Islam in the areas of education, work and health care (Hamdon, 2010). When Orientalism, essentialism and racialization combine, Muslims are homogenized as part of Islamophobia. Zine (2006) defines Islamophobia as, “fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents that translates into individual, ideological and systemic forms of oppression and discrimination” (239). Using Orientalism as its foundation, essentialism, racialization and Islamophobia continuously place Muslims, or in this specific case, Muslim women, at the margins of the ‘West’.

Until being introduced to Shahnaz Khan’s (2002) *Aversion and Desire: Negotiating Muslim Female Identity in the Diaspora*, I had not been able to find relevant work that that applied Said’s (1978) postcolonial thought to the experiences of Muslim Pakistani women in the Canadian context. Although Khan (2002) groups together various Muslim women from diverse ethnicities, she does include immigrant Muslim women in the Canadian context, which is important to the understanding of how the Orientalist lens is applied in combination with intersectionality. Khan’s (2002) research shows how Muslim immigrants in the North American context are often incorrectly all grouped together as Arabs and in need of being ‘rescued’. Her work is able to critically bring to light the discriminatory practices that her participants live through because of the oppressions they experience in the diaspora as a result of their race, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality. She shows how these work simultaneously to ‘other’ them as a homogenized group of women (Khan, 2002). Similarly, in Khan’s (1995) earlier work, she shows that because of the Orientalist lens towards Muslim women wearing the hijab in the Canadian context, the ‘West’ suggests, “know[ing] the Orient better than the Orient can know itself,” which legitimizes the essentializing and
racialization of the ‘Muslim woman’, whatever her race, ethnicity, nationality, class, sexuality and other intersecting relations or conditions (149).

Narratives that show how students in both the Australian and British contexts continue to feel marginalization when trying to utilize student services can be understood in the context of the anti-racist literature. Orientalism provides a theoretical lens for understanding why such students feel “alienated, non-liberal and oppressed,” especially if they visibly identify as Muslim by wearing the hijab (Asmar, Proude and Inge, 2004; Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006: 19-21). As has been documented, this Orientalist gaze is felt by Muslim students with various ethnic identities (i.e. Pakistani, Egyptian and Turkish) in the North American context when they engage in peer to peer relationships in their educational institution. In Cole and Ahmadi’s (2003) research, hijab-wearing females felt as if they were viewed as oppressed, passive, and inferior to their male Muslim counterparts by their non-Muslim peers. Theoretically, through the lens of Orientalist theory, whites see Muslim women as ‘the Muslim woman’, a gaze which is essentializing and thus, homogenizing. Further, the assumed static ‘primitive’ nature of Muslims generally becomes naturalized and the subject is assumed to be in need of being ‘fixed’ or ‘modernized’ by peers in the ‘West’. This process thus reinforces the racialized Eurocentric understanding of the complexities associated with difference.

From my own experiences as a Muslim woman who was born and raised in Canada, I have become more aware of how the Orientalist gaze/lens is integrated into all of our narrowed understandings of the ‘Muslim world.’ As a part of having a Pakistani heritage and choosing to wear a hijab for the past 17 years, I have lived through being asked questions about how my family and household functions. For example, I have been asked if my father
has a beard, with, I imagine, the assumption that all Muslim men look and act violently like Osama Bin Laden surrounded by oppressed hijab-wearing women that are passive. I have also been asked if my marriage was going to be arranged to someone ‘back home.’ Initially these types of questions were very hurtful for me, but as I began to analyze my surroundings, which include media in the forms of television, newsprint and the internet, I have learned that hearing the narratives of other young women that identify as Muslim, Pakistani and Canadian, can help me understand my lived experiences.

Another component of Orientalism beyond looking at how the ‘West’ scrutinizes the ‘East’ is proposed in the concept of ‘internal Orientalism’ (Davidson, Penslar, and Hanover, 2005). This idea is applied to those of Jewish heritage and it might also be applied to MPC women. In the case of MPC women, the analysis would focus on Muslim versus Muslim, rather than only non-Muslim versus Muslim. Referring once again to Cole and Ahmadi’s (2003) work, it can be seen that this idea addresses the observation that the interviewed students distinguish between their ideas of what it means to be a ‘good’ Muslim versus a ‘bad’ Muslim, often shaped by the perceptions their families hold about Islam and what it means to be Muslim. Other students in this research discuss being an ‘effective’ Muslim instead of trying to achieve the ideas of what it means to be a ‘good’ Muslim (i.e. wearing a hijab) because the ‘effective’ Muslim may have a better relationship with peers (Cole and Ahmadi, 2003). Also, referring back to Hamdon’s (2010) critique of the concept of a universal ‘sisterhood’, one can use internal Orientalism to explain how hijab-wearing Muslim women are pitted against non-hijab wearing women. A current event that demonstrates that very dialogue is occurring amongst Muslims is the debate on the recent banning of the \textit{niqab} (face covering that some Muslim women participate in) in France by President Sarkozy. On
one hand, Muslim women who identify with the niqab are not only resisting the ‘othering’ that they have to deal with the following ban, but now they are also resisting some Muslim women who believe the niqab is a problematic and defacing aspect of how Muslim women are perceived.\(^6\) This element of Orientalism points to a potential “double burden” for Muslim women including MPC women in higher education who are trying to find a sense of belonging not only with faculty or staff but their peers – both Muslim and non-Muslim.

**Terms and definitions shaping this research**

*Muslim Pakistani - Canadian: Walking the hyphen*

Deconstructing social and political discourses such as multiculturalism that constructs and reinforce a hyphenated social identity is also particularly relevant to those that categorize themselves and/or are categorized by privileged frameworks as ‘Pakistani-Canadian’ (Magnusson, 2000) (i.e. Orientalism, essentialism, racialization and Islamophobia all working simultaneously). Magnusson (2000) argues that education is one of the institutions that reinforces raced, classed, and gendered relations, and that makes the hyphenated identity seem as if it is based on equity, when in actuality it is a hegemonic discourse that masks Canada’s racist history. Mahtani (2002) also problematizes Canada’s multicultural policy and the resulting ‘hyphen-nation’. As Magnusson (2000) and others argue “the hyphens of multiculturalism” reinforce the “spaces of distance” or exclusions of ethnicities outside of their “Canadianness” (78).

Situating myself within this conceptualization I can see, as a person who identifies as South Asian (or more specifically, Pakistani – Canadian), that this identity encompasses two

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\(^6\) Please refer to the YouTube video: “Mona Eltahawy on France’s banning of face veils” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWJRam64dQY&feature=player_embedded)
aspects of the various identities with which I choose to align. From my personal experiences, identifying as only Pakistani leads to an assumption that I am a ‘newcomer’ or have ‘international’ status. And, if I identify only as Canadian, often I am still asked, ‘where are you really from?’ despite being born and raised in Canada. As a result of interrogating my identity(ies), I have learned that this is a shared experience among women (and men) in higher education who have come to the conclusion that the label of Pakistani-Canadian is most reflective of their lived experiences, while realizing and appreciating the problematic nature of such a discourse. This choice of identity is also echoed by some of Tyrer and Ahmad’s (2006) research participants among British South Asian women.

‘West’ and ‘Western’: A generalization?

Ruby’s (2006) article prompted me to clarify my stance on using terminology such as the ‘West’ or even ‘Western’. Ruby (2006) articulates the following in relation to her view and I agree with her statement as it is reflective of my political view as well. She writes,

> When I use the term “Western and/or the West,” I do not intend to homogenize the Western world. “The West is as diverse as any other part of the World” (Mojab, 1998:25); consequently, Western people are heterogeneous. However, the purpose here is to indicate the assumed superiority of the West. Western discourses often profoundly mould the majority of people’s lives, because they have managed to impress an ideology of white supremacy over the last few centuries (Jhappen, 1996).

Ruby (2006) thus draws on Mojab (1998) Jhappen (1996) to acknowledge the importance of not working to ‘other’ or marginalize the ‘West’. This is an important and relevant

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7 This learning about fellow students’ understandings of ‘Pakistani-Canadian’ is not based on formalized research; instead, this is a part of an ongoing informal dialogue among those I have met, work and/or study with in the university context.
observation as it can work to reinforce the same types of stereotypes that I am aiming to resist and counter in this research for women that identify as Muslim Pakistani-Canadian.

**Hijab and veiling: Synonymous?**

Throughout the literature that has been reviewed here, some authors (e.g. Cole and Ahmadi, 2003) refer to the headscarves or hijab that Muslim women wear as veiling. I would like to acknowledge that I was also using the terms hijab and veiling simultaneously and interchangeably throughout my own research process. That is, the two terms were never used together in my interviews, as the word hijab was only used if the interviewees chose to speak about their understandings of it. However, as this research thesis was being written, Ruby’s (2006) problematization and analysis has brought to light many of the terminology considerations that are useful to the research on the lives and experiences of MPC women.

According to Ruby (2006), hijab and veiling should not be used synonymously because the hijab, an Arabic word, cannot be translated into an equivalent of veiling because of the diversity in how it is interpreted by those that engage with the practice of observing the hijab. Ruby (2006) cites the *The Encyclopedia of Islam* to demonstrate how there are over 100 pieces of clothing that are considered the hijab. According to her work, cultural and regional interpretations of the hijab can be used to show how “veiling” is not an encompassing term for how the hijab is practiced. For example, a woman in Pakistan may wear a *niqab* (face covering and head covering) and call it a hijab; while a Muslim Canadian woman may use a headscarf and call it a hijab. Therefore, Ruby (2006) argues, “The concept of the hijab…emerges in multiple ways. The veil, which is often interpreted in Western traditions as a covering of the head, does not illuminate the complexity of the practice in the
Muslim context” (56). Therefore with the same understanding as Ruby (2006), for the purpose of this research, I only use the term hijab, even though researchers such as Cole and Ahmadi (2003) use it interchangeably in their research on the educational experiences of “veiled” women.

**Addressing the scope limitations of the research**

Prior to reading the literature on this topic, I was using my own experiences of not being encouraged to pursue graduate school (because of the norms of marriage over education in my family), as the benchmark for all MPC women’s realities, which shaped my preconceived notions. However, after reading some of the literature, I learned that many families view higher education as a ‘marketable’ quality for their daughters, when it comes time for marriage, thus countering my initial understandings (Abbas, 2002; Ahmad, 2001). I did not want these types of differences in perspectives to impact how I went about conducting this research, but I also realized that as a result of being an ‘insider’, my experiences make it difficult to practice ‘objectivity’ because “there is no neutral position,” and therefore, my influence on the research I produce was unavoidable (Haraway, 1988:584). However, as Dhurvarajan and Vickers (2002) emphasize, such ‘biases’ are correctable, and my insider status was essential to the research I undertook.

Being an academic advisor at the institution where I conducted this research was a relevant issue for me when considering the location of the research. I am well known in the institution as a former student, teaching assistant and now administrator and I was concerned that this might prevent students from wanting to discuss their experiences with me. I also worried about a phenomenon in the Pakistani community, as outlined in Basit’s (1997)
research, according to which ‘keeping face’ or maintaining family honour is a priority which may prevent students from openly disclosing information/factors that are linked to their familial relationships. However, this was not a concern as the study unfolded because from my understanding, the participants were open about their experiences as illustrated through their narratives below.

My own experiences with student services as an undergraduate also influenced my thinking. I was not comfortable utilizing student services because none of the student service providers ‘looked like me’ or did not seem to understand me and the cultural and religious norms with which I choose to align. However, even though I might ‘look’ like the participants of this research, this did not necessarily mean they wanted to share their experiences even if I told them about mine. Therefore, I was careful not to take their assumed comfort with me for granted. On the other hand, such concerns or hesitations may not have been an obstacle for this research as it might be for others. I believe this because I have had several encounters with female students identifying as MPC who come in to meet with me one-on-one (advising and career related) who have explained that they feel comfortable with not having to justify their cultural and religious commitments to the service provider. Many students have referred to this process as being uncomfortable and feeling as if the advisor/counselor they are meeting with is sometimes judgmental towards their beliefs and experiences. For the purpose of this research, I was mindful that my positionality as someone that ‘looks’ like the participants, might have made it easier for the participants to open up. However, I did not intend to take any of the points for granted and did work to ensure that I would question taken-for-granted phrases such as, “you know how brown

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8 This is based on conversations I have had with numerous students both formally and informally.
parents are.” That is, I attempted to clarify where possible what the participants meant when they assumed shared meanings so that I did not impose my interpretations.

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9 This question is often used to imply the stereotypes of how South Asian parents are perceived by their children, potentially including the strictness of socializing among other activities.
CHAPTER 3

As noted above, I am most interested in the experiences of Muslim Pakistani-Canadian (MPC) women in Canadian higher education and more specifically interested in learning about how their experiences with faculty, staff and peers in their educational institution are shaped by cultural and/or religious norms. In this chapter, I will describe the participants and the site location, along with the research design and methodologies that were employed.

Participants in the study and site selection

This study included seven women that self-identify as Muslim, Pakistani and Canadian, in varying combinations. All of the women participating in this research were registered students at the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC), one of the two satellite campus’ of the ‘main’ University of Toronto campus.

Participants in the study

The seven women\textsuperscript{10} included (Zulaikah, Muskan, Sarah, Aminah, Vaneeza, Duniya and Marilyn) ranged between the ages of 20 and 23, with the average age being 21.4 years. Three of the participants were “born and raised” in Canada (Zulaikah, Vaneeza and Marilyn) and the remaining four women were born in Pakistan or the United Arab Emirates and moved to Canada. All of the participants with the exception of Vaneeza said that they were not the first to attend university from their family. Vaneeza, being the youngest in her family, said she was the first to attend university because the rest of her sisters attended community

\textsuperscript{10} Each woman was asked to choose a pseudonym that would be used to refer to her in the study. Four of the seven women responded with names of their choice. The three that did not were assigned names that would not disclose their identities for the research.
college in Toronto. Zulaikah, Sarah and Duniya were, at the time of the study, in their last semester at UTSC, while Muskan, Vaneeza and Marilyn were planning to complete their final credits in the summer semester in order to graduate in November 2011. Finally, Aminah was in third year at the time of the study. With regard to areas of study or discipline, Zulaikah, Muskan, Vaneeza and Marilyn identified as students in the Arts (three Social Sciences students and one Humanities student), with Sarah and Duniya studying the Sciences (one in Biology and one in Biological Anthropology). Aminah was a Business Administration student (Management) student. Thus students from all three degree options at the campus were represented. However, having participants from different areas of study was not an aim of this study because I did not assume that certain students from a particular area of study would have certain answers or experiences. The average of their self-reported grades was about 75%; therefore, all participants were in ‘good standing’ (above 60% average) according to the university’s academic standards.

There were several reasons the participants provided regarding why they chose to attend UTSC. The main reasons provided by five of the women were: a manageable commute from home; and their parents’ desire that they attend this campus. These reasons were followed by the women highlighting the campus being their first choice to study at, along with, the University of Toronto prestige and the community feeling due to the smaller size of the Scarborough campus. All of the participants acknowledged wanting to use their undergraduate degree from UTSC as a launch pad for further educational pursuits such as graduate and professional school. At the time of the interviews, two of the participants had been accepted into professional programs at Canadian institutions including law school.
The students who decided to volunteer to take part in this research were students whom I may have served through the Academic Advising & Career Centre at UTSC. The purpose of the research is to provide a snapshot through insights from a small group of participants who facilitated a deeper understanding of experiences. I echo Khan’s (2002) sentiments when she refers to having no intention to “explain” the lives of the women in her research. Similarly, I am most interested in how very different women that identify as Muslim, (and in my case also Pakistani and Canadian), demonstrate how some women who identify as Muslim, Pakistani and Canadian negotiate their familial, educational and career aspirations with their faculty, staff and peers at UTSC. My goal was to say that I was able to do research “with and for participants rather than on them” (emphasis theirs)” (Kirby and McKenna, 1989 cited in Khan, 2002: 26).

Site selection

The site for my research, the University of Toronto Scarborough, was founded in 1964 as a college of the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Arts and Science, thus making it a part of one of the world’s most prestigious universities, often referred to as the “Harvard of the North.” UTSC is a park-like campus, overlooking the Highland Creek Valley on the east-end of the city of Toronto. The size of the campus is approximately 300 acres, with approximately 11,000 students currently registered at the undergraduate and graduate level (UTSC, 2011).

UTSC is tightly linked to community activities because the majority of the students on this campus are commuters from local neighborhoods (i.e. Ajax, Pickering, Scarborough and Markham). Most of the students live at home while pursuing their education, without (generally) having to pay rent or food. This is the reality for the women that took part in this
study, making it an important consideration for this research. Specifically, this fact suggests how closely intertwined family and educational life is for those students at UTSC. This is in contrast to many of the students attending the St. George campus, where students live on their own and pay for rent and for food, a norm too often considered the ‘normal’ life of all students.

From an anti-racist perspective, as a city and a university campus, UTSC is home to various ethnic backgrounds, and racial and religious diversity which reflects the surrounding communities. This is an aspect of UTSC that administrators pride themselves on as a distinct characteristic of the campus. As a reflection of this diversity, there are numerous campus clubs and organizations that draw on students from different ethnicities, races and religions to find a sense of belonging in the educational environment. In relation to the demographic of students in this study, participants reflected on their experiences with peers in organizations such as the Muslim Student’s Association (MSA) and the Pakistani Student’s Association (PSA). Other aspects of the campus that have attempted to serve or ‘accommodate’ students that are different include serving Halal meat options at the campus restaurants and food courts. Despite working to find a sense of belonging, the students who took part in this research still felt there are elements of the student experience that keep students feeling marginalized because of their experiences of being racialized and essentialized or in other words, ‘othered’ in their different interactions with faculty, staff and peers, as will be discussed.

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11 Halal is the Arabic word meaning permissible or lawful. In this context it is referring to the Islamic method of slaughtering the meat known as Dhabihah, which requires animals to be alive and healthy at the time of slaughter. Through this method, the jugular vein, carotid artery and windpipe have to be severed by a razor sharp knife by a single swipe, to incur as less a pain as possible on the animal. Halal meat is similar to the practice of Kosher meat in Jewish dietary laws (Halal Food Authority (HFA), 2001 from http://www.halalfoodauthority.co.uk/definitionhalal.html).
Recruitment, Research design, data collection and recording

Recruitment

In order to recruit the participants for this research, I drew on the support of the division of Student Affairs I am employed with at UTSC, which is the Academic Advising & Career Centre. I obtained consent from the Director, Ruth Louden (Appendix D), to have the Centre assist with recruiting participants. I initially felt this would increase the perceived legitimacy of my research because of the sense of familiarity students have with this department, thus facilitating the trust associated with the study. As a result, it was assumed that students would be more likely to be forth coming and willing to participate in the research.

Upon approval from the Director, I introduced the Academic Advisors and Career Counselors to my research study at our weekly staff meeting, which allowed me to discuss the forthcoming email and other elements of the study (i.e. benefits to the student, student services and student development) using Appendix E and A to guide the discussion. I then emailed my colleagues both Academic Advisors and Career Counselors that meet with students one-on-one with an email (Appendix E) that outlined my request for their assistance in locating participants based on the criteria the study was exploring. In addition to requesting the assistance of my colleagues in an email, I also attached a Microsoft Word document that outlined the request for participants that was to be sent out to potential students by the advisors and counselors (Appendix F). Another way I wanted students to be invited to take part in this research was by word of mouth from students that were already invited by members of our department. For instance, in the email sent to students (Appendix
F), they were encouraged to invite their friends/peers that fit the criteria outlined (called snowballing). As indicated in the email invitations, students were encouraged to contact me once invited, if they were interested in taking part in this research.

**Research Design**

Initially this study was designed to use three methodologies to learn about the experiences of MPC women, including a questionnaire, interview and focus group, but ultimately seven women filled out the questionnaire and five were interviewed individually. As a result of the limited research conducted on this topic, the various areas I wanted to explore have been untouched. Therefore, I began creating the questionnaire, based on questions from my own experiences. The questions I formulated were distributed to five women who were either current students or recent graduates, who identify as MPCs. This was to lend a participatory dimension to the research as well as to see if the questions were clear. Participatory research practices (PRP) shift and disrupt the power dynamic and reduce the ‘researcher-researched’, a dichotomy highlighted by Sprague (2005). Overall, seven women ended up taking part in the research. Five out of the seven women took part in a follow up one-on-one interview which will be discussed further below.

**Questionnaire**

Once a participant, voiced an interest in participating in this research, I provided her with a hard copy of the consent form and questionnaire to fill out, which she had the option to return to me in person. However, the majority of the participants (6 out of 7) wanted me to email them the documents so that they could fill them out, print them and bring them to the
interview. For the participants who did not want to meet in person to pick up the documents, I did make myself available via phone and/or email for any of the participants that may have wanted clarification on the questions or procedures associated with the research project as a whole or specifically questions relating to the questionnaire. I also offered participants the opportunity to fill out the questionnaire in my presence and though none of the participants felt they needed to do this, this option, and a location at the university was offered, in order for me to answer any of their questions.

The questionnaire consisted of 26 items (Appendix C), taking participants less than 45 minutes to complete. The amount of time the questionnaire took to fill out was informally reported by some of the participants when discussing their process of completing the questionnaire during our interview. One question asked participants to explain the ways in which they identify themselves in terms of the categories of Muslim, Pakistani and Canadian (Q9). This identity question was aimed at allowing for an elaboration on the discussion by Magnusson (2000) and Mahtani (2002) about the exclusionary practices that distance ethnicities when a hyphen is used to identify individuals as I have done for Muslim Pakistani-Canadians. However, as acknowledged in the literature review, the hyphen is sometimes beneficial. The questionnaire was also designed to highlight the participants’ understandings of how they define Muslim and Pakistani to demonstrate the diversity of their experiences with peers, student services staff and the faculty with whom they interact.

One-on-one interview

Once the participants responded to the questionnaire, I invited them, via email (Appendix G) to take part in a one-on-one interview with me to elaborate on their written
reflection, along with giving them the opportunity to add anything that was either missing or not highlighted in the questionnaire. Therefore, the areas of discussion in the interview remained consistent with the questionnaire (Appendix C1 includes examples of interview questions). Unlike a questionnaire, not every question needed to be addressed because the participants had the autonomy to decide how they wanted the interview to unfold or what direction they wanted the interview to take. My desire was for the interviews to go beyond the questionnaire so that the narratives would address the questions I posed.

Of the seven participants, five women were responsive to the one-on-one interview and they were given the choice to meet on or off campus or to even speak over the phone, if they were not going to be on campus. Because my office is on campus, the five participants decided that it was easiest for them to meet here as they were wrapping up their classes (due to being the end of the semester), writing final exams or in a couple of the cases, they were starting a new semester. All of the interviews occurred in my personal office space and all interviews were scheduled around the participant’s availability during business hours (9am-5pm). The duration of each interview varied but the average amount of time spent was one hour. In one case, the interview lasted an hour and a half.

After each interview was completed, participants were emailed the notes I had taken during the interview. Only one of the interviews was tape recorded, while the remaining four interviews were conducted while I typed the notes. The Consent Forms (Appendix A and B) confirmed the confidentiality of notes and audiotapes for participants. Typing while we engaged in dialogue did not seem to bother or distract any of the interviewees. The participants were actually very open to having me type the notes while we talked because it helped with clarifying points while we spoke. Because I did not want to misinterpret or
misconstrue any of the narratives being shared, I would confirm their ideas as I typed them. The process assisted with speeding up the note taking procedures, because instead of using additional time to transcribe the notes after the meeting, I was able to either print or email the notes taken during the session and provide each participant with the notes at the end of our meeting to review at their convenience. I did ask the participants to inform me of any changes within about a week of our meeting and none of the participants responded with any edits to their interviews. This editing process aligns with and reinforces the collaborative model between the researcher and participant in creating the study (Sprague, 2005). This was an important component of timeliness for this study.

One participant specifically took a moment to note that taking part in research like this, even if it just involved her speaking about her life, made her realize how important it is for her to think critically about her lived experiences and how they function within power dynamics that play out our racist, classist, sexist among other oppressive understandings and how we internalize them and accept what happens to us.

Limitations of data collection process

As the research began to progress, I decided to keep it focused on Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women rather than extending it to the larger South Asian population because I felt that extending it would take away from the focus I was trying to achieve for this research. It is noteworthy that I did have students that identified as Muslim Indian-Canadian who approached me about the research and asked me to let them know if I decided to broaden my scope. However, I felt the information I was collecting through the questionnaires and the
one-on-one dialogues was rich enough that I did not need to expand to the larger South Asian population.

The questionnaire and one-on-one interviews provided rich narratives and context that can provide at least a starting point for researchers interested in learning about the diverse experiences of women that identify as MPC in the Canadian context, since there is a dearth of literature and overall scholarly work currently available. Perhaps a focus group in future research could extend and deepen my findings.

Data analysis

The research questions were used as an organizing framework for the data that was collected. This process assisted with grouping items in the questionnaire and because the interviews were based on the questionnaire, it was beneficial to build off how this organizational tool grouped each of the areas I was able to learn about. Table 2 demonstrates how each research question was answered by the items on the questionnaire (Appendix C).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Questionnaire Data for Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the conditions or relations that affect the experiences of MPC women in Ontario’s PSE?</td>
<td>Q: 5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,23,24,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are these experiences shaped by cultural and/or religious norms/expectations?</td>
<td>Q: 3,4,8,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the conditions or relations shaping these student’s experiences in PSE also work to impact their career aspirations?</td>
<td>Q: 5,6,7,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,23,24,25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Are these student’s experiences effected by their interactions with peers, faculty and by utilizing student services and if so, how?

Q: 14,15,16,22,23,24,25

The data were analyzed by identifying themes that arose from the responses provided by the participants, in relation to the preexisting literature. Situating the findings of this research in the existing literature permitted a comparison of the experiences of participants who identify somewhat similarly (i.e. previous studies have included broader discussions including South Asians which groups Pakistanis within the larger group) but who also differ in their experiences (for example, when it comes to the culture of their PSE institution and geographically in terms of how ‘being’ Muslim and Pakistani varies in the British context). Drawing out the institutional and regional comparisons facilitated the contribution to the literature from the Canadian perspective. This also allowed for an exploration of strategies used in other contexts (British) for improving the student experience, which may extend to the Canadian context to support diverse populations.

Themes that arose from the findings were also situated in relation to the theoretical frameworks that are being used in this research – mainstream student development theory and critical feminist anti-racist perspectives on intersectionality and Orientalism. For example, when discussing student-faculty relations, which is a theme highlighted in the existing literature on this topic, Chickering’s (1969, 1993) discussion of environmental influences that contribute to student development are connected. In addition, the framework of intersectionality, which demonstrates the connectivity of conditions such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ability (among other identities) was used to show how the various
identities MPC women classify themselves with work simultaneously and bidirectionally to shape their lived realities (Knudson, 2005).

The importance of reflexivity

Reflexivity in research is crucial as it requires, according to Nightingale and Cromby (1999),

an awareness of the researcher’s contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining ‘outside of’ one’s subject matter while conducting research. Reflexivity then, urges us to explore the ways in which a researcher’s involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research (228).

Ryan’s (2005) research for the “The Ontario Action Researcher” on reflexivity emphasizes the importance of this “internal conversation” that the researcher needs to engage in, especially when the researcher shares the same background or identity as the participants, which is an important consideration in this research because of my identity as a Muslim Pakistani-Canadian woman who has attended the same educational institution as the participants. This acknowledgement then, allows researchers like myself to understand the role that I can and do play in creating and recreating the narratives that the storytellers share because my interpretation of what is shared will shape how the research unfolds. As a result, Ryan (2005) points out that, “We can never be entirely sure how much impact we have had in the final account whether we are writing or listening to experiences” (4).

Concerns about being an ‘insider’ are also voiced in Hamdon’s (2010) research, where she points out that “insiders” have often been accused of being ‘biased’ and too close to the culture, which prevents them from asking questions that are provocative. However, she admits to readers that it has taken her a long time (10 years during her research) to work through her concerns and assumptions of “being blinded by the familiar” and has come to
realize that “biases are not something to be transcended; they are who I am” (13). This is an important point to highlight as my ‘inherent biases’ are similar to those of Hamdon (2010) but it is an empowering feeling to read her process of being reflexive which has made it an easier journey for my research process. This is also the position of feminist scholars such as Haraway (1988), who emphasizes that there is “no view from nowhere” (581).

Kanuha’s (2000) research on “being native” in the realm of Social Work also exemplifies the process of conducting research with communities or identity groups of which one is a member. She argues this is a reflexive way in which researchers can challenge positivistic epistemologies and methodologies. Kanuha outlines reasons for conducting research amongst “my own kind” which include wanting increased knowledge, analysis and more understanding of others whose life experiences may be similar to mine. Additionally, she points out that conducting research amongst our own allows for a contribution to knowledge and practice that will allow for an enhancement of services (service provision in the case of the research on MPC women would be university experiences with faculty, student services with staff and peers) for diverse populations that are ‘othered’ or marginalized. Therefore, as researchers if we intentionally separate ourselves from our participants then we, as the “native” or insider, become marginalized.

Ethical considerations

Ethics Review approval was granted in March 2011 by the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto. The process to ensure confidentiality for participants was thoroughly covered in the Consent Form provided to the participants (Appendix A and B).
CHAPTER 4

In this chapter the experiences shared by Zulaikah, Muskan, Sarah, Aminah, Marilyn, Vaneeza and Duniya about the experiences of MPC women in higher education will be presented and interpreted using feminist, anti-racist, as well as mainstream student development theoretical frameworks. The literature reviewed above will be used to assist in interpreting the stories and narratives that were included by the interviewees.

Even though each research question will not be addressed as a specific “theme” for analysis, each of the areas or themes outlined will be connected to the purpose of this research to provide an overall understanding of how the experiences of these MPC women have unfolded at UTSC during their undergraduate career. Familial, cultural and conceptualizations of religion will also be drawn on to demonstrate how various conditions and relationships play out in experiencing university in relation to faculty, staff and peers.

*The politics of identity formation*

How each of the participants chose to identify as Muslim, Pakistani and/or Canadian is telling in terms of which identities hold precedence for each of the women. This is a relevant consideration as the discussions on identity demonstrated how participants found a sense of belonging in the different realms of their lives, including within their familial and educational contexts.

Zulaikah, Sarah, Aminah and Duniya, all identified as Muslim Pakistani-Canadian and their reasons were similar. In Duniya’s words, “This question is very difficult to answer. I consider myself all three, equally. I picked this [MPC] because it is in chronological order - - born Muslim in Pakistan, and then migrated to Canada.” This was echoed by two other
I was born in Canada and I went back to Pakistan when I was four. My identity as a Pakistani is constructed in the household, which is why I am patriotic about being Canadian. In relation to religion, religion is important but I am not that practicing. I don’t wear the hijab and I don’t pray five times a day so it does not play a major role in my identity.

Participants that chose this identity. Zulaikah’s reasoning was similar even though she was born in Canada because her parents immigrated here. In contrast to these four, Muskan self-identified as Pakistani Muslim-Canadian, at the same time admitting to “feeling bad” for choosing this identity because of the traditional (cultural) influences in her home that she feels have contributed to her putting Pakistani culture before being Muslim. Muskan felt that “being Muslim is inherent, whereas being Pakistani is important because my family immigrated here and we don’t want to lose the culture.” Therefore, knowing how to speak Urdu, Pakistan’s national language, is emphasized (versus speaking or learning Arabic, often referred to as the language of Islam), in order to hold onto their family’s cultural “roots.”

Finally, both Vaneeza and Marilyn identified as Canadian first, with a Muslim Pakistani background being secondary; their reasoning for this identity formation was similar. Vaneeza for instance, noted,

> I was born in Canada and I went back to Pakistan when I was four. My identity as a Pakistani is constructed in the household, which is why I am patriotic about being Canadian. In relation to religion, religion is important but I am not that practicing. I don’t wear the hijab and I don’t pray five times a day so it does not play a major role in my identity.

Similarly, Marilyn said that she identifies as Canadian first because of being born here and it is most influential for her, while being Muslim is an identity she has chosen for herself and being Pakistani is an “adopted” identity because of her parents. The varieties in identity formation among just the three identities highlighted, Muslim, Pakistani and Canadian, show the political complexities of self-identification and demonstrate how these women understand themselves and how they find a sense of belonging. It would have been interesting to observe the dialogue that could have potentially occurred in a focus group setting amongst these participants.
women to see how they may have or may not have found connections with one another, with how they conceptualize and ultimately identify with these classifications.

At the most basic level, the women’s reasoning illustrate Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) discussion of identity formation in relation to student development, such as the assumption that developing an understanding or being able to contemplate their identities exemplifies development along the vector of “establishing an identity” for the women of this research. As discussed in the *Theory on Identity Development*, an identity is formed through a sense of historical, social and cultural contexts, often through family and ethnic heritage. The parental or familial influence is evident in the women’s interviews; for example, Muskan, Vaneeza and Marilyn state the importance of “cultural roots” or visiting Pakistan and/or adopting the identity because of their family’s patriotism about being affiliated with Pakistan and Pakistanis. In classical development literature, this recognition of ‘where we come from’ is an important foundation in how students ‘find themselves’ and how they find a sense of belonging with other students that may be similar or different than them in higher education.

Closely intertwined to this vector are the environmental factors that are included in Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) theory. It may even be worth researching whether the order in which these participants have chosen to situate their identities is linked to “student communities and friendships.” Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) environmental factors shows that the diversity in identification, could be linked to the environmental influences at UTSC that connect these students with like-minded people and with individuals that have different attitudes and backgrounds. This has helped the women in this study orient how they feel they are classified relative to race, ethnicity, religion and nationality.
Applying a feminist anti-racist lens to understanding the women’s various identities brings to light the importance of intersectionality (Choo and Ferree, 2010; Knudson, 2005). Using the ideas of classical theorists such as Collins (1990), there can be detected the “matrix of domination,” through which interlocking oppressions of socially constructed identities such as being Muslim, Pakistani, Canadian and a woman work simultaneously and not hierarchically to impact how these participants live their lives and how they feel they are viewed in their different environments. Intersectionality theory encourages an analysis of the complexities associated with power dynamics in different environments, such as education, which then, facilitate ‘otherness’ or marginalization (Knudson, 2005; Magnusson 2000). For example, when the participants distinguished their identities of being Muslim, Pakistani and Canadian, the order in which they chose them was a result of how they felt they may be viewed in their surroundings. In the cases of both Vaneeza and Marilyn, they noted being Canadian first, which could be attributed to the importance that has been placed on ‘being’ Canadian in their environments, such as in their schooling, where they may have felt an Orientalist lens towards their parental origins. On the other hand, Muskan placed emphasis on being Pakistani first, as her family has socialized her to do so. And, as her story unfolded, Muskan emphasized her active involvement in organizations such as the Pakistani Student’s Association (PSA) at UTSC, linking her to students who had the same understanding around being Pakistani, and therefore, making her feel connected and as if she belonged.

Theorizing this way also gives me insight into my own situation. For most of my undergraduate journey, I always emphasized that I was Canadian, when people would ask me, “where are you from?” I would then be asked, “no, where are you really from?” and I
would go into this entire explanation of how I identify as Muslim, but I was born and raised in Canada and my parents originated from Pakistan, giving me a “Pakistani ethnic heritage.” Applying a feminist anti-racist lens allows me to see that perhaps I had a denial of certain aspects of my identity because I did not want to be ‘grouped with them’ – referring to Pakistanis. And this is understandable in light of the potential negative reactions I might experience if I did not say I was Canadian. After contemplating my politics around my various identities, I have now begun to appreciate my history. I have even decided to adopt the identity of being Muslim-Pakistani Canadian, which is similar to four of the participants above, Zulaikah, Sarah, Aminah and Duniya. I finally realized that my identities of being Muslim and Pakistani would continue with me no matter where I choose to live in the world. They are the identities that allow me to decipher how I want to live my life, whereas being Canadian can easily change if I decide to leave the country at become a citizen elsewhere.

The hyphen between Pakistani-Canadian, despite Magnusson (2000) and Mahtani’s (2002) convincing arguments countering the hyphen, is something I have adopted. This is because I feel I need it in order to educate my peers, whether in my schooling or my work as an advisor, about ‘where I really come from’ and how you can actually be Muslim and Pakistani, while *being* Canadian, whatever that *being* may entail. As mentioned above, this sentiment about the importance of the hyphen is echoed in other research by Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) on the experiences of South Asians in the British context.

Another facet of this research that began to surface in my analysis of participant identities was how some of the participants’ religion was viewed. Muskan, for instance, demonstrated guilt or “feeling bad” for placing her Pakistani identity before her Muslim

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12 The ‘but’ is emphasized here in order to overcome any idea that being Muslim is only affiliated with the East – also known as the Occident (Said, 1978).
identity, while Vaneeza explicitly said that, consistent with not wearing a hijab, she did not feel that religion plays an influential part of her identity. Though Muskan did not identify why she felt the way she did, her acknowledgement of cultural values (food, clothing and language) over religious values (which for her seem to include components such as the hijab) may have made her feel as if she had chosen the ‘wrong’ answer. These are similar perceptions highlighted in Cole and Ahmadi’s (2003) research, in the American context with diverse Muslim women students in PSE. The participants believed the hijab was an indicator of being a ‘good’ Muslim. Consistent with these two women not wearing hijabs, they may have felt they did not align enough to the religion to choose it as a primary identity (Cole and Ahmadi, 2003).

With such diverse interpretations, one can see how the act of wearing a hijab can be interpreted differently. In my case, for example, though the participants did not know my reasons for wearing the hijab¹³ beyond it being a visible religious symbol, there may have been assumptions on their part of what I think it means to be a Muslim and the importance they think I may place on the hijab. As a result, their answers may have been impacted or shaped by their thoughts of me as a Muslim Pakistani-Canadian woman and based on what my expectations were of their answers.

¹³ Even though the one-on-one discussions between the participants and myself were a dialogue where we shared our lived realities in relation to the questions, I did not share with the participants that I wear the hijab as a way to counter Orientalist ideologies that assume that hijab wearing women are oppressed, ‘stay at home’ and do not work or are not educated. For me the hijab has been a tool to counter these stereotypes. However, I realize now that my philosophy may not have been evident to the participants because it did not directly arise in our discussions. They may imply that the only reason why I wear the hijab was for the purpose of being a Muslim and identifying with Islam.
Constructing Islam and Pakistani culture: The same or different?

The questionnaire asked the participants what they think it means to be a ‘practicing Muslim and Pakistani’. The intent of these questions was not to get a static understanding of what it means to have these two identities; what I was interested in was whether these identities were thought to be interchangeable by each of the women. All seven women noted that identifying as Muslim and Pakistani are not synonymous and that there are many differences that are masked in the name of religion. Zulaikah embraced intersectionality (Collins, 1990; Knudson, 2005) in her conceptualizations, demonstrated when she said,

A practicing Muslim is fluid and varies based on...age, geographic and social location, gender, class, culture, sexuality and education[al] level. I also believe history and lived experiences shape people’s understandings and interpretations of Islam, which therefore shapes how people practice and identify with Islam. Similarly, I believe there is no solid definition of ‘practicing Pakistani’ because it varies temporally and spatially. For example, people living in Pakistan may practice differently or similarly to each other from those living outside of Pakistan. Also, practicing culture and its traditions are influenced by how people practice Islam and how religion and culture intersect and clash.

Duniya referred to specific practices that shape her understandings of being Muslim and separately, Pakistani:

A practicing Muslim goes beyond the five tenets of Islam (belief, prayer, fasting, charity, Hajj [holy pilgrimage for Muslims in Saudi Arabia]. He or she eats halal, does not drink, practices modesty, reads and understands the Quran. Following the Prophet’s [considered by Muslims as the messenger of God] example is also crucial, particularly in his kindness, tolerance, generosity, fairness and empathy. I want to point out that my interpretation of a practicing Muslim may differ from others, and I accept these differences. A practicing Pakistani is one who is immersed in Pakistani culture. This includes but is not limited to, eating Pakistani foods, wearing Pakistani clothes, celebrating Pakistani holidays (i.e. Independence Day), speaking Urdu and maintaining ties to the ‘homeland’.

All of the participants described a ‘practicing Muslim and Pakistani’ similar to Zulaikah and Duniya and they all also went on to say that the ways in which they described a ‘practicing
Muslim’ is similar to how they identify with Islam. Though the descriptions of being a ‘practicing Pakistani’ were similar in many ways in terms of ritualistic practices, however, it was evident that not all of the participants felt that though they participated in the cultural norms, they did not identify with the culture as much as they did with the religion. The participants all went on to state the conflicting ways in which religion and culture are interpreted which can be problematic in how they practice and live their lives. Marilyn voiced her concerns about the interchangeable use of Islam and Pakistani culture, when she commented:

To many Pakistani’s [being Muslim and Pakistani hold the same values], but to me personally no [they] don’t because the more people blur their religion and culture, the more it bothers me, I have the values that I have because of my faith, not my culture.

Muskan also shared her concerns about how religion and culture get conflated in her familial settings:

When we go to family parties, we have to ‘look good’ and we will put prayer on hold because in order to pray we have to wash our faces [apart of the cleansing process prior to prayer]. And since we are wearing make-up we won’t want to remove our make-up by washing our faces and therefore we put tradition [dressing up in cultural clothing] before religion. Also, if getting married is so important in Islam, then how come our marriages don’t include any Islamic traditions? And if we are ‘such good Muslims’ then we should not be pressured to get married [this was in reference to her young friends being married off to spouses of their parents’ choice].

What is missing from the narratives above is some of the frustration that was expressed by the participants of this research as they discussed their understandings of how culture and religion are perceived. Prejudice and the conflation of national and religious identities appeared to leave these women feeling more inclined to align to Islamic values rather than cultural Pakistani values. Zulaikah was particularly concerned about how religion and culture are conflated as a result of family and community influences. As she put it,
Identifying as Muslim and Pakistani does not mean that both identities hold the same value. This is because the values and beliefs vary and do not always align with each other. I find some cultural values are mainly to keep face and maintain some kind of respect in a community or family. These cultural values in turn are masked behind religion and therefore, enforced as a religious belief. And of course practicing cultural norms are based on people’s experiences and geographical/social location, which then becomes selective for other groups. Religion on the other hand is more of a solid foundation that outlines what should be done and shouldn’t (even though people practice it selectively). It becomes a problem when culture and religion are mixed with each other and people try to associate both categories to be similar and sometimes even solitary. Identifying with Islam and Pakistani culture are different as Pakistani traditions are not Islamic (meaning not prescribed in the Quran) and vice-versa.

The research by Abbas (2002, 2003), in the British context, demonstrated the complexities that are associated with how Islam and Pakistani culture are interpreted and also perceived by many as interchangeable, which was echoed by the women in this research. Similar to Abbas’ (2002, 2003) participants, the women of this research refer to familial expectations of what it means to be a ‘good’ Pakistani and/or Muslim, leaving them confused about how to negotiate both identities that align to what they have been socialized to believe, while maintaining autonomy in developing their own beliefs and values.

Similar to the findings in literature on intersectionality, the women of this research adhered more to Islamic values over Pakistani values because of the problematic Orientalist understandings people have about how Muslim Pakistani women are supposed to behave (as being docile) and dress (in cultural clothing) (Abbas, 2002). Although the interpretation of what it means to be Muslim and Pakistani varies, but for those who are unaware of how these identities are distinguished, it is easy to fall into stereotypical notions of how Pakistani women living outside of regions in South Asia are constructed, which in turn impacts their levels of satisfaction with all elements of their lives including higher education. This will be elaborated on in the following themes arising from this research.
From a mainstream theoretical perspective, student development theorists such as Chickering and Reisser (1993) may consider the understandings associated with culture and religion demonstrated by the participants in my research as a part of their identity development. Similar to the discussion above, when students are able to contextualize their identities in relation to their historical, social and cultural backgrounds they work towards “establishing identity” and “developing integrity” when they are able to strike the balance they are comfortable with regarding their values and beliefs. Similarly, with the politics associated with forming an identity, the “environmental factors” that students engage with in their PSE institution as theorized by Chickering and Reisser (1993) can be seen to work to either challenge or affirm the understandings/conceptualizations that come about. For instance, in the familial context, exposure to culture and religion as conflated or as Zulaikah put it, “solitary,” may contrast with the views expressed to such individuals amongst their peers. That is, these participants may be exposed, through their environment, to more of a division between the two identities, assisting them with rebalancing their values and beliefs.

Another way to view this development is that meeting people with the different views on religion and culture than those that are emphasized in the home may also challenge the participants, making them aware of differences in ideas, backgrounds and values, which then may allow for development along the vector of “mature interpersonal relationships.” Acknowledging the simultaneous development of students along the various vectors is important theoretically because it captures the complexities associated with how these students construct their identities in relation to their environmental influences, showing the multi-faceted processes that need to be understood to support diverse students.
Linked to the multiple perspectives from which identity development or overall student development can be understood and problematized, Hamdon’s (2010) research on identity development among her participants trying to define being Muslim, shows the critical nature of intersecting identities such as culture, class and gender, among other conditions and relations that work simultaneously and bidirectionally to shape how identities form and change over time. Using critical theory, the formation and changes of identities and how values are attributed to them, as seen by participants, might be linked to experiences of marginalization. Theories of marginalization, or being ‘othered’, which include Orientalist lenses both internally (from your own kind – “internal Orientalism”) and externally (from the ‘West’) are also useful in interpreting my data. For example, Muskan questions how culture, specifically dressing up and pressuring the woman to marry, is put before religious obligations such as praying or Islamic traditions at weddings (which may include simplicity of celebration versus the elaborate weddings focusing on material goods). Her resistance to these pressures, would of course put her at the margins of her ‘own kind’, who may have their internalized and thus, normalized understandings of what it means to be a ‘good’ Muslim and Pakistani. The ‘good’14 versus ‘bad’ dichotomy reinforces marginalization or ‘otherness’ if you do not fit the norm, which could happen in familial settings that are dominated with understandings of Islam being conflated with Pakistani culture or “internal Orientalism” (Cole and Ahmadi, 2003; Davidson, Penslar, and Hanover 2005).

These power dynamics are necessary to understand the situations of these students in the PSE institutions. This point is supported by researchers such as Abbas (2002) who have

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14 I would argue that using words like ‘good’ and ‘bad’ is noteworthy as it is indicative of internalized terminology used by Muskan. See my earlier argument about my position as the researcher who ‘looks like’ the participants where I have used my own understandings of what it means to be Muslim and Pakistani to theorize the meanings of ‘good’ and ‘bad’.
argued that the educational achievements of racialized students are shaped by a “complex web of factors [conditions/relations]” such as class, gender, ethnocentricity on the part of the instructors (or student services and peers), institutional racism and parental religion and cultural affiliations (Abbas, 2002:292). In summary, intersectionality and Orientalism are important theoretically because they permit a thoughtful exploration of the complexities associated with the situation of students that go beyond relying on simplistic and more than often, reductionist assumptions about what makes Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women ‘different’ from other students, in their PSE environment.

Familial influences on educational and career endeavours

The influence of the familial arena in the context of culture and religion crosses or blurs the boundaries between the family and educational environments. That is, I would argue that there is a strong connection between ‘where these students are coming from and where they are going’ in terms of decision making outside of the family/home life.

Where to study?

The power the family dynamics has for the women in this research can be highlighted in various ways. For example, six out of the seven participants said they refer to “siblings and/or parents” for assistance when choosing courses, programs or seeking other academic advice. Decision making was also influenced by family when choosing UTSC as the university at which to study at. In our one-on-one dialogue, Sarah talked about not wanting to attend UTSC because she had received and accepted her offer of admission to another university, requiring her to live in residence, which was what she wanted. However, when
UTSC sent her a letter of offer, her father encouraged her without giving her much choice to accept UTSC, as it was close to home. This was similar for Marilyn, who wanted to pursue criminology at another university in Toronto to facilitate the process of pursuing a law degree in the future; but when she was accepted to UTSC, since it was closer to home, her parents did not allow her accept the offer of admission to the other university. When I asked her how she felt when her parents, specifically her father, told her she had to attend UTSC she said,

> You work so hard in high school to get what you want but then it doesn’t matter in the end because [parents] get the say in the end and they are persuasive in making the travelling sound difficult [from our house in the east end of the city]. They have ways to have their point of view win.

A theoretical consideration in this analysis that is noteworthy is the socio-economic class of these two participants who identified coming from families where their fathers were financing their education. Not having purchasing power, or in this case, being able to pay tuition, leaves these particular women reliant on their families to pay for their schooling, which sheds light on the power dynamics that play out in relation to socio-economic class. This is a clear example of one of the conditions of marginalization discussed amongst theorists of intersectionality (Collins, 1990; Hamdon, 2010; Knudson, 2005). Class is not merely understood as purchasing power but as a culture. For example, previous research by Abbas (2003) found that families from the working class experienced marginalization because the families aligned more to cultural values, which prevented those participants from pursuing education of their choice. In this case, the participants identified as middle to upper class families but still felt as if cultural understandings of ‘girls’ going to school close to home shaped where they ended up studying thus demonstrating how cultural values impact educational choice. Even though neither of these participants said anything about the assistance from their fathers being revoked if they did not attend UTSC, there was a clear
hegemonic understanding that since the women had support from their families, the views and wishes of their parents, specifically their fathers, would be accepted.

Despite not being able to deconstruct the power dynamics that play out in the family setting, student development theories like Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) acknowledge that identity development in PSE can be halted or slowed if the student is not interested in being in the particular environment. In the cases of Sarah and Marilyn, not wanting to initially attend UTSC demonstrates how it may have taken them longer than students who successfully chose UTSC as their “first choice” to engage with the environment (including connecting with faculty, student services and peers because of longing to be at another institution). As previously noted, UTSC prides itself on its intimate and communal feeling with its institutional size of just over 11,000 students, with opportunities to connect with faculty in and outside the classroom; as well as several student communities that highlight the diversity of the campus (UTSC, 2011). Therefore, the campus’ “environmental factors” discussed by Chickering and Reisser (1993) could have possibly benefitted Sarah, Marilyn and other participants. In spite of their not wanting to be there to begin with, both participants in fact said they were able to take advantage of and make their experiences the best they could at the university. Both Sarah and Marilyn did conclude this part of the discussion with me by highlighting their love for the campus as they reflect back on the four and five years spent here.
Negotiating program selection

Duniya and Muskan went on to talk about their difficulties or struggles that arose relative to getting ‘approval’ from their fathers when selecting their field of study. Duniya in addition to Sarah and Marilyn, also specified that her father was financing her education. Thus, his expectation was that she would study “something worthwhile.” In Duniya’s words,

I understand my dad’s expectations because of his past; he is not a controlling parent or a dictator. He always wanted to be a doctor and he couldn’t because his mother could not afford to send him to medical school. So he always wanted me to be a doctor. He put a lot of pressure on me and my two brothers to become doctors because he wanted to live his passions and goals through his kids. My dad tells me that if someone [had] told him to be a doctor he would [have been].

Duniya went on to describe trying to meet her father’s expectations unsuccessfully. As she explained,

After my first year, I didn’t want to pursue science and medical school because I had no interest. I actually hated it. My dad was very upset and it led a screaming fight in our house. So I told my dad I wanted to do law school, as the next best alternative. Because, like medical school, it requires competition, it is prestigious and shows I am smart if I can do it. My dad still doesn’t believe in what I am studying right now because I am in the social sciences. And he doesn’t consider that the ‘real’ sciences like Math and Physics, because I am in the ‘easier’ sciences. This really angers me because I think the social sciences are just as important as the other sciences. I have tired explaining my passion to my dad because I tell him I’d rather not [only] be paid a lot but be happy with what I am studying.

Duniya, however, is able to resist her father’s simple-mindedness in her account. As she put it:

[My father] is very money-minded and tells me that I don’t know how the world works [and] when I have kids I will understand financial restraints and the need for financial security. Because my dad is paying my tuition, he feels that he has a legitimate claim of where I go, in terms of my career education. It’s like I owe him by pursuing the career he wants. I need to show my dad that I am a strong independent woman, which he doesn’t see because he pays my tuition and thinks I am a naïve young girl. I swear, if my dad had not put so much pressure on me during first year, I would not have failed my calculus course [shakes her head].
Duniya’s mother provides some check on her father’s influence, as she reveals:

    My mom, though, gives me more freedom. She had done Early Childhood Education (ECE) and is now in Teacher’s College because she found her earlier work was not rewarding. My mother expects excellence but expects me to define my own excellence. I am glad to have my mom because she is the balance to my dad. My mom is my therapist and it is because of her that I am here.

Similar to Duniya, Muskan also faced a struggle with her father but in her case, her mother indirectly sided with her father. The issue was again valuing a business degree over a social sciences degree. One difference in this case was that Muskan was not relying on her parents or her father particularly to pay for her education; she was using a student loan to ensure she could pay for her education. Yet she still encountered quite a struggle to change programs, as she recounted:

    My father has always been quite passionate about education and aspects of career building which has always had a consistent influence on me to continue my education. However, unfortunately he has often been forceful in terms of which field or direction my career should take. For example he wanted me to study the BBA offered at UTSC, after trying my best for a year I realized that it was something that I had no interest in studying or pursing further. Hence after a lot of struggle and constant efforts to change his mind, I decided to pursue a Social Sciences degree rather than a Business one.

I asked Muskan to elaborate on what she meant when she referred to feeling as if she was “struggling” to convince her father of her program change. Muskan replied,

    The pressure to do a business degree by my father has been hard because he has focused on what people will think. Amongst Pakistani families, a business degree is better when telling people about what your child is studying. I think it also has a lot to do with his lack of information about the social sciences. My sister did the sciences so she was considered up to par with a business degree. It was crazy pressure; I cannot even explain what I went through. I could have done much better looking back at my first year if I didn’t have that much pressure. My dad is fine with it now and a part of my degree is still dedicated to my dad’s desire of business because one of my majors is economics. My mom didn’t care and went with whatever my dad said. She has told me that she still tells people I am doing business she doesn’t want to tell people I am doing a BA because she is ashamed. She is lost – a lack of information on her part.
These narratives are very telling of the family dynamics. The secondary role that mothers play in the educational and career building of their daughters was also exhibited by the participants in Abbas’ (2003) research. There was the determination of the fathers that made the students feel they needed to attend and complete higher education. In both stories, the two women in my study, who decided to ‘give in’ and do something along the lines of pleasing their fathers, there was a “struggle.” Duniya ended up at law school and Muskan completed her economics major, (despite not enjoying it, as she mentioned at the end of our discussion). Both fathers ended up ‘giving in’ as their daughters pursued aspects of what they wanted, thus demonstrating the type of familial negotiations that take place. In these instances, it can be seen how closely blurred familial and educational contexts remain. This encouragement, or in particular cases, enforcement is consistent with existing literature as conducted by Abbas (2003), Ahmad (2001) and Tyrer and Ahmad (2006). My findings on compromise soften what might be considered Orientalist views of Muslim Pakistani-British (or in this Canadian) families acting as barriers to their daughters in pursuing higher education and building a career.

The vignettes here can be understood in the context of a collectivist culture, and illustrate the many identities that interact and intersect for these women, amongst Pakistani families (and others from South Asia or the ‘East’). Class and economic motives as well as culture explain how women are sometimes prevented from pursuing what they want, whether in the education realm or other areas of their lives, in the name of what others in their families or communities will think or the ways in which they will react (Basit, 1997; Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006). The individualistic ideal, a characteristic the ‘West’ prides itself on, is

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15 At the time of writing this thesis, Duniya was moving into residence at her law school ready to start in the fall semester of 2011.
often painted as contradicting or countering the ideas that are used to describe a collectivist society, creating, recreating and maintaining a binary between the ‘East’ (backwards, primitive) and the ‘West’ (progressive, saving the ‘East’ from oppressive beliefs), reinforcing an Orientalist lens (Said, 1978).

But to the extent that economic/class considerations figure in the father/daughter disputes, perhaps there is not such a great divide between the East and West. From a student development or experience perspective, family disagreements such as this can be a problematic area if students are unable find a sense of belonging in their educational environment, especially if supports from faculty, student services or even peers do not align with collectivist pressures.

A part of educational decision making can be linked to development along the vector of “developing a purpose” which unfolds as students set career goals. In Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) theory, the process of setting and achieving career goals works simultaneously with being able to “manage emotions.” This includes being able to develop appropriate responses to adverse experiences (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). This can be seen in the case of Duniya, who talked about her “anger” towards her father’s lack of understanding of the social sciences and for Muskan. Emotionally she felt a lot of stress and “pressure” due to her father’s “lack of knowledge” about the social sciences. However, both Duniya and Muskan were able to find ways to ‘deal’ with their emotions by compromising or negotiating with their fathers to end up pursuing programs that they felt were appropriate for their strengths and interests.
Marriage and the discussion of education and career pursuits

These disagreements however, showed not to take away from the general support for educational pursuits for women provided by collectivist pressures. As noted above, the research conducted by Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) indicated that Muslim South Asian women offer many reasons why their families encourage higher education, including being able to attract suitors when looking to get married. This sentiment is reiterated by researchers in the British context where research revealed that a daughter was supported to pursue school because she would then be able to take care of herself and her husband, if needed (Abbas, 2002; Ahmad, 2001). Similarly, both Vaneeza and Aminah in my research expressed the same support they had for pursuing their education. Vaneeza talked about her mother being very happy that her daughter was about to achieve her degree which she would be able to tell the mothers of potential suitors that her daughter had a degree, making her more marketable and marriageable. Aminah, on the other hand, stated that her father “wants me to study and get a proper job at the end of the day because he knows that after I get married he no longer can support me.” Knowing that marriage is a requirement of Pakistani culture for young women and men, it was enlightening to see that these women had parents that supported education in relation to marriage. This was one of the moments for me, personally, where I understood the diverse perspectives on how education can be interpreted in relation to marriage (culture) and support a positive result for daughter and parents.

In my personal life, I have witnessed when women are not encouraged to pursue education, justified by the argument that education might make a woman ‘too smart’ for her own good. This was echoed in Tyrer and Ahmad’s (2006) research, and, as indicated above
in this study by Marilyn when I asked her to talk about whether law school/other graduate programs could still be an option for her and she said,

I don’t know. Timing wise, it may not work unless I have an acceptance but even then dad would say, at least be engaged, because culture plays that much of a role. If a rhista [proposal] came and I was going into graduate school, I would [have to] get married and then study.

I followed up by asking if there would be a possibility she would not be able to continue studying after marriage and she replied by reflecting on an experience:

One rhista that came asked me if I wanted to study after marriage and I said “Yes, I want to do my Masters in Health Promotion.” And then he said no to carrying forward anything with me because his brother’s wife had studied after marriage and she became very educated and ‘broke up the family’ wanting to move out of the joint family setup [living with the husband’s parents]. And that’s what made it difficult for him to accept my want to study because this suitors’ sister-in-law could ‘think for herself’ and make decisions. And so just witnessing this experience made this guy I was meeting not want to go further because he wanted to marry someone that would be willing to stay home and raise the family.

Sarah’s experience was different in that she was in a relationship with an individual of her choice who was seven years her senior (she was 20 at the time of the study). Sarah’s parents, especially her mother, had concerns about her choice of who she wanted to be with. As she put it,

I don’t feel it now but I have thought about these educational differences for the future. For example, I am a science student and he went to college and I like understanding different labs and techniques. I don’t think more education makes you smart but I don’t think he’ll be able to relate. His parents are putting on the pressure now because of his age according to cultural standards. I do see myself at a potential crossroad in two years with being in [graduate studies] and figuring how to get married with it. He has already told me that the joint family would need to be a consideration and that would require me to help out in the house in order to keep izzat [keeping face or respect in the family]. My mom is so against this relationship. She doesn’t even want to meet him because she thinks that because I went to university and did really well, I should have met a doctor. She thinks this is a phase I will grow out of.
Concerns such as these shared by the participants about experiencing the requirements of marriage amongst Muslim Pakistanis in the Canadian context, are reflective of the research that has been conducted previously. As indicated, fathers are more determined for their daughters to reach certain levels of education, while the mothers play more of a role in encouraging education to only a certain point (Abbas, 2003). Either way, the family or parental power dynamic is often experienced as overbearing in how these young women deal with negotiating what and how they want to do it in relation to the expectations of their cultural norms and education and career choices. The ‘point’ at which schooling is considered ‘enough education’ appears dependent on what may be considered ‘too educated’ in a particular family and community network, again reinforcing the effect of collectivist society that the participants of this and other research have documented (Basit, 1997; Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006). One poignant example in my research was Marilyn’s potential inability to pursue graduate or professional school, even if she had an offer of admission, unless she had a potential suitor in the picture.

In the reflections of Vaneeza, Aminah and Sarah, though there was a positive attitude towards what a degree can mean for a woman in terms of attracting ‘appropriate’ or like-minded spouses and being able to care for themselves, there is still an underlying understanding that marriage is the next appropriate developmental phase for these women. Thus, marriage is a gendered requirement within Pakistani culture, which, I have argued, is often masked as requirement of Islam. Though Islam does encourage marriage, education is also a requirement along with the rights of both sexes. I would argue that often this understanding is culturally misinterpreted, preventing women from pursuing their aspirations (Hamdon, 2010). This is especially true if they get married, need to care for children, or need
to be active participants in the ‘joint family’ arrangement. In the cases of Marilyn and Sarah, there is the potential of required care for elderly or ill in-laws, which is also mentioned in Tyrer and Ahmad, (2006). These requirements make it very difficult for women to go back to school if they left it to fulfill these familial obligations. It may also be very difficult to engage with others in the PSE environment if a woman is trying to achieve her degree, while she is balancing all of the responsibilities that could be required of her familial relationships.

In summary, my analysis indicates that the complexities associated with being able to strike a balance between these two realms of their lives are important considerations in how these participants find or do not find a sense of connection and belonging with their university experience. As will be demonstrated with the following three sections for this thesis, the boundaries are blurred, between home and school. I will illustrate this point, showing how these participants interact and experience their faculty, peers (both that identify and do not identify as MPC) and overall interaction with student services. I will argue that these results suggest that mainstream student development theories need to be supplemented with feminist critical anti-racist understandings of intersectionality and Orientalism. These theories, are not often brought together as they have been throughout this analysis, where I have utilized them to demonstrate how identity formation, problematic interchangeable conceptualizations of Islam and Pakistani culture, and parental influences of where, what and how much to study are central conditions and relations to be explored when trying to define, create or cultivate an environment to serve diverse or ‘multicultural’ students in Canada’s higher education system.
Experiences with faculty

There is much research in the realm of student development theory that has demonstrated that student and faculty interaction both in and outside the classroom is critical to the academic achievement and social experiences of a student in PSE (Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) “environmental factors” include student-faculty interaction and the curriculum should include processes that facilitate student engagement in order for students not to feel isolated, alienated or alone when navigating the educational system. These environmental influences are theorized to promote feelings of belonging and connecting with faculty, as well as working towards students “achieving confidence” in relation to academic knowledge. This is because connecting to the faculty is theoretically linked to the content that is being taught in the course(s) and thus, contributing to academic potential that a student can demonstrate. This development then can be connected to other vectors such as “developing mature relationships,” and “developing purpose and integrity” among the other vectors that are cultivated simultaneously and bidirectionally with the “environmental factors.”

In Marilyn’s first example offered about her relation to faculty, she found a “bond,” as she describes it, with a professor who happened to identify as Muslim. She elaborated that the connection was “beyond religion.” In her own words, Marilyn ultimately described both positive and negative experiences with two different professors and the difference in feelings that resulted. This was especially evident in her facial expressions during our one-on-one dialogue. As she put it,
My best experience with a faculty member was a professor who identifies as Muslim. I didn’t feel connected to her because she is Muslim but because I went through a health concern and she took my cell number and called the evening of my appointment to see if I was okay. The bond with her is unbelievable. I never initiate the bond of being Muslim and if they do, then I will. If the professor uses terms like *inshallah* (Arabic for “God Willing”), I will go with it. We were close, but I didn’t take that bond for granted, I did my work, participated and earned that A. I don’t have a cultural bond with her because she is Arab. She understands our cultures because she knows and cares to be educated about our cultural expectations. She understands things like marital expectations and familial expectations.

However, it hasn’t been all great with my professors. I had difficulty with a professor who continually interrogated my work. I drew on the services of the Writing Centre to see if I was on track and the staff member also agreed that I was doing well and [keep up with] the class. She picked on me after our second paper was due. She gave the class a speech about plagiarism and I noticed that most of the people that were ‘caught’ were Muslim and all the women, but me, wore the hijab. I can’t help but wonder because everyone was of colour and mostly wearing a hijab... I couldn’t help but wonder.

It could be argued that the positive experience of working and connecting with the first professor assisted Marilyn with achieving her “A” in the course because she felt the faculty member actually cared about her needs and who she was as a person, thus helping her to be confident with her position in the class. This was in contrast to the experience with the faculty member in her other class who she felt was “interrogating” her. Her feelings of being a racialized or ‘different’ female came out and she felt that “everyone accused was of colour and mostly wearing a hijab.” The accusation of plagiarism is arguably the most serious of charges that can be made in an academic setting and thus it is clearly important to address. While plagiarism needs to be addressed, Marilyn’s concerns about her professor’s assumptions about Muslim students also need to be addressed, because of the feelings of being ‘othered’ in the classroom (Choo and Ferree, 2010; Hamdon, 2010; Said, 1978).
One of the problems in the public school systems is Islam, which is a secondary religion in France. The ‘viole islamique’ means the hijab is controversial in ‘l’écoles laique’. This is because certain French people see it as a sign of oppression by father/brothers and this is against the view of modern France. Muslims refuse to integrate in the French population and because of this the ‘Loi Stasi’ of 2004 was established which forbids any sort of religious gear in school and this ensures religious neutrality in France.

After sharing the professor’s quote with me (based on her notes she had brought from the class to our interview), Sarah expressed her personal reactions to this experience. She commented: “I remember feeling very uncomfortable and even though I don’t wear a hijab, so the professor didn’t know if I was Muslim or not, I still feel like she was pointing me out as a Muslim.” When I followed up and asked Sarah about her relationship with her professor after the comment was made, she said, “If you mean, do I talk to her, then no, I will never go to her office hours again and I cannot wait until this class is done.” She then went on to connect how this experience in the classroom was complicated by and also closely tied to her relationship with her Muslim peers in the classroom, based on her professor’s comment. In her own words,

I looked to the girl next to me, who wears a hijab, to see if she was uncomfortable with this comment. But she seemed like it didn’t even faze her. This threw me off because I felt that, if she didn’t have a reaction then why was I so uncomfortable with the professor’s comment. I also did not have enough confidence to confront the professor about this comment because she is the professor, after all, and I did not want to risk my grade in the class.

As a woman who identifies as Muslim (religious affiliation), Pakistani (ethnic heritage) and Canadian (nationality), who does not wear a visible religious symbol like the hijab, Sarah’s
narrative demonstrates various levels of complexities of how she experiences higher education and the relationships with her professor and peers that have worked simultaneously in this incident. Without using terminology such as ‘othering’ or ‘marginalized’ Sarah’s choice to share this experience exemplifies how she felt isolated/alienated by her professor’s comment. When she looked over at her peer to find a sense of belonging because of their religious commonality, her peer seemingly was ignoring the professor’s statement, which made her feel that did not ‘measure up’ or did not have the right to have a reaction because she is not a “good” Muslim who wears a hijab (Cole and Ahmadi, 2003). Whether or not the peer actually was unfazed by the professor’s statement is irrelevant, since her reaction demonstrates indirect ‘internal Orientalism’ (Davidson, Penslar, and Hanover 2005).

The professor’s use of terminology was problematic for Sarah in that it showed Islam as the “problem” in schools in France, or the hijab as being “controversial.” Her claim that the hijab is viewed as a form of “oppression” by “modern” France or that Muslims have not “integrated” into France and that the ban is aiming for “neutrality,” begins to show how the Orientalist gaze becomes part of in the teachings and ideologies of the professor. Through the professor’s explanation and support for France’s strict separation of religion and the state, which is central to maintaining ‘civility’, she reinforces the legitimization of needing ‘barbaric and primitive’ Muslims to be ‘civilized’ in order to find their belonging in France. This marginalization or ‘othering’ also demonstrates how the power dynamic between the professor, who represents the Occident, silences Sarah, who represents the Orient. Specifically, Sarah does not want to potentially risk her grade in the course because she would like to excel in her studies. The student essentially later avoids conflict with the professor by not attending office hours and counting down the days until the class is over.
This isolation voiced by Sarah has also been echoed in the Canadian context by participants in research at the secondary school level in Saskatchewan. Wearing the hijab for one student led her teachers completely disengaging with her and ignoring her in the class. This is against the backdrop of a racist history in Canada that has essentialized Muslims and Muslim women that dates back to at least 1994. In Montreal, students were sent home by school officials because they wore a hijab and were told they could not attend the school if they did not remove their head covering. This was further legitimized in Quebec in 1995 by the largest teachers’ union in the province (Centrale de l’enseignement du Quebec (CEQ)) when members voted to ban the hijab in schools (Ruby, 2006). These examples are indicative of the Orientalist gaze that has and continues to plague Canada’s educational systems at all levels, leaving the Muslim women, and specifically MPC in this research feeling they do not belong and may be risking the relationship with their faculty in their post-secondary institutes because of just being Muslim; or in Sarah’s experience, if they choose to wear a hijab.

In Sarah’s case, a mainstream theorist might argue that the student feels very distant from the professor because of her opinions about Sarah’s identity, whether knowing Sarah identifies as Muslim and with Islam or not and according to general theorizing of Chickering and Reisser (1993), it might be argued that Sarah’s development was stunted along various vectors, including “achieving confidence,” “developing relationships” and even possibly “questioning her identity” in relation to her Muslim peers (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). However, mainstream theory provides little insight about how those vectors interrelate while anti-racist theory provides some clues about underlying processes.
Peer relations in higher education

Echoing Sarah’s experience of being ‘othered’, Duniya talked about her experiences with her Muslim Pakistani peers. Duniya, who no longer chooses to wear the hijab, talked about wearing the hijab from grades 3 to 11 by choice because of the feelings of “sisterhood” which she felt she achieved with her peers. Despite not wearing the hijab during her undergraduate years, Duniya pointed out that she feels that women who wear a hijab clearly experience the “sisterhood.” In Duniya’s own words,

When you see another girl wearing a hijab in a class, the likelihood that the two of you connect is more so then if you don’t wear hijab. [But] I have experienced this in relation to not wearing the hijab and going to the prayer room. Ninety percent of the women that use the prayer room wear a hijab and I feel that I may be considered inferior or less of a Muslim then other hijab-wearing women. I feel like I am being looked at with a disapproving stare. Some women feel that you are not supposed to wear leggings because they are not appropriate to wear while praying. So some of my friends, who would be wearing skinny jeans, would either say they cannot go pray because of not being dressed appropriately. Or if they did go they would use the chador [a large piece of cloth that can be wrapped around the body for prayer] for a make-shift skirt to cover them. I did that a couple of times because I felt uncomfortable, and then I said “screw that, I am praying for Allah [God] and myself, not them, so my faith is what matters.” There are all sorts of dresses out there and if you’re modestly dressed, in terms of how I define it, then who cares?

The points about a “sisterhood” that hijab–wearing women achieve is an interesting consideration that Duniya highlights as a facet of religion she feels has impacted her not being able to connect with other Muslim women. In Ruby’s (2006) research in the Canadian context, participants felt a community orientation with other women who wore the hijab because as Duniya points out above, to them it demonstrated a similarity and support for the attitudes, values and beliefs that linked them to their community of identifiable Muslims. However, the benefits of being able to connect to other Muslims is problematized by Hamdon (2010), like Duniya went on to problematize the ideas that underpin this
“sisterhood” because of how they could work to further marginalize those that are already at the margins of both communities (Muslims and non-Muslims; Pakistanis and non-Pakistanis; and Canadians and non-Canadians).

I can personally situate myself in relation to the concerns felt by a woman who wears a hijab and identifies with Islam and as Muslim experiences at the margins of both ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ cultures. When I started my first year at UTSC, I began to explore the different student groups on campus and thought that I would connect with the MSA. I quickly began facing difficulties, as some of the male executives of the organization began to question how I chose to wear the hijab – specifically wearing the scarf as ‘a bun’ (the scarf tied behind my head around my hair), rather than the ‘conventional, right way’ (in their opinion) that covers the head and neck of a woman. On numerous occasions I was told that I was not a ‘true’ Muslim because I had my own style of wearing my hijab. Experiencing this type of questioning and constant interrogation of being ‘good’ or ‘true’ not only led me to disengage from the organization for the rest of my undergraduate experience, but I also realized that I could find more of a sense of belonging amongst those who did not identify as Muslim and with Islam, as I found that non-Muslims and non-Pakistanis were more inclusive of diversity and interested in learning about my experiences. Thus I could not find a connection with ‘my own kind’. This type of marginalization is indicative of ‘internal Orientalism’, which limited and essentially disconnected me from any organizing on campus in relation to Muslims and Pakistanis, despite still classifying myself as possessing these identities. I did not want to be told continuously that I did not measure up or was not ‘good’ enough. As discussed earlier, in Cole and Ahmadi’s (2003) research, I replaced being a ‘good’ Muslim with being an ‘effective’ Muslim who would rather spend my time educating
people about what the hijab means to me as a symbol of religion and a tool to resist political and social oppression, than trying to fit in with a group of individuals who reinforced stereotypical understandings of how and what the ‘*Muslim woman*’ should be.

As someone who enjoys and practices her religion, Duniya felt further isolated when she decided to take part in a flood relief effort for Pakistan associated with her peers that use the prayer room which was linked to the Muslim Student’s Association (MSA) at the university. As she commented,

> I was the only girl not wearing a hijab at the MSA for the Pakistan Flood Relief meeting and I felt uncomfortable because some of the guys would not look at me all, and then other guys did look at me all the time, and the girls just gave me dirty looks so I felt out of place.

Feeling isolated and not being able to connect with her peers in the MSA was not only mentioned by Duniya but also by Muskan who questioned the decision making of the MSA as an organization that is supposed to be representative of the Muslim students at the campus. In her words,

> I felt the MSA was restrictive, which is why I never took part, especially because I don’t wear a hijab I have felt that I was not welcomed amongst those in the MSA – kind of like a cult. Yes, being a Muslim includes praying five times a day but it is more than just that. I remember a Shia Muslim was elected as the President of the MSA, but the rest of the members, who represented Sunni Muslims (the largest sect of Islam), felt that they needed to change this because of his sect. They felt the MSA would be going in the ‘wrong direction’. This is wrong because they cannot define who is Muslim. Who gave them the authority to judge who is right or wrong?

Duniya and Muskan’s peer-to-peer relationships within and among Muslims constituted the main part of our interview discussion, as they both felt their overall experiences with non-Muslim, non-Pakistani peers were easier to “deal with.” This was attributed to the receptiveness that these other peers demonstrated to learn about Muslims, Islam and
Pakistani Canadians also true for Cole and Ahmadi’s (2003) participants. Theoretically, the experiences that both Duniya and Muskan reflected on in our one-on-one meetings can be understood as demonstrating ‘internal Orientalism’. Both Duniya and Muskan were journeying through their educational experiences attempting to build relationships with peers who seemed familiar to them because of their shared religious and even cultural ideologies although they encountered much difficulty. This interpretation takes into account the negotiated nature associated with the various understandings of religion and culture (Abbas, 2002, 2003). Anti-racist theory also draws attention to the observation that the Orient also ‘civilizes’. For example, Duniya feels pressured to be ‘civilized’ to be more of a Muslim. Is this gaze all that different from the Occidental gaze? At the very least, the example suggests a power struggle and lack of appreciation by her peers of the diversity of ideas and understandings of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim Pakistani-Canadian woman.

Returning briefly to mainstream student development theory, one of the “vectors” Chickering and Reisser (1993) identify is “developing mature interpersonal relationships,” which is theorized to occur when there is an awareness of the differences that exist in ideas, peoples, backgrounds and values. One of the “environmental factors” that can impact the amount of growth that happens for this “vector” is assumed to be the extent to which student communities and friendships are cultivated that are diverse in attitudes and backgrounds. For both of these participants whose experiences are discussed here, attempts were made to build networks with peers, though they constantly encountered barriers of attitudes that showed differences from their understandings that are not problematized in mainstream theory. Arguably, marginalization by an imagined stereotyping by one’s ‘own kind’ was the basis for their isolation, which impacted the connection they were trying to make with their peers.
Theorizing participant experiences using concepts from Collins (1990), Khan (2002), Knudson (2005) and Said (1978), of “internal colonization,” thus go beyond mainstream theory to account for the complexities associated with the experiences of Duniya and Muskan’s intersecting, simultaneously functioning identities. These identities have them grouped in with all Muslim women by non-Muslims and non-Pakistanis as being one group. But their experiences show that their peers did not necessarily want them as group members. Thus wearing as well as not wearing a hijab can impact one’s sense of belonging in an educational setting.

*Interactions with student service providers*

The last topic dealt with in this data chapter is the experiences that the participants reported about their interactions with student service providers. Overall in the five interviews, student services were less seldom referred to. However, interviewees did provide advice for the development of student services dealing with issues of diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity, race, ability and sexuality amongst those that are hired to provide the services. This was interesting because each of the participants applied what could be seen as the idea of intersectionality to how they would feel most comfortable when accessing the services (Abbas, 2001, 2003; Ahmad, 2001; Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006). Muskan’s explained how she used student services, not only for personal issues but to get involved on campus. Her experience of how having individuals that are not necessarily like you exactly but exhibit some identity of being ‘different’ assists with the process of getting engaged with the campus. In her words, Muskan said the following about speaking with a student leadership
I used counseling services and I met with a male that is Pakistani but non-Muslim. I met with him at a time that I was stressed because I was accused of plagiarism by my professor. He gave me exercises to help me understand that this one professor will not define who I am and how I will achieve my degree. He helped me learn about self-worth because that concept is non-existent in the Pakistani culture. We are socialized to sacrifice ourselves to be a great daughter, sister and wife and if you have problems you don’t voice them. My counselor helped me understand that I need some self-indulgence and that it is okay to put myself first once in a while. He understands the cultures.

Although I haven’t experienced direct discrimination, I have always felt a barrier in approaching student services as I have felt that many educational problems will not be understood by services. Until recently, I had restricted myself from applying to jobs on campus or taking an active part as I had a fear of discrimination and was afraid that I may not be able to mix in with other individuals on campus while following my religious and cultural norms. To get involved, I stuck to the PSA (Pakistani Student’s Association) because I didn’t want to leave my ‘own kind’. I also didn’t apply to work at the SCSU (Scarborough Campus Student’s Union which is the student council) because I knew I would have to work late hours beyond my curfew and that would not be okay. But then, being in my 4th year, I realized I had no experience and I came across a first year mentorship program for which the [organization] needed senior students to be mentors for first year students and I spoke to the staff coordinator and I have to say she was very supportive in how she spoke to me. She wanted to hire students that were from different ethnicities. That made me feel really good about myself because it showed that people prefer people like us. As a student service provider her approach made a huge difference because it gave me confidence to take part.

A similar experience was had by Marilyn, who drew on student services for counseling when going through a difficult time during an academic semester. Though, the counselor was similar in terms of ‘difference’ because he too, identified as Pakistani, there was a difference between the two in terms of religious affiliation and gender. However, Marilyn felt that whether Pakistani, Muslim and male or not, she felt supported. These were descriptions of the process of meeting him:

I used counseling services and I met with a male that is Pakistani but non-Muslim. I met with him at a time that I was stressed because I was accused of plagiarism by my professor. He gave me exercises to help me understand that this one professor will not define who I am and how I will achieve my degree. He helped me learn about self-worth because that concept is non-existent in the Pakistani culture. We are socialized to sacrifice ourselves to be a great daughter, sister and wife and if you have problems you don’t voice them. My counselor helped me understand that I need some self-indulgence and that it is okay to put myself first once in a while. He understands the cultures.

For Muskan, because the coordinator identifies as being racialized, it helped her connect her ‘difference’ to someone she felt could understand and appreciate her.
Despite the positive reflections offered by Muskan and Marilyn, Muskan also did use other services on campus but found them not to be as effective in providing her the support she required for her mental health concerns. The utilization of counseling by Muskan was a recommendation by Zulaikah, as she also used the services. Even though Zulaikah recommended the services, she also had her personal experiences of not really being able to get the help she needed. Specifically, she said, “I realized [the counselor] wasn’t really able to help me as she wasn’t familiar with cultural/religious expectations that shaped my experiences.” She added that, “perhaps there isn’t training for every culture/religion or other factors that shape our lives.” But in a more detailed account, Muskan shared her concerns of being made to feel “abnormal.” In her words,

I have met with a counselor about four or five times but I felt that instead of her helping me, I was educating her. She was so fascinated about the world I was coming from, which made me feel even more abnormal. At points, I felt she didn’t give me the right advice, because she couldn’t. I think she is good but I think she didn’t know what to say. Her questions showed me she didn’t know what to say. I also met with a psychiatrist and he asked me questions about how extreme my depression was, in terms of doing weed or wanting to commit suicide. And when I told him “no I didn’t have those urges,” he felt I was okay. What he didn’t realize was that just because I wasn’t doing those things, it could have been because of my cultural and religious restrictions. He didn’t realize that my ‘extreme’ could have been in different ways that are comparable to someone that is suicidal.

Even though Zulaikah did not feel that she was served as she would have liked, she still referred Muskan, with the hopes that at least one of them would get help. Their experiences suggest the need for culturally competent services on campus to support students from diverse backgrounds. For students such as Zulaikah the services can become an “ear” to talk to, rather than to get practical pieces of guidance, whereas Marilyn was able to get the exercises which have helped her. Zulaikah has been able to work with just talking out her concerns and lived experiences, while Muskan gave the service a try and did not feel
I made a career counseling appointment with a non-Muslim/non-Pakistani woman and I shared my dad’s expectation of going to medical school and she looked at me thoughtfully and was sympathetic, but she did not say anything. I felt the career counselor was scared to say anything because she didn’t want to offend me or maybe she wanted to be politically correct. The appointment became me just talking for 30 minutes, because I didn’t want awkward silences so it was a waste of my time because I wasn’t given practical advice or motivation to not feel the way I did. I wanted her to say that I should make my decisions. I gave her so many opportunities to jump in and say the right things but she didn’t. I understand where she is coming from because I think I would be in the same position if I was dealing with someone from another background. I don’t think she should have been afraid to acknowledge that she may not have understood what I was experiencing but she could have told me that I was taking the right steps by talking to her. She could have said, “I may not understand the expectations you are required to live through and if I say something to offend you, I am sorry and it is unintentional.” I do understand the difficulties service providers face but I think both providers and student users need to be engaged in an open-minded dialogue.

Duniya also shared her narrative of using career counseling services as she said she “loves the staff” and felt that she could “speak to them about anything.” On the other hand, she described an incident where she was left feeling as if she was not able to take anything away from her meeting with a counselor:

 Even though Duniya does not wear a hijab and did not have any verbal negative experiences with her career counselor as did a participant in Tyrer and Ahmad’s (2006) research who was not supported by her career counselor to pursue professions like medicine, the silence of Duniya’s career counselor spoke to her in terms of her feeling ‘othered’. She felt that the career counselor was hesitant to say anything that was “politically incorrect” which gave Duniya the idea that the counselor had notions about her being ‘different’ from the norm of supported. Her situation was the one that cries out to be addressed because she stopped using it, not because she wanted to, but because she felt it contributed to her feeling even more ‘different’ than she did before using counseling.
students that usually come into her office. This assumed lack of understanding was echoed by the other participants in Tyrer and Ahmad’s (2006) work who felt their career advisors did not understand the experiences of Muslim female students in and outside of the university context.

The richness of comments and analysis provided by the participants of this research go far beyond what existing literature has had to offer in terms of Muslim Pakistani (or South Asian) women’s experiences with student services at the post-secondary level of education, specifically in the North American context. The experiences and opportunities that these women shared suggest that while student service providers are well-meaning, there is a problem of experiencing an Orientalist gaze that racialized students experience, a theme that has been woven into the analyses of all of the relationships in this research. Muskan found a connection or a sense of belonging with another racialized individual on campus, showing her she can be “comfortable” in her own skin. On the other hand, in a personal counseling service visit she was not able to find that connection. She did not mention if she felt a hierarchy and if the counselor was racialized or not. Similarly, Muskan’s description of her counselor seemingly “fascinated” with her was ironic, given that she was turning to the Occident to discuss problems and get ‘expert’ ‘help’ to feel ‘free’, ‘liberated’ and ‘civilized’ (Hamdon, 2010; Said, 1978). This example illustrates that the discomfort a student senses can be the reason she stops seeking services, despite needing the support to excel both academically and personally.

I have used Orientalism, and intersectionality consistently as theories to guide my analyses, but these theories were also informally integrated by the participants when talking about their multiple identities and how they wished to see more diverse identities represented
in student services on campus. Marilyn’s experience also pointed to how her counselor’s cultural familiarity allowed him to have a cultural understanding that other counselors, and student service providers, may not have about the cultural and religious norms that are required of these women. Not having such an understanding could leave service providers feeling a loss about what to say. This may have been the case in the incidents reported by Muskan and Duniya. Presumably the power dynamic was uncomfortable for both parties though the views of the counselors remain to be explored.

Clearly this is an area of further investigation. The positive outcomes of what we refer to as student affairs, or other service providers such as the registrar’s office and financial aid, are central to the student experience and how students develop in their journey while at university. I would argue that the narratives highlighting the positive outcomes by Muskan and Marilyn can be used by student development theorists to explain how engaging with student services and student service providers contributes to learning how to “manage emotions”, develop “mature interpersonal relationships”, “establish identity” and “develop integrity.”

In summary, different sets of interactions can be seen to be functioning simultaneously and contributing to different aspects of the participants’ lives. In Muskan and Zulaikah’s example, Muskan met Zulaikah when they started working together in the mentoring program, and developed an understanding and close friendship because of their similar identities of being Muslim, Pakistani, Canadian women. As a result, they were able to develop a “mature” friendship, according to mainstream development theory. At the same time, they assisted each other with “establishing their identities” by sharing their lived experiences with one another as one wears a hijab and one does not, but they identify
similarly and also have different understandings of how and what they want to do individually to observe these identities. In mainstream theorizing this could be linked to the vector of “developing integrity” because it is through learning from one another that they have been able to contextualize their values and beliefs. From what Muskan shared with me during our one-on-one dialogue, Zulaikah has helped her when it comes to working through and responding appropriately to her anxiety and mental health concerns, which could be suggestive of why Zulaikah referred Muskan to the counseling services to begin with. She was attempting to provide Muskan with a response that demonstrated care and optimism, which demonstrates development along the vector of “managing emotions.” The dynamic between Zulaikah and Muskan is also an example of how engaging with peers and student services (where they first met) facilitates development along various vectors and also shows how the vectors work with the “web of environmental factors” including “institutional size” that has opportunities for students to participate in leadership roles on campus (as mentors). Further to this, opportunities to get involved are linked to the “building of student communities and friendships” with those who are both similar and different in attitudes and understanding of backgrounds. But Orientalism and intersectionality perspectives on are also beneficial when discussing experiences such as identity development as they are able to shed light on the various layers of complexities that need exploration and discussion when attempting to understand and serve our students through campus services.
CHAPTER 5

~“In the social sciences today there is no longer a God’s-eye view that guarantees absolute methodological certainty…There seems to be an emerging consensus that all inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer, that observation is theory laden…We can no longer think of ourselves as neutral spectators of the social world” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 420 cited in Hamdon: 2010:20).~

Summary

This research study focused on the experiences of Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women in higher education in the Canadian context, with a case study that centered on one of Toronto’s mid-sized university campuses. More specifically, I wanted to concentrate on how cultural and/or religious norms the participants are expected to adopt or socialized into shape their educational and career aspirations. Seven women took part in this research and provided a breadth and depth of commentary that allowed me to theorize the diversity and complexities of their experiences as Muslim, Pakistani Canadians.

In chapter one, I reviewed the themes or areas of interest derived from existing research. This ranged from ideas around identity construction, to the interchangeable nature of Pakistani culture and Islam as a religion, along with the familial impact on educational and career aspirations in relation to the expectations of marriage, and the overall experiences that Muslim Pakistani (or South Asian)-American/British/Australian women have in relation to their faculty, student service providers and peers. These became areas for me to explore.

In chapter two, the importance of bringing together mainstream student development theory on the identity development of students in PSE by Chickering and Reisser (1969, 2003) and feminist critical anti-racist understandings of intersectionality (Collins, 1990; Knudson, 2005; Hamdon, 2010) and Orientalism (Davidson, Penslar, and Hanover, 2005;
Said, 1978) was emphasized. My argument was that this is necessary to obtain a holistic understanding of the impact of diversity on students’ experiences in higher education.

The ontological, epistemological and methodological intricacies of this research project were outlined in chapter three and discussed in relation to my choices of starting with a questionnaire and ending with one-on-one interviews as my methods to collect data. This process was discussed in relation to my status as an ‘insider’ and the importance of a reflexive process.

In my data chapter appeared my analysis of six themes in relation to the existing literature and the theoretical frameworks chosen to situate this research. The narratives led to discussions about the politics associated with identity formation, in relation to being Muslim, Pakistani and Canadian in varying capacities; the problematization of Islam and Pakistani culture as synonymous; and the influence of the familial realm on educational and career aspirations. The final three themes focused on the experiences within the educational realm in relation to the interactions that the participants of this research have had with faculty, their peers and student service providers.

Reflections on the research process and implications of research

The reading, researching and writing of this thesis, which began surfacing before I even applied to this graduate program, has been a critical journey in learning about myself and those around me, in terms of how I am viewed and understood by those that see me as ‘different’. Hamdon (2010) in particular facilitated my acceptance of being an ‘insider’ in my research. As acknowledged previously, not only am I a student service provider but I also identify as a Muslim Pakistani-Canadian woman and I have my own experiences of being a
student in higher education. I believe this research topic and study are contributory both in being Canadian and being contemporary.

Praxis/practice

This topic allows for an understanding of domestic students who may identify with a ‘minority’ ethnicity and/or religion who are often grouped in with international students. This point was highlighted by Cole and Ahmadi (2003) in their research on Muslim women who wear the hijab in the American context. The majority of literature they cited, as acknowledged by the authors, assumed hijab-wearing was an indicator of international students. Therefore, an integrated approach will allow for positive experiences of students in higher education.

This type of research is important for the purposes of training in services such as academic advising, career counseling, personal counseling, financial aid advising, and frontline staff at the registrar’s office and staff coordinating student leadership positions. The findings in this research are also important for faculty who work closely with students and for those faculty who are often referred to as mentors to students when trying to obtain research positions and to learn about graduate and professional school opportunities. Research with MPC women in Toronto can be used as case study for the purposes of cultural competence training to ensure the educational environment is inclusive.

Sakamoto’s (2007) anti-oppressive approach to cultural competence is reflective of a critical ontological, epistemological and methodological lens. She points out that cultural competence has been a “professional imperative” since the 1970s with many goals attributed to it, including awareness of our own values and assumptions, knowledge of a variety of cultures and worldviews and skills in developing and applying culturally relevant and
sensitive skills (107). However, Sakamoto (2007) critiques existing understandings of this competence framework because they often exclude a power analysis. With a focus on power, such as intersectionality theory, a system of oppressions such as racism, sexism, classism and Islamophobia can be addressed. Sakamoto (2007) urges “allies” of an anti-oppressive approach to cultural competence to embrace this critical underpinning to secure a positive learning environment so that problematic ideas around diversity are not reproduced in the institutions in which we work. This requires like-minded colleagues and allies for systemic change. Consistent with my case study on MPC women, those serving students from typically marginalized groups can apply the theories of intersectionality and Orientalism in addition to student development theories to deconstruct the power dynamics at play to ensure that we are culturally competent. We must also be confident in not only our theoretical understanding, but also in our day to day identities as professional practitioners in the various realms of the academic institutions.

Further research possibilities

As a student service provider in the role of an academic advisor who identifies with the demographic studied, I believe future research should focus on the perceptions of advisors and other student service providers and faculty with regards to their relationships with students identifying as Muslim Pakistani-Canadian and how the advisors and faculty think they experience higher education. Most interesting would be to obtain perspectives on what supports, training and/or awareness administrators and faculty believe they need or want in order to be comfortably able to best serve diverse student populations. A follow up study could connect with student service providers, especially in advising/counseling settings, and faculty to learn about their experiences, understandings and practices with
students from backgrounds different from theirs with a specific focus on race, ethnicity and
religion. This would assist with cultivating Asmar, Proude and Inge’s (2004) recommendation that staff and faculty embrace an integrated/holistic approach to serving students, whether this includes provision of services, teaching and/or learning practices that are sensitive and flexible. The result will be an enhancement and enrichment of learning and engagement of both Muslim South Asian students and their peers. Creating a flexible and engaging learning environment is also an “environmental factor” highlighted by student development theorists like Chickering and Reisser (1993). It is argued that assisting students in their identity development in university is a crucial area that faculty and staff should be made aware of in their practices to assist with developing an anti-oppressive culturally competent environment for all (Sakamoto, 2007).

In relation to the functionality of services and learning environments of students that shape major components of the student experience, another aspect that could provide additional data on how student realities are impacted is through an analysis of institutional policies that are in place to acknowledge and support diverse students. Due to the explanatory nature of this research, investigating such policies was not possible. However, future research, especially in a diverse city like Toronto, can provide insight into the language and terminology utilized in policies and procedures to serve the student body. This idea comes from ‘Equal Opportunities’ professionals’ (who address policies such as religious and cultural diversity) for Tyrer and Ahmad’s (2006) research on Muslim South Asian-British women to bring issues to the forefront such as Orientalist understandings that underpin service provisions. In turn, this would assist with and contribute to making
recommendations on implementing and modifying existing policies and processes that highlight cultural and religious norms to facilitate a constructive student experience.

Contributions to theory

In this research, I attempted to provide a unique example of how to bring together a mainstream student development theory (Chickering and Reisser, 1969, 1993) with critical feminist understandings from intersectionality and Orientalism. One goal was to show how many facets need to be considered when working to learn about and serve our diverse students. I have learned and challenged my own understandings during this journey because I had to tread very carefully when asking questions around identity and about what it means to be Muslim and Pakistani. I did not want to solicit static answers that would reinforce essentialist notions about identities, thereby reinforcing what Samatako (2007) referred to as “self-Orientalism.” Thus problematizing around theory is a difficult and ambitious task but a worthwhile undertaking, nonetheless, as it has permitted me to meet students who raised issues that I have not come across before, thus contributing a new perspective, especially in the Canadian context.

Reading Hamdon’s (2010) work has reminded me of my reading of Karen Max’s (2005) chapter, “Anti-Colonial Research: Working as an Ally with Aboriginal Peoples.” I have realized that my positionality within the critical framework has recommended that I locate myself in a way that “shifts the gaze” back to myself in order for me to interrogate my assumptions, instead of creating the ‘other,’ so that I do not think that I am ‘helping’ people ‘who are like me’ to have a voice in research. I will be honest when I say that initially I felt I was going to make a difference with my helpful research; however, I have come to realize in the process that if the goal of the research is to empower the participants through self-
determination, then I needed to learn very quickly (which I did) that the contributions that the participants make are as necessary as are the contributions I may be making. It is through this process that I have become aware of my own epistemological and methodological stance of moving more to the right side of Guba and Lincoln’s (2005) conceptualizations. However, although I have shifted away from these mainstream paradigms that would interpret student experiences as black or white they are still present. I am on a reflexive journey because of my close relations to the participants.

I was able to use this research as a way to advocate for the process of reflexivity (Kanuha’s 2000; Ryan, 2005). Too often, positivistic methods of research which include objectivity and ‘right’ answers are favoured because our ‘biases’ are not supposed to influence our work. I believe I was able to situate myself in the middle of this research but acknowledge my role and overall position and potential influences during the process and at the same time, I feel I was able to achieve knowledge through the rich commentary shared by the participants that contribute to the existing research and theory that I used as a foundation for my insights. Therefore, reflexive research is possible and can be contributory and a beneficial ‘risk’ for researchers who are concerned about the ‘validity’ of their research as my study is an example of “scratching beyond the surface” to learn about a marginalized group of women.
References


Appendix A: Consent form: Participant signatures

Consent Form for Non-Medical Research with Human Participants
Consent to Participate in Research

Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women’s experiences in Canadian higher education:
A case study at one Ontario university campus

You are invited to participate in a completely voluntary research study conducted by Mariam Aslam, at the University of Toronto Scarborough, under the supervision of Dr. Peter Dietsche. You were contacted by my colleagues from the Academic Advising & Career Centre (AA&CC) or you may have heard about this research from your peers. You were provided my contact information which is how we connected to ensure that you fit the criteria of:

- Identifying as a Muslim, Pakistani and Canadian woman
- Currently registered student (between first and fourth year) at UTSC
- Being a full-time or part-time student
- Being between the ages of 18 and 27

The findings of this study will be used for the purpose of graduate work at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the supervisor of this Master thesis Dr. Peter Dietsche in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies at OISE at 416.978.1217 and/or at peter.dietsche@utoronto.ca.

Purpose of the Study

By conducting this study, I would like to explore the experiences of Muslim Pakistani-Canadian (MPC) women in higher education in Ontario. More specifically, the purpose is to learn if and how cultural and religious norms and expectations shape the experiences of students in post-secondary education (PSE) and how this may shape larger educational and career aspirations for students. The purpose is to contribute to this area of research in the Canadian context.

Procedures

This study will involve the usage of three methodologies including:

- questionnaire
- one on one interview
- focus group

In the questionnaire you will be asked to disclose your age and year of study in order to provide demographic information for contextualizing the study. Other items included on the questionnaire have to do with reflecting on what it means to you to be ‘Muslim’ and ‘Pakistani’. Also, information
about your experiences and interactions with peers, student service providers and faculty will be requested. The completion of the questionnaire should take no longer than 30-40 minutes.

Once the questionnaire is completed, you will also be invited to take part in a one-on-one interview with me, if you wish to further elaborate on the answers in your questionnaire. If you do want to, you will be asked to give your top choice of where and when the interview should take place. The interview can range between 45 minutes to 1 hour. The time will depend on how long you may want to continue your discussion of your experiences as a student.

Once the questionnaire and one-on-one interview has been completed, you will be invited to take part in a focus group consisting of other students who have taken part in this study to facilitate the meeting of new people and connecting about the various topics explored in this research. Please note, you can choose to only participate in the questionnaire, or the questionnaire and interview; however, if you decide not to participate in the interview, you will also not be able to participate in the focus group. Only students who take part in the questionnaire and interview can participate in the focus group. You will also be asked to indicate your consent to being audio taped and/or with me taking handwritten notes during the focus group and will sign for your explicit consent to be recorded below. The focus group could range from 60-90 minutes. Again, the time commitment for the focus group will depend on how long you and the other participants want to engage in sharing your student experiences.

**Potential Risks and Discomforts**

There will be no risk of psychological or physical harm associated with this study. This research carries no more risk than in everyday interactions. However, while all participants in the focus group are asked to keep all information discussed confidential, there may be a slight risk that some information may be shared outside the group, therefore please keep this in mind when determining whether you will be participating in the focus group. Upon participation in any element of this research, should you feel uncomfortable if any of the questions lead to a discussion about past or current experiences, you will be able to, without any penalty, refuse to answer.

**Potential Benefits to Participants and/or to Society**

This study will hopefully benefit me in understanding the experiences of students and the factors shaping their success in higher educational institutions. More importantly, this study is intended to assist students at UTSC to openly discuss their feelings about their post-secondary experiences, while identifying as Muslim Pakistani-Canadians. Additionally, this type of study can also assist in facilitating further research and recommendations on how to improve the undergraduate student experience at UTSC. This can be done through bettering practices of service provision in areas such as the Academic Advising & Career Centre, a supporter of this research.

**Payment for Participation**

This study is based on voluntary participation and thus there will be no payment for participants.

**Confidentiality**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. In order to ensure confidentiality any notes that are taken and/or any audio taping which includes you will be kept in a
locked filing cabinet, which will only be accessible by Mariam Aslam. Additionally, to ensure your anonymity pseudo names will be used in any written component/publications of this project or in any of the presentations that occur for staff at UTSC. I will be the only individual who has access to the master list. Furthermore, the research will take place without the direct involvement of the Academic Advising & Career Centre; therefore, your participation will in no way impact your academic standing, program and/or status at UTSC.

Any information (audio tapes, notes) associated with this study will be destroyed 3 years after completion of this research study is completed at which time the information will be destroyed. Hand written notes will be destroyed by a paper shredder and the audio tape(s) will be erased. Participants will not be audio taped if they do not consent. Also, the information collected will not be disclosed to any person/agency and will be solely used for the purpose of this study. Some results or responses may be used for the publication of scholarly journal articles in the future; however, the participants will be unidentifiable, based on their age, year of study and institution affiliation. Although responses provided during the course of this research may be of a personal nature, no value judgments will be made of the participants.

Research Results

Participants will have the choice to keep a copy of the questionnaire they submit for the purposes of the research. You can either make your own photocopy or ask me to make you a copy so you can keep it for your records. After the one-on-one interviews are conducted, within a one week time frame, I will email you a copy of the transcribed notes. You will have one week from the date on the email sent to you, to review the notes and respond with your comments (i.e. corrections, additions, clarifications). Please respond to the email sent, even if no changes need to be made to the transcribed notes, in order to confirm that you have received and read the transcripts. For the purposes, of potentially not audio recording the focus group (if not all participants are comfortable with the option), and only one note taker (me), the focus group notes will not be transcribed and sent to participants in order to ensure that information from different participants is not shared beyond the focus group room.

After the completion of this project, if you wish to obtain a summary of the findings this will be made available to you. The findings will be either sent to you via email or I will mail them to you if you do not have access to an email address.

Participation and Withdrawal

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. You can withdraw at any time by informing me verbally or in written form, via email.

Rights of Research Participants

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Toronto – Office of Research Ethics. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

UofT Office of Research Ethics
Signature of Research Participant

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study being conducted by Mariam Aslam of OISE - University of Toronto. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study, and to receive any additional details I wanted to know about the study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, if I choose to do so, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form. Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.

Consent to participate in the Questionnaire:
Date ______________________
Name of Participant (Print) ______________________
Signature of Participant ______________________

Consent to participate in the One-on-One Interview: (only sign once previous consent has been completed)
Date ______________________
Name of Participant (Print) ______________________
Signature of Participant ______________________

Consent to participate in the Focus Group: (only sign once previous 2 consents have been completed)
Date ______________________
Name of Participant (Print) ______________________
Signature of Participant ______________________

Please initial if you would like a summary of the findings of the study upon completion: ______
Please initial if you give permission to have your interview audio taped: ______
Please initial if you give permission to have your participation in the focus group audio taped: ______
Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

In my opinion, the person who has signed above is agreeing to participate in this study voluntarily, understands the nature of the study and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

______________________     ______________________
Signature of Investigator      Date

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Appendix B: Informed consent letter: Student consent cover letter

To the participants of this study,

You are invited to participate in a voluntary research study conducted by Mariam Aslam, at the University of Toronto Scarborough. You were contacted by my colleagues from the Academic Advising & Career Centre (AA&CC) or you may have heard about this research from your peers. You were provided my contact information which is how we connected to ensure that you fit the criteria of:

- Identifying as a Muslim, Pakistani and Canadian woman
- Currently registered student (between first and fourth year) at UTSC
- Being a full-time or part-time student
- Being between the ages of 18 and 27

The purpose of this study is to determine the experiences of Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women in Ontario’s higher education system. More specifically, this study will explore the cultural and religious norms/expectations that shape these experiences and potentially shape career aspirations of students. For this research, approximately 7-10 participants are being recruited to take part using various research methods, discussed below.

This study will be carried out in Ontario, specifically in Toronto at the University of Toronto Scarborough, by Mariam Aslam under the supervision of Dr. Peter Dietsche, of the Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). The data are being collected for the purposes of a MA (masters) thesis and perhaps for subsequent scholarly research articles and presentations.

This study will include a questionnaire and will ask you to reflect on your experiences in higher education and should not take longer than 30-40 minutes to complete. Once the questionnaire has been completed, you will be invited to take part in a one-on-one interview with me to further elaborate on your reflections in the questionnaire, which may range in the duration because you will be able to choose which questions (from the questionnaire) you would like to elaborate on and how long you want to discuss each topic area. As the interview proceeds I may ask questions for clarification for further understanding, but my part will be mainly to listen to you speak about your experiences. After the two previous methods have been completed, you will be invited to take part in a focus group with other participants that have taken part in this research. The focus group, again, will be shaped by the areas the participants are interested in exploring further. The duration of the focus group will be based on the participants. Please note, only students who have taken part in the questionnaire and interview will be asked to join in the focus group.
It is the intention that each interview will be audio taped and later transcribed to paper; you have the choice of declining to have the interview and focus group discussion taped. A pseudo name that is decided by you will be used to correspond with your interview and transcriptions.

Participants will have the choice to keep a copy of the questionnaire they submit for the purposes of the research. You can either make your own photocopy or ask me to make you a copy so you can keep it for your records. After the one-on-one interviews are conducted, within a one week time frame, I will email you a copy of the transcribed notes. You will have one week from the date on the email sent to you, to review the notes and respond with your comments (i.e. corrections, additions, clarifications). Please respond to the email sent, even if no changes need to be made to the transcribed notes, in order to confirm that you have received and read the transcripts. For the purposes, of potentially not audio recording the focus group (if not all participants are comfortable with the option), and only one note taker (me), the focus group notes will not be transcribed and sent to participants in order to ensure that information from different participants is not shared beyond the focus group room.

The information obtained in the questionnaire, interview and focus group will be kept in strict confidence and stored at a secure location (a locked filing cabinet that is only accessible to me). Only I will have access to data, along with my supervisor, Dr. Peter Dietsche, only when necessary and even then a pseudo name will be used on the data to ensure your identity remains confidential. All information will be reported, whether published or presentations to staff at UTSC, in such a way that individual persons and institution will not be identified. Your identity will remain anonymous based on the pseudo names you select for yourself. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, questionnaire answers) will be destroyed three years after the completion of the research.

You may at any time refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the interview process because this is a completely voluntary study. You may request that any information, whether in written form or audiotape, be eliminated from the project. At no time will value judgments will be placed on your responses. This research carries no more risk than in everyday interactions. Finally, you are free to ask any questions about the research and your involvement with it and may request a summary of the findings of the study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: 416.208.5139 or at maslam@utsc.utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Peter Dietsche at 416.978.1217. Finally, you may also contact the UofT Office Research Ethics for questions about your rights as a research participant at ethics.review@utoronto.ca 416.946.3273.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

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Appendix C: Student questionnaire

Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women’s experiences in Canadian higher education:
A case study at one Ontario university campus

The purpose of this questionnaire is to learn about your experiences in higher education and how services can be improved to support you and your journey at UTSC.

Instructions: There are 26 questions and this questionnaire should take about 30-40 minutes to complete. Any explanation for the questions asked will be greatly appreciated. If there is a question you would like to elaborate on but there is not enough space, please feel free to use the back of any of the sheets. If there are any questions, that have unclear wording or terminology you need clarification for, please do not hesitate to ask. If at any point during the questionnaire you feel a question is inappropriate, or you feel uncomfortable answering a particular question, please feel free not to answer it. After you have completed the questionnaire, and you no longer would like to take part in the study, please let me know and your answers will be removed. There will be no penalty for removing yourself at any given point because participation in this research is completely voluntary.

Pseudo Name: _________________________________

1:: What is your age? ____________.

2:: What year of study are you in?
   • First year (0-4 Full Credits)
   • Second year (4.5-9.5 Full Credits)
   • Third year (10-13.5 Full Credits)
   • Fourth year (14-20 Full Credits)

3:: Were you born in Canada? Yes or No
   If no, which country were you born in? _________________________. How many years have you lived in Canada? ____________________.

4:: What language from the list below, did you first learn to speak?
   • English
   • Punjabi
   • Sindhi
   • Urdu
   • Hindi
   • Farsi
   • Dari
• Other: ____________

5:: What are you currently studying (i.e. your program subject post(s))? If you are currently undecided in your program selection, what are the areas you are hoping to pursue?

6:: What grades are getting at UTSC? (%)

• 90s
• 80s
• 70s
• 60s
• 50s
• 40s or below

7:: Do you plan to pursue education beyond your undergraduate degree?

• No
• Masters
• Doctorate
• Professional Degree
• Professional Designation
• Other: _____________________________

8:: What is the reason(s) you decided to attend UTSC? Circle all that apply.

• UTSC was my number 1 choice – I have always wanted to come here
• It is close to my house – I didn’t want to travel too far
• I was attracted to the small size of UTSC
• I didn’t get accepted to my first choice
• My parents (or family) wanted me to come here
• I have a sibling (or extended family) that came (or comes) here
• I had heard a lot of positive information about this campus
• UofT is really prestigious, which is why I thought I should come here
• My program of study/co-op option is available here
• Other: _____________________________

9:: Do you identify with any of the following classifications? If so, please circle the one that applies that most:

• Canadian
• Canadian-Pakistani
• Pakistani-Canadian
• Canadian-Muslim
• Muslim-Canadian
- Muslim Pakistani-Canadian
- Pakistani Muslim-Canadian
- Canadian with a Pakistani-Muslim background
- Canadian with a Muslim-Pakistani background
- Canadian Muslim with a South Asian background
- South Asian Canadian
- Muslim South Asian-Canadian
- South Asian Muslim-Canadian
- Muslim South Asian with a Canadian background
- Visible Minority
- Other: _______________________

10:: Are you the first in your family to attend university? Yes or No

11:: What is the highest level of education your father has earned?
- Elementary School
- High school
- College/University (i.e. College Diploma, BA, BSc, BBA)
- Masters (i.e. MA)
- Doctorate (i.e. Ph.D.)
- Professional Degree (i.e. LLB)
- Professional Designation (i.e. CMA)
- Other: _______________________

12:: What is the highest level of education your mother has earned?
- Elementary School
- High school
- College/University (i.e. College Diploma, BA, BSc, BBA)
- Masters (i.e. MA)
- Doctorate (i.e. Ph.D.)
- Professional Degree (i.e. LLB)
- Professional Designation (i.e. CMA)
- Other: _______________________

13:: Have your family’s interests in your academic and career pursuits influenced your decision-making in what you are or will be studying? Please explain.

14:: When selecting your courses, programs, or seeking other academic advice, which of the following do you consult? (Please circle your top 3 choices).
• Academic calendar (hardcopy or online)
• Registrar’s office (actual office or website)
• Program supervisor
• Professors/TAs
• Academic Advising & Career Centre
• Parents/Guardians
• Siblings/Cousins or other extended family
• Friends/Classmates
• Significant other/Romantic partner
• Employer/Colleagues
• None of the Above
• Other:_____________________________________________

15:: How often do you use **academic student services** on campus? Examples of academic services include, but are not limited to: Registrar’s office, Academic Advising & Career Centre, Library and etc.

• Never
• 1-2 times a semester
• 3-5 times a semester
• 5+ times a semester

16:: How often do you use **non-academic student services** on campus? Examples of non-academic services include, but are not limited to: Athletics and Recreation, Multi-Faith Prayer room and etc.

• Never
• 1-2 times a semester
• 3-5 times a semester
• 5+ times a semester

17:: How would you define a ‘practicing Muslim’?

18:: Based on the definition provided, do you feel this describes how you identify with Islam? Yes or No

If no, please explain:

19:: How would you define a ‘practicing Pakistani’?
20:: Based on your definition provided, do you feel this describes how you identify with being Pakistani? Yes or No

If no, please explain:

21:: Do you think identifying as Muslim and Pakistani means that both identities hold the same values? Yes or No

If yes, how are these identities similar?

If no, how are these identities different?

22:: Have you ever experienced discrimination, based on your cultural and/or religious identities, from faculty, student service providers and/or acquaintances? Please explain:

23:: Is there any advice you can provide for faculty that would help improve your experience at UTSC?

24:: Is there any advice you can provide for student service providers that would help improve your experience at UTSC?
25: Is there any advice you can provide for your fellow students or acquaintances that would help improve your experience at UTSC?

26: Would you like to take part in a one-on-one interview? Yes or No
If yes, please provide your preferences for dates, times and locations you are able to meet.

Thank you for taking your time to answer these questions!
Appendix C1: Examples of questions to guide one-on-one interviews

1:: Do you feel your cultural identity contributes to or shapes your academic and/or career choices? If yes, how and if no, why not?
2:: Do you feel your religious identity contributes to or shapes your academic and/or career choices? If yes, how and if not, why not?
3:: Do family, friends, colleagues play a role in your academic and career decision making?
4:: Do you talk to your professors? Can you discuss your experiences on campus with faculty, in or outside of classroom time (i.e. office hours, via email)?
5:: Do you use student services on campus? If so, which ones have you or do you use? Can you discuss your experiences on campus with staff? If you have never and do not intend on using student services, what are some of the reasons?
6:: Can you speak to any experiences with peers on campus – in or outside of classroom time (i.e. in club or association meetings)?
Appendix D: Letter requesting administrative consent

Attention: Ruth Louden, Acting Director Academic Advising & Career Centre, University of Toronto Scarborough

Dear Ruth:

As you know, I am a graduate student in the Theory and Policy Studies in Education Department at OISE/UT, under the supervision of Dr. Peter Dietsche, and am currently planning a research project that will involve the students that use the services at the Academic Advising & Career Centre. In order to begin the project, I am requesting your written consent, so that I can draw on the support of the Academic Advisors and Career Counselors to locate participants that fit the criteria of the research study. This support will entail the advisors and counselors contacting students (via email) that they believe fit the criteria of this study to let them know about this study and provide them with my contact information so that the students can contact me directly if they want to participate. The participants should:

- Identify as Muslim, Pakistani and Canadian women
- Be currently registered students (between first and fourth year) at UTSC
- Be full-time or part-time status
- Be between the ages of 18 and 27

The purpose of this study is to determine the experiences of Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women in Ontario’s higher education system. More specifically, this study will explore the cultural and religious norms/expectations that shape these experiences and potentially shape career aspirations of students. For this research, approximately 7-10 participants are being recruited to take part using various research methods as outlined below.

This study will include a questionnaire that will ask students to reflect on their identities and experiences in higher education and should not take longer than 30-40 minutes to complete. Once the questionnaire has been completed, the participants will be invited to take part in a one-on-one interview with me to further elaborate on their reflections in the questionnaire, which may range in the duration because the participant will be able to choose which questions (from the questionnaire) they would like to elaborate on and how long they want to discuss each topic area. After the two previous methods have been completed, the students will be invited to take part in a focus group with other participants that have taken part in this research. The focus group, again, will be shaped by the areas the participants are interested in exploring further. The duration of the focus group will be based on the participants. Please note, only students who have taken part in the questionnaire and interview will be asked to join in the focus group.

The information obtained in the questionnaire, interview and focus group will be kept in strict confidence and stored at a secure location (a locked filing cabinet that is only accessible
All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons and institution will not be identified. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, questionnaire answers) will be destroyed three years after the completion of the research.

If you agree, please sign the letter below and return it to me in the envelope provided. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: 416.208.5139 or at maslam@utsc.utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Peter Dietsche at 416.978.1217. Finally, you may also contact the UofT Office Research Ethics for questions about your rights as a research participant at ethics.review@utoronto.ca 416.946.3273.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Mariam Aslam

Date ______________________________

Administrator’s Signature_______________________________________

---

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Appendix E: Email to request assistance of academic advisors and career counselors at the Academic Advising & Career Centre

Dear Academic Advisor / Career Counselor:

As you may know, I am pursuing my Master of Arts in Higher Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), which is a part of the University of Toronto, under the supervision of Dr. Peter Dietsche. For my research study I am looking to explore the experiences of Muslim Pakistani – Canadian women’s experiences at UTSC. More specifically, I am most interested to learn about how the cultural and/or religious norms and expectations that this group of women may be expected to align to shape their educational and career aspirations. I would also like to learn about their experiences in relation to peers, faculty and staff at UTSC. The input of potential participants will be beneficial in contributing to understanding the student experience and provide ideas on how to improve the quality of support services for students from diverse backgrounds.

My hope is to draw on your assistance in locating participants for this study by sending out the attachments to this email to potential participants. I am asking students to take part in a questionnaire that should take about 30-40 minutes to complete and after they complete the questionnaire, they will be invited to take part in a one-on-one interview (in person or via phone) and focus group to elaborate on their answers they provided in the questionnaire.

The email attached can be sent to students to invite them if they fit the following criteria:

- Identify as Muslim, Pakistani (or South Asian) and Canadian women
- Current registered student (between first and fourth year) at UTSC
- Full-time or part-time status
- Between the ages of 18 and 27

Thank you for your assistance,

Mariam Aslam

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Appendix F: Email forward for academic advisors and career counselors

Dear Student:

My name is Mariam Aslam, an academic advisor at the Academic Advising & Career Centre at UTSC. As a woman that identifies as Muslim Pakistani – Canadian between the ages of 18 and 27, I invite you to take part in a research study because I am most interested to learn about how the cultural and/or religious norms and expectations that you may be expected to align to shape your educational and career aspirations. I would like to learn about your educational and career aspirations, while learning about your experiences in relation to your peers, faculty and staff at UTSC. Your input will be beneficial in contributing to understanding the student experience and provide ideas on how to improve the quality of support services for students from diverse backgrounds.

I am pursuing this research study to meet the thesis requirement of my Master of Arts in Higher Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), which is a part of the University of Toronto. This research is being supervised by Dr. Peter Dietsche of OISE.

Should you be interested in taking part in this study, please review the consent forms attached to obtain details regarding the study. If you agree to take part in the study, starting with the questionnaire, please email me at maslam@utsc.utoronto.ca. If you have any female peers at UTSC, that fit the criteria described above please feel free to provide them with a copy of this email and ask them to email me at the address provided above, if they would like to participate. Beyond the questionnaire, if you are interested in taking part in the one-on-one interview and focus group, details will follow, once you indicate your interest.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any point without penalty. Even though you have been referred to this study by a staff member at the Academic Advising & Career Counselor (AA&CC), please note your participation or non-participation in this research will not impact your progress in your program of study or in the accessibility of services at the Academic Advising & Career Centre. Please also note the staff at the AA&CC will not know who the participants are of this research.

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Appendix G: Email invite for one-on-one interview

Dear Student:

Thank you very much for taking the time to fill out the questionnaire, to highlight how your educational and career aspirations are shaped by cultural and/or religious norms, along with your undergraduate experiences at UTSC, with your peers, staff and faculty.

As outlined in the initial consent form sent to you, I said that I would be inviting you to take part in a one-on-one interview to have the opportunity to discuss your answers and/or any other elements of your experiences as a Muslim Pakistani-Canadian woman in higher education that may not have been addressed in the questionnaire. The one-on-one meeting can range in time but has an average time of one hour.

If this is something you would be interested in taking part in, please email back at: maslam@utsc.utoronto.ca, so that we can arrange a time and location that will be convenient for you. If you would prefer having a one-on-one meeting via the phone, arrangements for that can be made as well.

I have attached the consent forms to this email for your convenience. I can also provide printed copies. Please let me know what you prefer.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Mariam Aslam

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