

ABSTRACT

MISENHIMER, MARY, M. Religious, Gender, and Ethnic Identity Development in Muslim and Christian Women. (Under the direction of Dr. Sylvia Nassar-McMillan.)

Through the analysis of mixed methods research design, this research study examined: (1) lived experiences of Muslim and Christian women of varying ethnicities, (2) the similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity as explained by a specific group of women, (3) relationships among religious, gender, and ethnic identity development. This study used a consensual qualitative research method, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as a conceptual framework for the research. The research draws on data gathered from ten semi-structured interviews with Muslim and Christian women of varying ethnicities. Participants were drawn from various parts of the Southeastern United States including Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, and Alabama. The ten participants were chosen based on their gender and belief in Islam or Christianity and were between the ages of 25-55 years of age.

The research findings suggested Muslim and Christian women in this study saw their identity at its core as religious. Though even at the religious core, each participant identified religion as intertwined with either ethnicity or gender, individually or simultaneously. Unable to separate these identities, the research participants discovered that religion, gender, and ethnicity sometimes reinforce and complement one another while other times they confuse, conflict, and contradict one another. Detailed descriptions of the themes are provided supported by the thick rich descriptions of the participants. Implications of these and other emergent themes, as well as statistical information related to the MEIM, were discussed and future research directions were presented.

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Religious, Gender, and Ethnic Identity Development in Muslim and Christian Women

by
Mary M. Misenhimer

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APPROVED BY:

Sylvia Nassar-McMillan
Committee Chair

Stanley B. Baker

Marc A. Grimmatt

Pamela Martin

DEDICATION

To my grandmother, thank you for teaching me not to settle, for your endless love and encouragement, you have made a difference in my life.

Isaiah 46:4 Thank you God for loving me enough to carry me.

To the women who trusted me enough to share their journeys- to the Muslim and to the Christian- thank you for your truth.

BIOGRAPHY

Mary Melissa Misenhimer was born in Asheville, North Carolina, but raised in rural Alabama. Mary's parents and grandparents were and are very instrumental in her life. They raised her and encouraged her individual, determined, and fiery spirit. Her mother and grandmother modeled a spirit of faith, strength, and spunk. From this, Mary credits her deep faith, determination, and drive. Mary is a Licensed Professional Counselor Associate in North Carolina and a Nationally Certified Counselor. She currently works at the Carolina House, an inpatient eating disorder facility in Durham, NC. Her primary interests are in religious, ethnic, and gender identity development, her focus on these topics undoubtedly stem, in part, from her own journey toward identifying her religious and gender identity. In addition her other main research interests include spirituality, eating disorders, substance abuse, career selection and life satisfaction. She holds a Bachelor's of Science Psychology from Cumberland College in Williamsburg, KY, and a Master's of Science in clinical community counseling from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD.

Mary attended North Carolina State University from 2007 to 2011. While at NC State, Mary worked for Meredith College, the Carolina House, Saint Mary's School, and North Carolina State. She taught advanced placement psychology at Saint Mary's school, taught graduate courses at NC State, and co-taught a Gender Issues course with Dr. Rhonda Sutton. She served as the Counselor Education Graduate Student Association treasurer, and has been involved with Chi Sigma Iota honor society as treasurer, president, and past-president for the past three years. Mary also studied abroad in 2009 in Tuscany, Italy. She spent three weeks learning from other counselors and also presenting her own research at an

international presentation. Mary's professional development also consisted of teaching graduate courses, presenting at state, national, and international conferences and publishing. In addition, she served as a board member for the Association for Creativity in Counseling, and the Chi Sigma Iota Task Force. Mary is a member of the American Counseling Association, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, Association for Creativity in Counseling, and the North Carolina Counseling Association.

Her clinical experience ranges from working with families, children, adolescents, college students, eating disorders, to working with substance abusers. She loves the outdoors, traveling, running, riding horses, and yoga. She especially enjoys spending time with her family, friends, and her fiancée-soon to be husband Patrick, and their dog: Gator.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“The personal is the political,” a slogan that became popular in the late 1960’s as a mantra of the feminist movement (Hooks, 2000). Today this slogan still resonates with our society. Religion, politics, and finances are three things we are taught, from an early age, not to discuss with people. However, these three topics permeate our society. Therefore, a person’s religious views, political views, and financial status, or the “personal,” are, in fact, the political. In recent years we have seen this first hand, as religion has been tied to political tensions throughout the United States. This tension has manifested across nations and ethnicities (Tummala-Narra, 2009).

The terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001 fueled widespread concern, fear, and speculation surrounding the negative experiences by many Americans in response to the horrific events of 9/11. Despite attempts to prevent repercussions against certain cultural groups, Muslims have, since then, faced turmoil and prejudice. U.S. citizens and immigrants have experienced an increase in hate crimes and profiling in recent years. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) listed more than 600 attacks against persons assumed to be Muslim (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2005). A study released by Human Rights Watch in November 2002 noted that the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported a 17-fold increase in anti-Muslim crimes nationwide during 2001; in Los Angeles County and Chicago, officials reported 15 times the number of anti-Muslim crimes in 2001 compared with the preceding year (Human Rights Watch, 2002). Thus for these Americans and many others, their “personal” has become very “political.”

Religion is one of the most important factors in shaping human experience, beliefs, values, and behaviors (Lukoff, Turker, & Lu, 1992). For many women, religious beliefs are an important aspect of diversity that serve as a source of strength and provide a sense of personal support (Ali, Mahmood, Moel, Hudson, & Leathers, 2008). Religiosity is often portrayed in the research as a negative influence on a woman's life (Burn & Busso, 2005).

The American Psychological Association has also taken note of the importance of spirituality and religion in the ethical section of the standards (e.g., Standards 3.01, 3.03; American Psychology Association, 2002). This section of the ethical standards discusses the importance of research linking spirituality and religion to be included in all forms of health and well being (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001).

Religious and spiritual commitment may help people cope better with the stressors in their lives which is directly associated with better mental health functioning, specifically more optimism, compassion for self and others, forgiveness, and less anxiety and depression (Koenig et al. 2001, Plante & Thoresen, 2007). Read & Bartkowski's (2000) research supported the notion that religion could serve as a source of strength and connectedness within Islam. Religion and spiritual orientation could be seen as a source of strength and should be incorporated into the therapeutic relationship (Read & Bartkowski, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

The main goal of this study was to obtain a deeper understanding of religious, gender, and ethnic identity development of Muslim and Christian women in the southern United States. A holistic view of Christianity and Islam was depicted to further explore and examine the similarities and differences among women from both of these religions. The specific

purposes of this study were to examine: (1) lived experiences of Muslim and Christian women of varying ethnicities, (2) the similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity as explained by a specific group of women, (3) relationships among religious, gender, and ethnic identity development. A mixed method approach was used to address the purposes of the study. The qualitative portion of the study allowed the participants to share their personal lived experiences. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992) served as the quantitative instrument and allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the ethnic identity development of the participants.

Urie Brofenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory served as a base for this research study. Brofenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems theory provided a framework for investigating the environments in which the participants live/exist. Theoretical conception within this theory states that ecological research's main effect is likely to be the interactions within person and situation. This theory is composed of topologically nested arrangements of structures, consisting of the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem (Brofenbrenner, 1986). (A thorough description of Brofenbrenner's theory is listed in Chapter 2). Therefore, the researcher considered the nested and interacting relationships within the Muslim and Christian lived experiences.

The environment of the United States has drastically altered within the last nine years, and this has directly impacted the landscape of religious freedom. All the while, Muslim and Christian women are developing relationships and reconfiguring existing relationships to maintain their need for support and connection to their religion, gender, and ethnicity. Therefore, this mixed methods study intended to gain an understanding of identity

negotiation among Muslim and Christian women through the lens of Brofenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Brofenbrenner, 1986).

Rationale for the Research

While Christianity is the largest religion in the world, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. There are an estimated 1.3 billion Muslims throughout the world (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). Christianity is the largest religion in America, and 76% of Americans identify as Christian (Kosmin, & Keysar, 2008). While less than one percent of the Americans identify as Muslim (.6%), this percentage encompasses 2.34 million Muslims in America. The number of Muslims and Christians in America is growing. Muslim communities within the United States are increasing in number and becoming more visible throughout American society (Barazangi, 2004).

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 had a direct and overwhelming affect on many Americans. While these events unfolded, many Americans began to be filled with disbelief, shock and horror. In the midst of this horrific event, some Americans who knew very little about Muslims began to view these individuals in their communities with anxiety and suspicion (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007; Haddad, Smith & Moore, 2006; Suarez-Orozco, 2008). This blame and anger directed toward Muslims led to feelings of isolation among this group (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008). Due to the events of 9/11, there remains a great deal of tension between Muslims and other ethnic and religious groups (Sirin & Balsano, 2007). Muslims endure the stress of living in a world that demonizes them for their religious affiliation and often equates Islam with terrorism (Zaal, Salah & Fine, 2007).

Both Christian and Muslim Americans are extremely diverse in terms of geography, ethnicity, race, culture, and sect. As a nation built on immigrants it is no wonder that these religious groups would also encompass similar diversity in their ethnic identities. For Muslim and Christian women there is an overlap in many of their ethnicities and religious beliefs. Sometimes this overlap is so engrained that individuals cannot separate their religion from their culture. Therefore this study not only looked at religious identity but also ethnic identity.

As Muslim and Christian women continue to thrive in community, college campuses, and school settings, counselors and counselor educators must be equipped to facilitate their growth and development. Religious, gender, and ethnic identity are pervasive parts of an individual. Therefore, understanding the identity of any individual is a complicated task. Counselors and counselor educators would benefit from having a greater understanding of the lived experiences of Muslim and Christian women. Both of these groups of women have experienced stressors in order to form and maintain their identity.

Need of the Study

After the dramatic events of 9/11, more and more researchers continue to conduct studies on the beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions and experiences of Muslims in America (Bartkowski & Read, 2003; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Esposito & Mogahed, 2007; Haddad, 2004; Haddad, et. al., 2006; Kopp, 2002; Read, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008). However, most of this research is narrowly focused on specific aspects of Islam; currently, there are no existing studies on Muslim and Christian women's personal experiences since 9/11 in the southeastern United States.

Moreover, no existing empirical investigations have explored the identity development process among Muslim and Christian women in the United States specifically looking at religious, gender, and ethnic identity. Therefore, this study aimed to address this gap in our knowledge. In particular, this research focused on the development, maintenance and negotiation of Muslim and Christian women's ethnic, gender, and religious identities.

Understanding Islamic and Christian customs and traditions is essential for developing a society that welcomes and appreciates diversity. Counselors and counselor educators need to understand this group as they will encounter clients from both of these religious groups. It was the hope of this researcher to clarify some of the misunderstandings and ignorance that have developed regarding Islamic and Christian culture and present possible solutions to further inform practice and research. The findings should be useful to counselors, researchers, educators, mental health professionals, the Muslim and Christian communities, and the general public.

Researchers have found that individuals want their health care professionals (including counselors, psychotherapists, and educators) to not only respect but to also acknowledge and integrate their spiritual and religious principles within their patient and client relationships (Frick Riedner, Fegg, Hauf, & Borasio, 2006; McNichols & Feldman, 2007; Shafranske, 2001). Polls and surveys have indicated the high value that the general population, including counselors, place on spirituality and prayer. Research has also begun to demonstrate the usefulness of incorporating the spirituality of clients (Weld & Eriksen, 2007). A majority of clients who attend therapy seek to discuss spiritual and religious matters in counseling (Rose et al., 2001). In the therapeutic relationship, silence on religion

and spirituality indicate an unspoken avoidance of central aspects of the client's inner life (Tummala-Narra, 2009).

Furthermore, implications for future research have pointed to a convergence between gender relations in Islam and Christianity. Researchers pointed out that information could be gained by drawing more detailed cross-cultural comparisons between the experiences these religious women encounter (Read & Bartkowski, 2000). This research study will contribute to further research by providing a comparison between women of the Muslim and Christian faith communities. Previous research supported the need for a study such as this.

Furthermore, an investigation of any convergence between gender, racial, and religious relations in Muslim and Christian women would further educate counselors and scholars. By using qualitative questioning to discuss religious and gender identity development with the participants allowed a safe venue for the participant's voices to be heard.

Research Questions

Primary Research Question:

What are lived experiences of Muslim and Christian women of varying ethnicities?

Secondary Research Questions:

What are the similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity as explained by a specific group of women?

Is there a relationship between religious, gender, and ethnic identity development?

Assumptions

There are many claims/assumptions made about religion and gender. One such claim is: women are more religious than men (Walter & Davie, 1998). In support of this idea, one

study found women attend church services more than men. This same study also reported that women pray more and more women reported that religion was more important to them (Krause, 2006). This could be because some women describe religion as more intrinsic than men. Older women are said to attend church more than older men this could be due to the fact that women typically live longer than men (Krause, 2006).

Conservative Christians have been seen as radical, “bible beaters” that lack spontaneity in their lives. Some see Conservative Christians’ main focus as trying to “convert” or transform others. Often churches are seen as being oppressive to women. Some Christian churches do not allow women to serve in the church. This assumption has been manifested between public and private sectors of Christianity. In the private sector, women are encouraged to raise the children and take care of the house. However, in the public sector, women’s base of power and authority is often devalued in some Christian religious groups. These conservative churches enforce more traditional roles of women which often confine and devalue women socially (Artimage & Dugan 2006).

Even though middle class Muslims as a whole have experienced rapid growth and economic privilege, Muslims in the U.S. have been the target of pejorative stereotypes. There are various caricatures that depict Muslim women as being submissive and backwards. Recent research investigating these claims suggests that Muslim women negotiate their religious, gender, and ethnic identities in light of economic prosperity (Read & Bartkowski, 2000). Research findings have further indicated that in spite of these depictions, the majority of Muslims in the U.S. are university graduates within the middle class (Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Treacher, 2003).

Several scholars contend that Muslim women occupy a subordinate status in many countries and (Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007; Sirin & Balsano, 2007). Researchers in the past often supported this view of women occupying subordinate status by highlighting the traditional gender customs prescribed by Islam and focusing on the veiling and shrouding of Muslim women (Javed, 1994). This population has also encountered extreme stereotyping and prejudice that have increased drastically since the events of 9/11 (Treacher, 2003). U.S. citizens often possess subconscious stereotyping about Arab or Arab American women, especially for Muslim women. This notion is often reinforced within society as negative depictions of women persist. Images like girls doing belly dance or contrasting images of women wearing dark cloaks unable to leave the house permeate our media (Shakir, 1997). Many Muslim women are quite modern; dressing as most other Americans, balancing time between work, school, community, and family (Read, 2007). Many women have found a balance between religious, gender, and ethnic development illustrated in this research.

Even though some customs such as veiling in Islam and baptism in Christianity seem very distinct, one could assume that belief in one God could yield a common ground among Christianity and Islam. However, these two religions are often portrayed as polar opposites even though both profess a belief in one true God. The division between these religions historically began with the story of Abraham. Christians believe they were descended from Sarah and Abraham's son Isaac, Muslims believe they were descended from Ishmael, Abraham's first son through Hagar (Sarah's maid). It is this division that has divided these two groups and has led to further differences in faith, appearance, and practice. Muslims believe that regardless of these differences Christians and Jews are "People of the Book."

Islam recognizes that Christians received revelations through prophets or books revealed from God (Esposito, 2002). Therefore Muslims as a whole believe that Christians also worship the same God that they too worship.

Definitions

The Muslim faith is a monotheistic faith. Muslims believe in Islam and follow the teachings of the Qur'an. Muslim and Arab are not synonymous terms (Hakim-Larson & Nassar-McMillan, 2008) despite the various reports that Arab equates Muslim. In recent years, the media has had a tendency to over generalize the Muslim population. The truth is that only 0.8% (a little over 2 million Muslims in America) of the United States population have identified as Muslim. This encompasses only 0.2% of the world's Muslim population (Salmans, 2007).

Christians are also a monotheistic faith and profess a belief in Jesus Christ and follow the teachings of the Bible. Both religions have customs and holidays that are observed throughout the year. Christians celebrate the birth of Christ through Christmas. Muslims observe the *Fast of Ramadan*, followers that are able to fast do so during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar (Esposito, 2002).

The following include, but are not limited to, terms, individuals, and groups mentioned in the study that relate to Muslim and Christian women:

1. Religion- the service and worship of God or the supernatural (2) : commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices
2. Higher Power- A power greater than oneself, often used interchangeably with God

3. Spirit- an animating or vital principle held to give life to physical organisms : a supernatural being or essence
4. Spiritual- of, relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit : INCORPOREAL (*spiritual* needs)
5. Christian-One who professes belief in Jesus Christ
6. Jesus- the Jewish religious teacher whose life, death, and resurrection as reported by the Evangelists are the basis of the Christian message of salvation —called also *Jesus Christ*
7. Islam – the religious doctrine built upon the concept of submission to one God, Allah, and to the prophet Muhammad.
8. Muhammad – founder of Islam and regarded as the last Prophet of God
9. Qur'an – the sacred text and foundation of Islamic law, religion, culture and politics.
10. Caliph – a spiritual leader claiming succession from Muhammad.
11. Sunni – a division of Islam that accepts the first four caliphs as rightful successors of Muhammad.
12. Shiite – a division of Islam that regards Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad, as the legitimate successor of the Prophet and disregards the three caliphs who succeeded him.
13. Hijab – the headscarf worn by Muslim women to maintain standards of modesty.
14. Mixed method: A research method that involves the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study. The two different sets of data are

collected concurrently or sequentially, given a priority, and integrated at one or more stage in the research process. (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann & Hanson, 2003)

Organization of the dissertation

This dissertation includes five chapters. Chapter I, as presented above, illustrated the purpose, rationale, and importance of the study. It addressed assumptions, limitations, and relevant definitions and delineates the study's specific research questions. Chapter II includes a literature review of Islam and Christianity. It reviewed applicable research studies that addressed gender, religious and ethnic identity development. In addition the study examined the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory (1986) and feminist theories and their applications to identity development. Chapter III outlined the research methods, describing the participants, design and development, data collection, and statistical data analysis procedures. In Chapter IV, results and findings were presented. Chapter V integrated an evaluation of the research and its application to the current body of literature on Muslim and Christian women. Further limitations, implications, and recommendations for practice and future research were identified.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The development of religious, gender and ethnic identity are important identities for practitioners to consider given the fact one's identity, to a large degree, is influenced by the individual's feelings about himself or herself as well as her or his life choices. This knowledge will help counselors and scholars not only understand but also promote healthy identity development for women clients, whether Muslim or Christian, and regardless of ethnicity. Because existing research has yet to fully investigate these three areas of development in Muslim and Christian women, it was necessary to bring several bodies of literature together to completely understand the foundation of this research study.

In order to understand how Muslim and Christian women interpret their experiences and make sense of self, it was essential to recognize the role ethnicity, gender, and religion play in everyday life. Therefore, in this section, an investigation of the literature within and outside the field of counselor education was provided. By examining the experiences of Muslim and Christian women, this dissertation aims to further the understanding of religious, gender, and ethnic identity development.

Initial investigation begins with an overview of Islam and Christianity, followed by an explanation of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner's theory serves as the primary theoretical framework of this study. Along with Ecological Systems Theory a Socialist- Cultural Feminist view point assisted with the goals of the research. Therefore a discussion of the role of feminism within the context of this research study was also listed, followed by, brief summaries of foundational theories of religious, gender, and ethnic identity development. Each analysis consisted of reviewing the theory and research

within each construct. Next, there was an explanation of the conceptual framework and how these concepts informed an interpretation of the findings. In closing there was an overview and summary of the chapter.

History of Islam and Christianity

In an effort to better appreciate the experience and backgrounds of the participants, it was essential to briefly glance at the historical foundations of Islam and Christianity. This section begins with a brief overview of Islam, specifically investigating the historical foundations, beliefs, customs, and misconceptions followed by a similar review of Christianity. Finally, an overview of the similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity is shared.

Islam. Following Judaism and Christianity, Islam is the third established monotheistic religion. Islam is also the fastest growing religion in the world and the second largest religion next to Christianity. Islam was established between the years 7-10 AD. The Prophet, Muhammad, received and delivered God's message not claiming to be divine, but rather received divine revelations from Gabriel the Archangel. The messages from the Archangel were revealed through a twenty-three year period between the years 610-632 A.D. (Azayem & Hedayat-Diba, 1994). The messages revealed to Muhammad from Allah (God in Arabic) were written and known as the Qur'an. This is not radically different from the Old or New Testaments in the Bible (Nassar-McMillan, Gonzalez, & Mohamed, 2009). Even though Muhammad is seen as the last prophet from God, Muslims recognize and accept all previous Prophets of God.

Some basic beliefs of Islam include that people are responsible for their deeds and are held accountable to God (Azayem & Hedayat-Diba, 1994). Within the two prominent divisions of Muslims exists diverse schools of theology and law. Islamic practice expresses itself in various methods through a vast array of cultures that extend from North Africa to Southeast Asia as well as Europe and North America. One of the uniting principles in Islamic practice is the “*Five Pillars of Islam.*”

“*Shahadah*, the declaration of faith to one God , Allah, and in Muhammad as God’s prophet; *Salat*, the formal practice of worshiping by bowing toward Mecca five times daily and praying; *Sawm*, the month-long fast observed during Ramadan, which serves to build practice and obedience to God as well as to teach compassion for those who go hungry; *Zakah*, or the donation of 2.5% of one’s income to the mosques as a form of giving alms; and *Hajj*, of the pilgrimage to Mecca. (224)” (Nassar-McMillan, Gonzalez, & Mohamed, 2009)

Many Muslims see Islam as not only a religion, but a guide for life. Islamic law in fact is written to help people live ethical lives involving promoting peace and respect for others. This is further emphasized in the meaning of the word *Islam* the literal translation means peace through submission. Islam does not condone actions that would hurt or terrorize another person or group (Azayem & Hedayat-Diba, 1994).

There are many misconceptions surrounding Islam one that is often overemphasized is that women are to be subservient to men. Actually, before God men and women are seen as equals. Muslim women are allowed and often encouraged to obtain an education, own

property, and decide whether to marry or divorce. Women pray in the same manner that men do however, the genders are separated for prayer (Esposito, 2002).

Muslims believe that God sent revelations first to Moses resulting in the Torah, then to Jesus, and finally Muhammad. Muhammad is not seen as the founder of Islam. He is however, seen as a religious reformer and prophet (Esposito, 2002). Islam asks its believers to respect all monotheistic religions as it is the common factor and consider them as one. All believers of Islam are to respect each prophet and make no distinctions between them (Azayem & Hedayat-Diba, 1994). Islam emphasizes unity across religions or racial lines. In fact, Muslims, just like Jews and Christians see Abraham as the father of faith. They respect Jesus and the Old Testament Prophets as the predecessors of Muhammad (Esposito, 2002).

Christianity. A major division between Christianity and Islam, aside from the belief in Muhammad or Jesus, takes place with the story of Abraham. Christians believe that Isaac was to be sacrificed by Abraham according to God's command (Genesis 22:1-2 King James Version). Muslims however, believe that Ismail was the intended victim in the story (Esposito, 2002). This division led to further divisions of practice, custom, and worship.

Christianity was founded on the belief in Jesus of Nazareth, recognizing Jesus as the Savior of the world. Many Christians refer to Jesus as the "Messiah" or "Christ". Christianity began as a Jewish sect but separated from the Jewish faith as Christians recognized Jesus as the Son of God. Christians view the Bible as the sacred scripture sent from God. This scripture is to help Christians in their everyday walk and life with Christ. Christians believe that one can have a personal relationship with God through Jesus.

Christians see God as Three in One: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The belief and worship of these three entities is essential to the Christian faith (Tomkins, 2005).

As implied earlier, Christianity is a plethora of diversity. There are different Christian churches or sects from Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, to Greek and Russian Orthodox. Aside from these divisions there are also subdivisions within them. Baptists for instance, vary from Southern, Missionary, Independent, etc. This results in diversity of beliefs and practices within Christianity. As the largest religion in the world, Christianity can be seen throughout the globe (Tomkins, 2005).

Since the purpose of this dissertation was to investigate women and gender identity, one essential element to consider when looking at the Christian faith was to investigate the history of women gaining access within the church. There is a grave stereotype that society highlights with regards to Muslim women and access. However, little is discussed surrounding the struggle for Christian women to gain access and acceptance through the church. Christian women have struggled and continue to struggle, in many instances, to be seen as equals in the church.

In the 1950's, the women's liberation movement began and with this came many changes in the Catholic Church. The nuns united and formed the National Coalition of American Nuns in 1969. With this organized group the nuns were united in their support for feminist issues (Braude 2004). Changes were also affecting the Methodists Churches due to activist Anna Arnold Hedgeman, an African American woman, who was also on the founding board for the National Organization for Women (NOW). In the Episcopal Church women began to condemn the church as "racist, militarist, and sexist" and they called for an

enforcement of the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which would ensure that women would be employed by the church (Braude 2004).

Other denominations were also feeling the effects of the women's movement. The United Presbyterian Church and the American Baptist convention called for the church to work towards equality for women. They called for equality in not only the church but in every aspect of social and economic life. Church women, regardless of denomination, united and endorsed the equal rights amendment (Braude 2004).

Similarities and differences. There are some similarities between Christianity and Islam. Just like with Christianity, Islam was founded on the belief and worship of one God. (Azayem & Hedayat-Diba, 1994). Muslims and Christians also share a belief in heaven and hell. Muslims do not view Islam as a religion but rather as a guide for everyday life. This was a similar feeling for many Christian women who have difficulty separating their spiritual life from their everyday life. Both Christianity and Islam stress the importance of a personal relationship with God (Esposito, 2002). This relationship is built on an intrinsic motivation and desire to serve and love one God.

One significant difference between Islam and Christianity would be the divisions of faith. The Christian faith as stated has numerous divisions based on belief, practice, worship, prayer, and service. Some of these divisions can differ greatly from Evangelical Christian, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, or Southern Baptist just to name a few; Christians can differ in their worship and practice of religion. Islam has two predominant branches, the Sunni (85% of all Muslims) and the Shiites (15% of all Muslims). There is also a small but significant radical minority known as the Kharijites. This group may not

have a number of followers but has however, impacted and continues to impact political and religious debate (Esposito, 2002).

Ecological System Theory

Key constructs. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1986), human development is best understood and explained within its social/cultural contexts, which include the family, the school, the community, the society, the value and belief system of a given culture, as well as the interactions among these immediate and extended social contexts. Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues described all developments as a proximal process. A “proximal process” refers to a person’s immediate interactions with people, physical environments, or with information (Broderick & Blewitt, 2003). Proximal processes are interactive, meaning the organism influences and is influenced by the immediate environment. Proximal processes, according to Bronfenbrenner, can be modified by distal processes. “Distal processes” are more concrete such as genetic makeup (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Aside from proximal and distal processes there are a few constructs that must be described in order to fully understand Bronfenbrenner’s theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Demand characteristics are described as behavioral tendencies that often encourage or discourage certain kinds of reactions. Bronfenbrenner maintains that changes in the organism can be emergent, stage-like or they can be more continuous. Both types of changes are the result of proximal processes which are influenced by distal internal and external processes (Broderick & Blewitt, 2003).

Gathered from his views on development Bronfenbrenner developed the Ecological Systems Theory also called Development in Context or Bio-Ecological Systems Theory. This theory will serve as the base for this research. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986).

Bronfenbrenner has argued that any understanding of human development, feelings and behavior must consider the context in which the individual functions. Accordingly, individuals interact with their environment in a continuous process of influence, reflected in the interaction and transaction patterns of the individual in relation to a set of five overlapping sub-systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem. A microsystem is regarded as the immediate environment such as family, biology, and peer group. The second stage, the mesosystem, describes the interaction that occurs within the microsystem. An example of these interactions would be the interaction between a child's home and school. External environmental settings which indirectly have an impact on an individual depict the third stage, the exosystem. An example of this would be a parent's work environment on the child. While it may not directly impact a child, it could indirectly affect the child. Customs and culture of the larger culture that helps shape the microsystem is described as the macrosystem. This fourth stage is illustrated as the cultural attitudes and laws that can influence an individual (Broderick & Blewitt, 2003).

The final system, the chronosystem, describes dimensions in time. This stage was added to the EST in 1986. Typically the chronosystem is best described as a life transition. These transitions include environmental events, socio-historical events, and transitions over the course of a lifetime. Dimensions of the chronosystem can range from the impact of divorce to the effects of 9/11 on an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Development. The Ecological Systems Theory views the environment as a set of nested structures, each inside the next. Bronfenbrenner even compared this nesting of systems to a set of Russian dolls where each system is found within the larger system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Newer versions of this theory give equal attention to the internal level of the organism. A person brings a set of pre-existing abilities, experiences, knowledge, and skills to the proximal process. These are then influenced by biological and physical levels of functioning. Bronfenbrenner emphasizes the bidirectional effects of each level which in return impacts adjacent levels (Broderick & Blewitt, 2003).

Bronfenbrenner (1986) asserts that to study a person's development one must look not only at the person and the immediate environment but also the interaction of the larger environment. According to Bronfenbrenner the interaction between each system steers the child's development. As a person develops, the interaction within these environments becomes more complex. The complexity arises as a person grows and matures. If a relationship in the microsystem breaks down, the child may not then have the tools to explore other parts of the environment (Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

In the EST, the behavioral system is associated with an environmental event. When a similar event occurs, the response is recalled and replayed. The bio-ecological system is the most important to the development of an individual. Relationships such as mother-child, father-child, and father-mother, are the basis for the early microsystem. This relationship can be seen as the most influential to early development. Behavior is learned in the microsystem, however, as the person grows older, the other systems have more influence (Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

Cognitive systems are said to develop through the movement of the nested systems. An infant would be in the microsystem and the immediate mesosystem. As someone grows, they move into the other systems helping them cognitively develop. Emotional systems are also said to develop similar to the cognitive development. At the beginning of life all emotions surround the microsystem. However, as an individual grows the emotions expand beyond the microsystem (Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), a person's cultural beliefs have the power to affect all of the ecological systems. These beliefs are deeply held and usually become a basis for a person's sense of self. Due to the influence of culture on identity, there is a potential for conflict between cultures in society. Even though people unite to form one society, they maintain various cultures consisting of different ethnicities, religious affiliations, and nationalities. The dominant culture often communicates conflicting messages to other cultures. This miscommunication can create identity crisis in children (Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

Societal level breakdown that has occurred according to the Ecological Systems Theory is due to problems with the mesosystem relationships. The shift from an industrial model to a technological model can be contributed to the breakdown of society. In support of this, it was pointed out that lobbying for supporting parents' roles would benefit society as a whole. This would directly impact the children and shift the development of children today (Henderson, 1995).

Gender can certainly be an influential characteristic that determines how that individual is treated (Broderick & Blewitt, 2003). For example, when children are very

young they begin to learn through the environment what is socially acceptable. Boys are often taught to not express emotions and be “tough;” girls are reinforced to be caring, compassionate, “ladies.” Although Bronfenbrenner does not directly discuss gender, it is a pervasive attribute in American society. The benefit of EST is that because it encompasses each element of a person’s experience topics like religion, gender, and ethnicity can easily fit into the model.

Even though Bronfenbrenner’s theory was not designed specifically with religion, gender, or ethnic identity development in mind, the experience of identity can be investigated through this model. The interaction of the individual and the environment will directly affect their religious, gender, and ethnic identity development. Therefore, Bronfenbrenner’s theory will serve as the backdrop for this dissertation looking specifically at the identity development of Muslim and Christian women across various ethnicities.

Within this framework this study focused on the microsystem as the setting of day-to-day living; the macrosystem is the basic framework of a particular society, including its cultural, economic, political norms, values, and attitudes; the chronosystem consist of life events that have impacted an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The values and the norms of the macrosystem are believed to affect the personal attitudes of the individual in regard to gender roles, role of religion in the family and impact of daily life. The macrosystem values and norms provided the basis for comparison between Christian and Muslim women across various ethnicities.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory is the extension of feminism in a theoretical orientation. Feminist theory is linked to the women's movement of the 1960's. This was a time when women began to unite and express their dissatisfaction with the limits and conditions of traditional female roles. Women began to come together to share experiences and perception. This helped women to realize they were not alone and they began to form a sisterhood. Women united to organize shelters for battered women, rape crisis centers, and women's health and reproductive centers (Corey, 2005).

The history of feminism can be traced to three waves. The first wave took place in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century and dealt primarily with women's suffrage. The second stage took place in the 1960's and 70's focused on inequalities with laws and also cultural inequalities. The present, third stage, started in the 1990's to the present and is in some ways a continuation and also a response to the failures of the second wave (Corey, 2005).

One cannot discuss feminism without addressing some key constructs. The terms power, women's liberation, oppression, and sexism have all been linked to feminism.

Defined terms:

Power, in our society, equates with domination and control over people or things (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/power>).

“Women's lib” or the women's liberation movement was aimed at making women the social equals of men (Hooks, 2000).

Feminism is the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes; organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism>).

Oppression is characterized as an unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power; something that oppresses especially in being an unjust or excessive exercise of power (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oppression>).

Liberation is described as “the act of liberating; the state of being liberated; a movement seeking equal rights and status for a group.” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liberation>)

Sexism is prejudice or discrimination based on sex; especially, discrimination against women. (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sexism>)

One of the central tenets of modern feminist thought has been the notion that all women are oppressed in society. Hooks (2000) stated that this would imply that women share a common lot. This would assume that factors like class, race, religion, sexual preference, etc. do not create a diverse experience. This experience will then determine the extent to which sexism may be an oppressive force in the lives of women. She further points out that it is not safe to assume that all women experience the same forms of oppression. Some women do not speak out because they do not experience the lack of choices that other women may experience (Hooks, 2000).

The feminist view of human nature is separate from other theoretical models. Other traditional theories grew out of historical periods based on gender. Men and women were typically viewed as having different personality characteristics. It was thus assumed that

because of biological differences men and women would pursue different directions in life (Corey, 2005).

The slogan, “the personal is the political,” was first used to describe women’s everyday experiences as being informed and shaped by politics and thus are political. This became a slogan encouraging women to realize that experiencing discrimination, exploitation, or oppression automatically shaped one’s social status. Once women realized that by describing their own experiences they were developing a critical political consciousness, the progress of the feminist movement was stalled (Hooks, 2000). Due to the oppression women have and continue to face, it is logical that women may be fearful to become advocates for their personal and political identities.

Socialist feminism. As stated earlier the two specific feminist theories that are analyzed are Socialist and Cultural feminism. The history of Socialist feminism can be linked to two other theories Marxist feminism and radical feminism. This theory broadens the Marxist idea of capitalism oppressing women. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels used the terms socialist and communism interchangeably. There were three aspects of their theory of socialism that were relevant to Socialist feminism. The first were the formation of class consciousness, theories of capitalism and economic value, and the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1848), which all serve as influences in Socialist feminism (Donovan, 2006). Despite Marx’s influence on Socialist feminism some Socialist feminists feel that there are clear distinctions between Marxist feminism and Socialist feminism. Marx believed that when class oppression ceased, gender oppression would also halt. Some

Socialist feminists do not see gender oppression as a sub-class of class oppression (Corey, 2005).

Socialist Feminism, also called contemporary Marxist feminism, has as its primary goal societal change. These feminists focus on multiple oppressions and believe solutions in society's problems must include considerations of class, race, economics, nationality, and history (Corey, 2005). Liberation is achieved only through ending economic and cultural sources of oppression. Socialist feminism holds that culture and society are rooted in material and economic conditions (Donovan, 2006).

Cultural feminism. Cultural feminism builds on and borrows from radical feminist thought in that it perceives gender as the primary division of people and a source of inequality. Unlike other branches of feminism (e.g. liberal feminism), cultural feminism recognizes the differences both physiological and sociologically induced between women and men. Further this branch posits that women's virtues of nurturance, warmth, and connectedness are effectual and indispensable (Gilligan, 1982; Saulnier, 1996). Cultural feminists believe that oppression was initiated through society's devaluation of women's strengths. They further believe that the solution to oppression lies in the hands of those who can spread feminist values. They believe that this will in turn allow society to become more nurturing, intuitive, subjective, cooperative, and relational (Corey, 2005).

Cultural feminist theorists believe that there are a number of universal cultural experiences that women endure. Women have experienced political oppression. Isolated examples do exist that have spared women from this form of oppression although, overall, women have not had the political power that men experience. This theory points out that in

nearly every period in time women have been assigned to the domestic and caring sphere. Women experience significant physical events throughout their lifetime that are quite different than men. In addition, women continue to be victims of male violence; examples include rape, sexual harassment, and physical abuse. Cultural feminists hypothesize that experiencing these various conditions has led to the formation of the women's standpoint (Donovan, 2006).

Nested within cultural feminism exists an emphasis on political change focusing on a cultural transformation. All the while women continue to recognize the importance of critical thinking and self-development. Cultural feminists tend to stress the role of non-rational intuitive and the collective sides of life. They do not focus on the similarities of men and women but rather they tend to stress the differences. They affirm that feminine qualities may be a source of personal strength and pride and a source of rebirth. From a developmental perspective, cultural feminist today bypass the nature versus nurture question by assuming that all humans are ultimately equal (Donovan, 2006). It is because of this belief in equality that this sect of feminism served as a guidepost for this dissertation.

Feminist research. Empirical research shows that feminist theory has been utilized in research primarily with women's issues. Cole and Zucker (2007) used feminist theory to guide their research looking at White and Black women. The goal of this research study was to investigate how these women conceptualize various components of femininity while looking specifically at how participants view themselves and what these individuals classify as feminine. More specifically, this study focused on perceptions of an individual's

femininity and whether that was a predictor of their attitudes concerning feminism (Cole & Zucker, 2007).

While some researchers utilize feminist theory, others investigate feminists as a whole. Treacher (2003) explored Islamic feminists and secular feminists. This study distinguished between Islamic feminists and secular feminists, claiming that liberation for men and women lies in following the Islamic faith. Feminism was seen as essential to Islam as a source of protection for women. Other studies have examined the relationships among ethnic and religious identities and feminist orientations among Arab American women. The focus of Marshall and Read's (2003) study was to question whether ethnic and religious identities undermine feminism in this population. The study looked at multiple identities to see if they are mutually supportive. The study used a survey of Arab-American women to examine the separate effects of dimensions of ethnic and religious identity on feminist orientation. The research indicated that political identity is positively associated with feminism while religious and feminist identities are inversely related (Marshall & Read, 2003).

Ali, Mahmood, Moel, Hudson, and Leathers (2008), used a feminist theoretical orientation to guide their research study. The goal was to gain a deeper understanding of Christian and Muslim views and opinions. Christian participants, while identifying with the goals of feminism, were hesitant to label themselves as "feminists." Muslim women, on the other hand, were not only able to identify as feminists, but they also stated that Islam is a feminist religion. The research team asserted that the study adds to the cultural diversity

literature by providing insight into religious women's attitudes towards feminism (Ali et. al. 2008).

Gender

Definition. Gender is a term that in recent years goes hand in hand with feminism. Feminists first adopted the term gender in the late 1970's to distinguish between biological mechanisms and social aspects of being a male and a female. Gender, among other things, does determine one's status in society regardless of one's ethnicity. To fully understand the implications of gender one must first make the distinction between gender and sex (Helgeson, 2005). Gender is defined as characteristics and traits both societal and culturally appropriate to males and females. Sex expresses what is biological or natural and gender describes what is learned or cultural (Eagly, Beall, & Sternberg, 2004). It is important to realize that the two words are not of the same meaning. In many instances the word "sex" implies that certain barriers are a matter of nature while "gender" in all but very few situations is a matter of nurture, i.e. socially constructed and therefore subject to change.

Historically, gender identity has received less attention in the study of identity development than racial identity by researchers. Even though gender and sex are not mutually exclusive terms, some researchers have investigated gender identity and its implications with sexual orientation; other researchers have looked at gender identity development in children, and few have looked at gender identity and ethnic identity development. This was especially true in regards to the research with Muslim and Christian women.

Research. Ali, Mahmood, Moel, Hudson, and Leathers (2008), goal was to gain a deeper understanding of Christian and Muslim women and their beliefs surrounding feminism. While this study did not look specifically at gender identity development gender identity did surface in the results. The researchers listed the lack of investigation surrounding ethnicity to be a limitation. The specific purpose of the study was to examine Christian and Muslim women's definitions and perceptions of feminism, gender roles, and the ways in which religious values impact the women's definitions of feminism. Most of the Christian women in this study supported the values of feminism but rejected the label of feminist. On the other hand, most of the Muslim women not only endorsed the label but actually identified Islam as a feminist religion. While this study looks at feminism and religious identity there are pieces that are lacking highlighting the need for further investigation. These researchers suggest that future studies should gather participants from varying ethnicities, social classes, and educational backgrounds.

Leo (2005) investigated gender roles and identity within Islam by investigating the Qur'an. The investigation traced the historical evolution of female sexuality focusing particularly on the development of female gender roles which are described in the Qur'an. Furthermore the study examined the concepts of sexuality, gender, and patriarchy; in an effort to, understand the power relationship that exists between the sexes in the modern world. The results showed that there was discourse with sexuality in Islam calling it a dense transfer point between discourse and silence.

Corby, Hodges, and Perry (2007) looked specifically at gender identity development in various ethnic groups. They found that White, Black, and Hispanic children reported pressure for gender conformity and that gender contentedness was strongly linked to self-esteem for participants. Gender identity development is clearly an instrumental aspect of development that should be investigated in counselor education research. Having low levels of gender identity development could result in low self-esteem and internalizing problems (Corby, Hodges, & Perry 2007).

Religion

Definition. Religion and spirituality are two of the most important factors in shaping human experience, beliefs, values, and behaviors (Lukoff, Turker, & Lu, 1992). Many times these terms are used interchangeably. However, they have strong distinctions with respect to the meaning and relevance; these distinctions often vary considerably cross-culturally. In Western cultures, religion is sometimes viewed more communal involving traditions rules and rituals developed by social institutions. Spirituality is seen as more of an individual experience characterized by a connectedness to something greater than self (Koenig, H., McCullough, M., & Larson, D. 2001). For many women, religious beliefs are an important aspect of diversity that serve as a source of strength and provide a sense of personal support (Ali et al. 2008).

Even though religious beliefs are intrinsic for some women, feminist scholars have, in the past, often shied away from exploring these aspects of women in clinical practice and research. Religiosity is often portrayed in the research as a negative influence on a woman's life (Burn & Busso, 2005). This phenomenon could be linked to the negative history

between feminism and religion. Many early feminists have portrayed religion as a main force that has kept women in subjugation (Donovan, 2006). Recently, however, feminist scholars are beginning to address gender specific ways in which spirituality influences a woman's personal and professional life (Tummala-Narra, 2009). Espin (2008) states that spirituality is relational, stating it is "fundamentally about a relationship with whatever we understand God to be" (p.72).

According to the Princeton Religion Research Center (1997) more than 90% of Americans report some religious preference. Myers (2000) found that 96% of Americans believe in God (Allah) and 40% attend religious services on a weekly basis or more. In recent years there has been a notable increase in the number of Americans interested in their spiritual growth and development. The number has risen from 50% in the mid 90's to more than 80% by the 21st century. Therefore it is safe to say that religion and spirituality is an increasingly important aspect of most American's daily lives (Plante, 2008). Due to this it is now seen as more important to incorporate the whole self meaning the religious and spiritual parts in counseling (Frazier & Hansen, 2009). More importantly as stated earlier for Muslim and Christian Americans their religion and spirituality are both seen as intrinsic parts of who they are and how they identify with their selves and others.

Research. Williams, Jerome, White, & Fisher (2006) investigated how religious women deal with adversity. This qualitative study consisted of interviewing 25 women who held monotheistic beliefs from Christian, Islamic, or Jewish traditions. All of the participants had recently experienced severe adversity; however, they reported they were coping well. Adversity was described as loss of significant relationship, the loss of a life role, health

problems, or inability to perform functions of life. All of the women in the study reported using multiple religious strategies to help them cope with adversity. These strategies varied from prayer, church attendance, and reading religious materials to forming relationships with others who share the same beliefs, all of which proved to help the participants cope (Williams et al., 2006). This study illustrated the importance of religion in coping with adversity and life events. Religion for these women was seen as a source of strength and support. The belief in something higher than self proved to be an essential element in coping with adversity. This study supports the fact that it is essential for counselors and counselor educators to consider religion when working with clients.

Religious and spiritual commitment may help people cope better with the stressors in their lives which is directly associated with better mental health functioning specifically more optimism, compassion for self and others, forgiveness, and less anxiety and depression (Koenig et al. 2001, Plante & Thoresen, 2007). Muslim-Americans are examples of this as the research by Read & Bartkowski (2000) pointed out the women in the study consistently expressed a level of connectedness and mutual respect for each other regardless of whether they veil or unveil. Counselors need to ensure that this same courtesy is extended when these women enter into a therapeutic relationship. The religious and spiritual orientation of these clients can be seen as a source of strength and should be incorporated into the therapeutic relationship.

Many researchers have reported that, regardless of religious affiliation, clients want their health care professionals (including counselors, psychotherapists, and psychologist) to not only respect but to also acknowledge and integrate their spiritual and religious principles

into their relationships with these clients (Frick, Riedner, Fegg, Hauf, & Borasio, 2006; McNichols & Feldman, 2007; Shanfranske, 2001). A majority of clients who attend therapy seek to discuss spiritual and religious matters in counseling (Rose, Westefeld, & Ansely, 2001). In the therapeutic relationship, silence on religion and spirituality indicate a unspoken avoidance of central aspects of the client's inner life (Tummala-Narra, 2009). This further amplifies the role and importance of religious identity development. Therefore, this research study further examined the religious identity as well as the ethnic and gender identity of Muslim and Christian women.

Ethnicity

Definition. Ethnic identity was defined as the extent to which one identifies with a particular ethnic group(s). Specifically ethnicity refers to one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership. The ethnic group tends to be one in which the individual claims heritage (Phinney, 1996). Ethnic identity is separate from one's personal identity as an individual, although the two may reciprocally influence each other. Due to the lack of understanding in the United States many groups face stereotypes, racism and lower status in society often affecting a person's ethnic identity development. Ethnic identity changes over time as individuals have different experiences (Skowron, 2004). Regardless of these experiences, ethnic identity formation involves developing an understanding and acceptance of one's own group.

Instead of holding to a concrete ethnic identity, it is imperative for individuals to maintain a positive ethnic identity. Research has indicated that individuals with a positive

ethnic identity often display higher levels of self-esteem and lower stress levels (Skowron, 2004). Serving as an advantage, an individual's identity and self-esteem can have a significant impact on their own experiences. This includes positive attitudes and feelings towards one's ethnic group, interest and knowledge about the group, and involvement in group traditions (Phinney, 1996).

Research. Each of the following studies investigated ethnicity within Muslim and Christian women. The researchers supported through their findings a need to address ethnic identity within this diverse group of women. Read (2003) investigated the impact of gender role attitudes of Muslim American and Christian American women. The focus of this study was to investigate a popular stereotype which states that Arab-American women are Islamic traditionalists. The focus, while not directly addressing ethnicity, investigated women's gender beliefs using survey data collected from a national sample of Arab-Americans. The results concluded that Arab-American women are more diverse and less traditional than popular stereotypes portray and in fact are not Islamic traditionalists. Furthermore the study discovered that ethnicity impacted a woman's gender role attitudes more so than her individual affiliation as Muslim or Christian women (Read, 2003).

Ali, Mahmood, Moel, Hudson, and Leathers (2008) looked specifically at a diverse group of Christian and Muslim women. The goal was to see if these women identified more with their ethnic or cultural heritage or their religion. The results showed that White Christian women identified with their religion as part of their cultural heritage; this was also the case for the White Muslim women. However, all of the African American Christian women and most of the Muslim women identified culture as their ethnic/racial background.

The African American women described church preference based on similar ethnic identities. Muslim women in this study discussed how their specific ethnic culture often oppresses the rights of women even though this is contrary to Islamic teachings (Ali et al, 2008). This research called for further investigation within a diverse sample of Christian and Muslim women to address ethnic identity.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the history and tenants within Islam and Christianity followed by a detailed explanation of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. A review of Socialist and Cultural Feminism was listed and serves as a lens to guide the goals of the research; therefore a discussion of the role of feminism within the context of this research study was also listed. Each analysis consisted of reviewing the theory and research within each of the constructs followed by brief summaries of foundational theories of religious, gender, and ethnic identity development. Finally, the issue of the negotiation of ethnic, gender, and religious identities was listed as well as a conceptual framework for investigating each.

In conclusion, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory will serve as the primary theoretical framework to guide this study. Bronfenbrenner does a stunning job relating this developmental theory to real life. Specifically when considering women's gender, religious, and ethnic identity development, it is essential to consider the various nested relationships and interactions. In addition, a Socialist Cultural Feminist Theory will serve as a lens to guide the research. This modality is not focused on color, race, gender, or ethnicity; however, feminism is about equality for all.

Literature has pointed to a convergence between gender relations in Islam and Christianity. The researchers pointed out that information could be gained by drawing more detailed cross-cultural comparisons between the experiences between these religious women (Ali et al., 2008; Read & Bartkowski, 2000). This research study used religion, gender, and ethnicity to achieve this cross-cultural comparison of Muslim and Christian women, all the while investigating the lived experiences of these women.

Results of studies conducted on Muslim and Christian women appeared to suggest that religious and gender identity formation are two critical components of identity development for these women (Ali et al., 2008; Read, 2003; Read & Bartkowski, 2000). In addition, studies have revealed that these two components of identity development, religion and gender, may be related to each other as well as to other identity constructs. (Read, 2003; Leo, 2005; Marshall & Read, 2003). One's identity does influence an individual's feelings about self and decisions about life; the formation of religious, gender, and ethnic identity are areas for practitioners to consider. Understanding the interaction between these three variables will help counselors understand healthy identity development as a woman whether Muslim or Christian.

Chapter 3: Method

The purpose of this study was to understand the dynamic experiences of Muslim and Christian women. Specifically, how these women understand, develop, and maintain their religious, gender, and ethnic identity development comprised the study's foci. Through learning about the participants' lived experiences, this study aimed to provide rich descriptions of their identity negotiation within a changing psychological, social and historical context.

The primary research question for this study was, "what are the lived experiences of Muslim and Christian women of varying ethnicities?" This study purports to assist scholars, counselors, and counselor educators by providing a glimpse into the lives of Muslim and Christian women. Thus, the primary audiences for using the results of this study are scholars, counselors, and counselor educators working to gain a deeper understanding of the identity negotiation of Muslim and Christian women. This section describes the methodology that guides the research, participant selection, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques, also addressed issues of trustworthiness and other elements of the qualitative methodology employed, as well as the researcher's role in the study.

Pilot Study

Prior to working on this project, a pilot study was conducted. This study was completed to meet this researcher's departmental requirements of the Thesis equivalency. This study involved two Muslim women living in the southeastern United States. The pilot study focused on gender and religious identity development of the participants. The pilot study participants shared cultural tensions, fears, and personal values and beliefs through a

structured interview process. The results of the pilot study further fueled the researcher's interest that prompting more interest in identity development. For these Muslim women, in the wake of 9/11 they continue to negotiate who they are and how they fit into the world around them, including negotiations within the American culture. Participants expressed challenges trying to live out their Islamic faith in a United States culture that is often in opposition to the beliefs and customs of Islam. One specific illustration would be the dissonance one participant expressed in regard to her wardrobe. Some of the things that she wanted to wear were not in line with traditional Muslim apparel, thus causing internal conflict further in making decisions about her to dress.

Recruiting of participants for the pilot study proved to be a challenging task. The volunteers openly stated that they were hesitant to participate out of fear. After thorough discussion with the participants it was discovered that the participants were fearful to be misrepresented by a Christian researcher. The pilot study encouraged this researcher to further investigate the negotiation of the multiple aspects of their identity between not only Muslim but also Christian women.

Research Design

A mixed methods approach was used for this study. One of the reasons that a mixed methods approach was utilized for this study was to provide participant enrichment and significant enhancement. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2010) described both participant enrichment and significant enhancement as two of the four major rationales for mixing quantitative and qualitative research. Participant enrichment refers to mixing methods in order to optimize the sample. Significance enhancement was described as mixing methods in

order to provide a rationale of maximizing interpretation of the findings. Both methods are used to enhance the findings and interpretation of the research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004).

Since the goal of this research study was to allow the participants' voices to be heard a consensual qualitative research approach within a phenomenological interpretive research paradigm, combined with a quantitative descriptive design, was utilized. This analysis incorporates Brofenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Brofenbrenner, 1979). The theoretical paradigm of this research study, specifically its ontological perspective, recognizes that there are multiple interpretations of reality. The epistemology was seen as an interactive process between the researcher and those being researched. The methodology for this study was both evolving and participatory. This perspective placed importance on the lives and experiences of those marginalized in society. This approach further analyzed why inequities based on gender, religion, and ethnicity are reflected in power relationships (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

The bulk of this research was the qualitative analysis of the individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Krathwohl (1998) stated "qualitative research methods are particularly useful in understanding how individuals understand their world, in showing how individuals' perceptions and intentions in situations determine their behavior, in exploring phenomena to find explanations, and in providing concrete and detailed illustrations of phenomena" (p. 225).

The specific purposes of this study were to examine: (1) the lived experiences of Muslim and Christian women; (2) the similarities and differences among a specific group of

women who identify as Christian and Muslim; and (3) the relationship between religious, gender, and ethnic identity development. In order to gain a better understanding of these issues, semi-structured interviews were used to query Muslim and Christian women along with the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Scale (Phinney, 1992) to assess the ethnic identity development of the participants.

This research study involved an unequal mix of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The first two questions are qualitative and the third quantitative. Therefore qualitative questions formed the bulk of the research study by utilizing the interviews, codes, and themes will serve as a foundational element in this research. While the quantitative portion was invaluable surrounding the participant's ethnic identity, it did not provide the same type of information that the interview will yielded. The sampling design of this study provided case to case transfer generalizations (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2010). These data sets were connected in the discussion and analyses of the participants.

Building a Relationship. Building a relationship or gaining access is said to be an essential element of conducting qualitative research. Glesne (1999) describes gaining access as the process researchers go through, including interviews, focus groups, observations, and obtaining documents to complete their study. This researcher began this process through a pilot study that provided within group contacts. This researcher has cultivated relationships and maintained contact with previous participants over the last two years. This included emails, phone calls, continual checking in with previous participants about family, friends, and life events. Previous participants provided a crucial role in recruitment and helped validate this researcher's credibility. These individuals expressed a willingness to vouch for

this researcher as an individual and a researcher, and agreed to encourage their peers to participate. These contacts proved to be very supportive, and they suggested friends and family that were amenable to being participants in the study.

The second step in the research process began with an application for approval from the Human Subject Review Board (IRB) from the doctoral student's educational institution. Once permission to conduct this research was granted, interviews were set up and finalized by the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). Following IRB guidelines, an explanation of the purpose and procedures of the study were emailed to contacts from the previous research study.

Participants

Participants were chosen based on their gender and belief in Islam or Christianity. The ten participants were recruited from a population of Muslim and Christian women in the southern U.S. between the ages of 25-55 years of age. In an effort to look at the construct of ethnic identity development, the researcher selected ethnically diverse participants.

Participants were drawn from various parts of the southern Southeastern United States including Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, and Alabama. Participants were gathered through snowballing (participants referring others to the study) and purposeful sampling (selecting specific participants to achieve a specific objective).

These ten participants' encompassed a range of ethnicities, three participants identified as Caucasian, two Spanish, three Egyptian, one Moroccan, and one African American. Not only were these women diverse in ethnicity but also they varied in their level of education some having only one year of college while another was a physician. Each of

the participants also varied with religious attendance and practice. A more detailed description of the participants is listed in Chapter 4 under the heading descriptive statistics.

Participants were invited to participate but were informed that participation was strictly voluntary. Interviews were held in a private location such as the office of the researcher. The researcher ensured that the private location was isolated so that all information was confidential. One major component for selection was that participants self identify themselves as either devout Muslim or devout Christian women. The reasoning behind selecting devout religious participants was to gain participants that are intrinsically linked to their faith. Participants also had to be willing to have their interviews tape recorded. There were a few areas of exclusion from the research these would be non-English speaking women. Immigrants that were not citizens would not be included in the research.

It was possible that feelings of discrimination or reminders of previous discriminatory acts could have sparked. The participants were reminded that their information would remain confidential and participation was voluntary. If the participants at anytime wished to withdraw from the study they were allowed to do so immediately. The information in the research records was kept confidential. No reference was made in oral or written reports which could link the participants to the study. Keeping in line with the goals of confidentiality, participants were NOT asked to write their name on any study materials to help eliminate matching participants' identity to the answers that they provided.

This study differs from the researcher's previous pilot study because this study involved not only Muslim women but also Christian women. Conceptually, this study also looked at ethnicity which was not previously studied. The previous pilot study produced a

very small sample of two participants. One main issue that this researcher faced was gaining access with the Islamic community. Because this was the second research study this researcher has developed and maintained significant relationships within the community that assisted with the recruiting of participants.

Researcher as participant. In qualitative research, the researcher is considered a participant in the research process. Since this study is mixed in its methodology, the researcher will remain a participant throughout the process. The researcher acknowledges that she may have her own biases; therefore, she worked to reduce the power of her potential biases by bracketing these biases and working with a team to acknowledge and reduce the bias in the research. As the researcher, I acknowledge that I am a White, Southern, American, Christian female researcher in the United States of America society that bestows certain privileges and advantages based on my ethnicity and other aspects of my demographic background. My related experiences have, therefore, shaped my worldview and influenced my perceptions of people and events. It is from this perspective that I approach and participate in this research study.

Since my perspective may bias the coding and thematic interpretation, I used three specific research strategies. The first of these strategies bracketing, is a means of demonstrating validity of the data collection and analytic processes (Ahern, 1999). This method consisted of the researcher listing all biases prior to and while gathering data. The method allowed the research team to hold each other accountable and ensure that personal biases do not seep into the data.

Member checking was the second technique that was used. This technique consists of going back to those researched, at the completion of the study, and asking the participants if the transcription were accurate or were in need correction/elaboration within certain constructs (Ratcliff, 1995). Using member checking ensured that the participant's words were their own, as they had full rein over the words that were used in their transcripts.

Finally, triangulation, or using multiple methods, data of research findings, etc. enhanced the validity of research findings (Mathison, 1988). Triangulation was used in an attempt to decrease the possibility that bias would skew the findings. Triangulation allowed the researcher to continue to investigate the convergence, if any, of the data both qualitative and quantitative, while leaving the researcher's agenda at bay and allowed the data to speak for itself.

Research team. The other coder was a student in the doctorate program. She acknowledged the following: I acknowledge that I am a White, Northern American, raised Catholic but currently does not identify with a religion. As a female researcher in the United States of America society that bestows certain privileges and advantages based on my ethnicity and other aspects of my demographic background. This researcher also recognized that her related experiences have, therefore, shaped her worldview and influenced her perceptions of people and events.

Bias

One essential element of qualitative research was to bracket the researcher's bias. Bracketing is essentially listing all biases that the research team acknowledges. This strategy allows the researcher to acknowledge bias and the research team to recognize these biases.

The goal of listing biases is to enhance the validity of mixed methods inquiry (Ahern, 1999). These biases were listed in a journal throughout the research process. One notable bias was my limited exposure and interaction with the Muslim American population. While I have been exposed to many cultures, and have attempted to realize my own cultural insensitivities, it still remains difficult to realize limitations from within. Figure one below illustrates the biases that this research team acknowledged through this process.

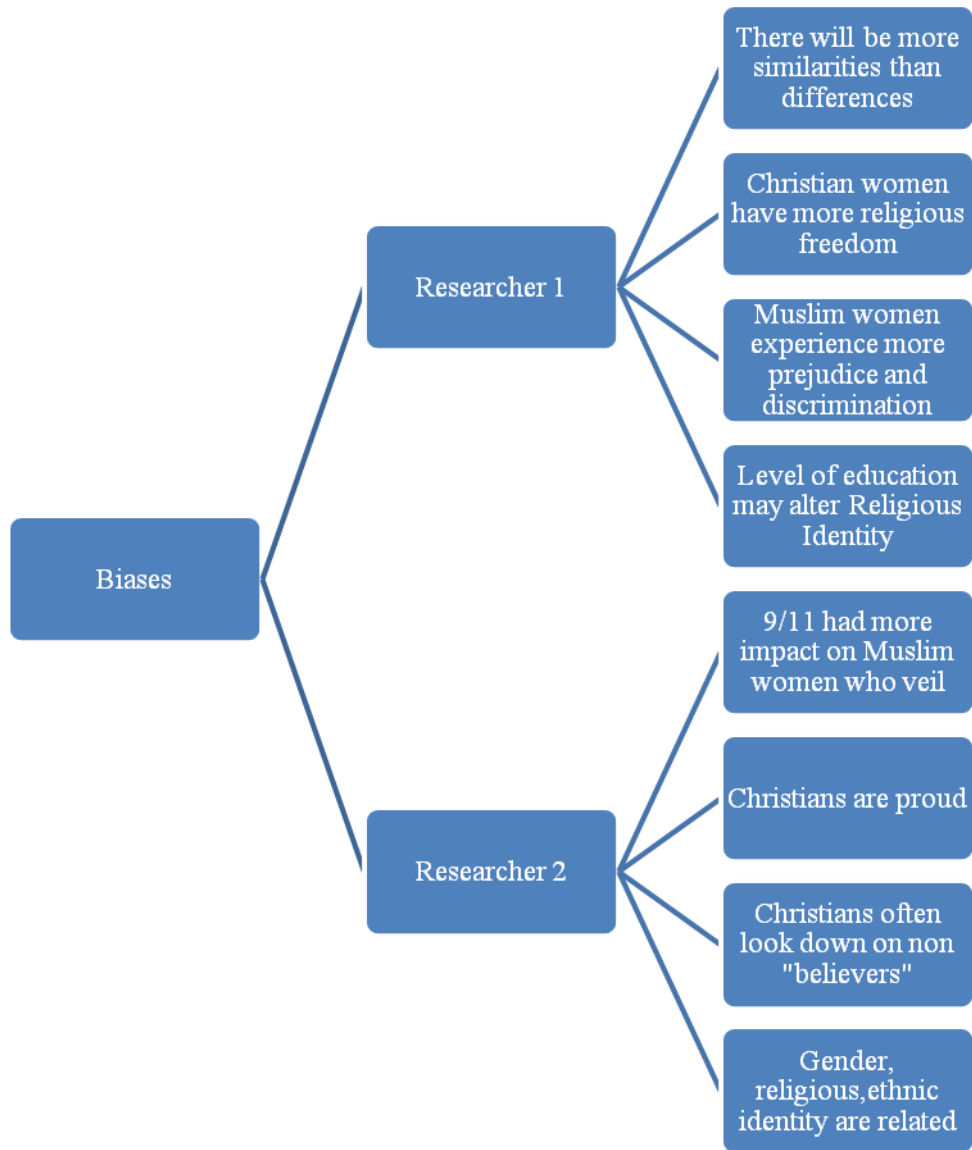


Figure 1: Bracketing of Biases

Instruments

Data collection consisted of a mixed methods approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Along with the interview each participant completed a demographic form and the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992) was used to assess the quantitative portion of the research. Also included in the research was a demographic form that was used to gather descriptive data including age, race, gender, ethnicity, education, length of time in the United States, and level of religious attendance. The qualitative component of the study was conducted through the semi-structured interviews.

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM, see Appendix C) was designed to meet the need for a general measure that could assess ethnic identity across diverse ethnic groups (Ponterotto & Mallinckrodt, 2007). This measure included 14 items that were said to assess the core components of ethnic identity. The components consisted of: sense of attachment or belonging, achieved identity, and involvement in ethnic practices (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Phinney (1992) suggested that the preferred scoring for the MEIM is to use the mean of the item scores; that is the mean of the 12 items for an overall score. The range of scores is from 1 to 4. The MEIM is a Likert scale meaning that this measure is also an ordinal measure, there is a fixed order to the responses (1 to 4). Previous research shows that the MEIM is comprised of two factors, ethnic identity (a developmental and cognitive component) and affirmation, belonging, and commitment. Ethnic identity is said to be reflected in items 1, 2, 4, 8, and 10; affirmation, belonging, and commitment, items 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12 (Phinney, 1992).

Phinney (2007) pointed out that the MEIM has been used in dozens of studies and has consistently shown high reliability. Alpha scores are reported above .80 across a wide range of ethnic groups and ages. Researchers have flexibility with the MEIM that other measures do not often afford. Phinney (2007) encourages researchers to modify the MEIM to adapt the measure to the research question of a variety of studies.

Qualitative interview. The semi-structured interview (see Appendix B) consisted of a series of questions developed by the researcher based on similar studies and literature related to the subject matter. Interview questions addressed the impact of participants' religious views on social relationships, stereotypes they have experienced, their view of feminism, their gender identity, and the importance of Islamic/Christian traditions in their lives (Read & Bartkowski, 2000). Questions also addressed any differences and/or similarities among participants before and after 9/11.

The questions primarily were open ended so that the participants would have the freedom to elaborate when and as they wish. This also allowed the researcher to have freedom to probe to gather more information. The probes allowed the researcher to obtain a greater understanding of the participants' views of their gender identity. The interview questions covered a range of topics to address the participants' gender identity, religion, and their perspectives on feminism.

Demographic form. Participants filled out a demographic form (see Appendix A), which asked them to provide information such as: age, citizenship, ethnicity, and country of origin. They were also asked to describe affiliation with place of worship, including

attendance. An open ended question for participants to describe level of education was also included in the questionnaire, as well as how long they have resided in the U.S.

Procedure

Data collection. Each volunteer filled out a brief demographic form, completed the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM, Phinney, 1992) and participated in semi-structured interview. Before beginning the interview the participants were given a brief explanation of the study and gave verbal approval of informed consent. The demographic form gathered information about their age, race, gender, if they were a U.S. citizen, length of time in the U.S. (if applicable), level of education, present occupation, and marital status.

Consent to participate was signified by participants' verbal agreement to the consent and the researcher signed and dated all materials. This was to ensure that the participants felt safe sharing information so that their results remained anonymous. Withdrawing, for any reason and at any time, was permitted without penalty. In the event that a participant became unnerved by the interview topic or process, she was permitted to terminate the assessment. All of the corresponding materials were destroyed should the participant withdraw. In an effort to ensure the well-being of each willing participant, the participants were debriefed after they completed the semi-structured questions. This provided a time for the researcher to assess for safety; to make sure that the volunteers were secure, and that the interview did not provoke them with any negative memories. Also participants were provided any additional information such as a list of referrals for counselors if needed. The time requested for the interview was 30-45 minutes. Interviews were tape recorded for the purpose of qualitative data analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative. Researchers have debated over the years whether one is to use mean and standard deviation in Likert or ordinal data collection (Monette, Sullivan, DeJong, 2005). Phinney (1992) suggests however that the preferred scoring for the MEIM is to use the mean of the item scores; that is the mean of the 12 items for an overall score. This study looked at the overall means and also specifically at the mean of the specified five items for ethnic identity and the seven items of affirmation, belonging, and commitment. Ethnic identity was said to be reflected in items 1, 2, 4, 8, and 10; affirmation, belonging, and commitment, items 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12 (Phinney, 1992).

Qualitative. Data analysis and reduction consisted of several steps. Interviews were tape recorded with the participant's consent. Two coders analyzed the data using a coding process. The coding process was described in further detail later (Basit, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). All three of the coders had previously received training in the process of coding in a qualitative course at a major southeastern university from January-May of 2008.

Training for coders. The interviews were conducted by a doctoral student in counselor education (primary investigator). The coding team consisted of one other doctoral student in counselor education, including the primary investigator. Both of the doctoral students had taken courses in graduate level Statistics I and II as well as a graduate level qualitative course in Psychology. These courses were taught in the fall and spring semesters between the years 2007-2009 at a major university in the southeastern United States. The research team met weekly to code and to analyze the data from the qualitative interviews.

Once saturation was found to have occurred the research team concluded with the results. Saturation was defined as the process where no new information arises from the data (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Qualitative analysis. The research was conducted using consensual qualitative research approach. This analysis incorporated Brofenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Brofenbrenner, 1979). The qualitative theoretical paradigm of this research study, specifically its ontological perspective, recognizes that there are multiple interpretations of reality. The epistemology was seen as an interactive process between the researcher and those being researched. The methodology for this study was both evolving and participatory. This perspective places importance on the lives and experiences of those marginalized in society. In an effort to investigate, understand, and describe the lived experiences of Muslim and Christian women participants. This approach further analyzed why inequities based on gender, religion, and race are reflected in power relationships (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Once the interviews had been recorded, the primary research team transcribed the tapes verbatim. The research team contacted the participants for clarification if some of the transcription was unclear. This member checking also controlled for any threats to validity within the transcription (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Once the tapes were transcribed, the research team worked individually to code the data. Qualitative research focuses on developing codes based on what the participants report.

Coding and essences. Codes were labeled based on similarities between the participant's responses. Once individual codes were developed by the individual researcher

the research team met again with their individual codes and definitions of these codes. After each coder individually coded the data, coding checks were done, and inter-rater reliability was deduced using Kappa (further discussed in chapter 4). Once inter-rater reliability was attained, a Kappa score of .80 and discrepant evidence to support the coding set was applied to the data. Reliability was calculated based on the coding the team members have done (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

The team then agreed on a master code list when saturation occurred within the data set. After this occurred, the code list was used for a second coding. Once the team had coded for the second time they met again and worked together to establish themes. Reliability was calculated again keeping with the measures to ensure initial reliability (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

The researchers discussed the codes and themes as a group allowing the research team to engage in triangulation which addressed validity amongst the research team. This ensured that the researchers were not imposing their own biases in the coding and the assigning of themes within the research (Mathison, 1988).

In addition to triangulation, the research team also engaged in bracketing. Bracketing as stated earlier is essentially listing all biases that the research team acknowledges. This is a technique used in qualitative research to ensure that the research team is aware of each of their biases. By making sure that the team is aware of their biases, it allowed the team to ensure that they are not bringing their biases into the research (Ahern, 1999).

Finally, once common codes were agreed upon by the coding team, validity was supported through an auditor. The auditor reviewed segments of the transcripts and code list.

Upon review, the auditor had full access to bracketing information to ensure that the researchers' biases were absent from the results. This was also in line with the consensual qualitative research requirements to reinforce validity. The auditor was chosen based on skill and rigor in qualitative research. Having conducted ample research studies utilizing qualitative analysis the auditor was found to be competent in qualitative research. The auditor's previous research specifically addressed topics including cultural diversity, counseling, and religious identity development. Due to the skill and rigor of previous research and credibility the auditor was chosen to assist with this research.

Overview of the Chapter

This study explored the absence or presence of relationships between religion, gender, and ethnic identity development in, Muslim and Christian women. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992) assessed the ethnic identity and the qualitative interviews assessed the religious and gender identity development. The statistical analysis and methodology are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

This chapter explains the method of the investigation and describes the design of the study, the participants, and the instruments used. Also included are the criteria for selecting, and interviewing participants. The procedure addresses the design of the interviews including the data collection and data analysis.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter provides the quantitative and qualitative results of the analyses conducted during this research. The following research questions were used as a framework for analysis:

- (1) What are lived experiences of Muslim and Christian women of varying ethnicities?
- (2) What are the similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity as explained by a specific group of women?
- (3) Is there a relationship between religious, gender, and ethnic identity development?

The chapter begins with results from the data analysis procedures, a review of the descriptive statistics, followed by a review each of the research questions. The first research question looks specifically at the qualitative semi-structured interviews. In order to answer this question the researcher discusses the themes and codes found in the research investigation. The second and third research question incorporate not only themes from the semi-structured interviews and but also integrate the results from the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure.

Data analysis

As previously described participants began by first filling out the brief demographic form. Before beginning the interview the participants were given a brief explanation of the study and gave verbal approval of informed consent. Next, participants completed the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM, Phinney, 1992). Finally they participated in the semi-structured interview. The data were organized efficiently and logically for analysis and

coding purposes, an important step in qualitative analysis (Schilling, 2006). Demographic data of the participants are outlined first. Then the findings of the preliminary analysis are presented using the research questions as a guide to organize the data. Chapter Four concludes with a presentation of the findings of this study, also arranged by research question.

Validity checks. Two coders analyzed each of the interviews using the coding process. Each response was tagged and coded. Tags consisted of a single word, sentence, or multiple sentences. After each coder individually coded the data, the coders developed individual code list. These lists were presented in a meeting and the group discussed and collaborated to form a master code list. The master code list consisted of 25 codes and definitions (See Appendix D).

Throughout the process coding checks were done, coding checks consist of the researcher checking to ensure similarities and differences in codes, following the application of the coding book to the data (coding book is an electronic or written book to calculate the coding occurrences), inter-rater reliability was deduced using Kappa. Kappa scores were depicted by each coder separately for each interview and overall results are reported in the table below (See Table 1). Overall Kappa scores for the ten interviews are above .85.

Table 1 Kappa Score Results

	MP1	MP2	MP3	MP4	MP5	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4	CP5	Totals
Researcher 1	57	35	22	27	26	22	14	17	18	18	256
Researcher 2	70	46	32	30	31	28	14	18	27	22	318
											574
Agreements	56	33	21	25	24	20	14	16	17	18	244
Inter-Rater	244*2	488	488/574	0.85							

An auditor was sent three sections of the data analysis to reinforce the accuracy of the coding books and the emerging themes. The three sections were chosen by random assignment (i.e. by picking the sections out of a hat.) The auditor supported the findings as being representative of the data. The auditor had full access to bracketing information to ensure that the researchers' biases were absent from the results. This was done to ensure consistency within consensual qualitative research guidelines to reinforce validity. The auditor was a doctoral student who matches the researchers experience and was chosen because of skill and rigor in qualitative analysis.

Organization of results. Results of the data analysis are organized by research question. Each question discusses themes from the qualitative analysis. Qualitative results are communicated through extended text and typical quotations in support of the findings (Schilling, 2006). All typical quotations were kept in their originally submitted format. Please note the grammatical and structural organization of the responses. Results were also communicated utilizing numbers, graphs, figures, and descriptions when appropriate. These presentation tools were used to note patterns, themes, plausible explanations and to present the findings of the exploration of the women's life experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Descriptive Statistics

The participant's descriptions were derived from the demographic questionnaire. All the women in this sample defined themselves as devout in their faith. These women were gathered through a combination of snowballing (participants referring others to the study) and purposeful sampling (selecting specific participants to achieve a specific objective).

Together, the participants identified with a range of different nationalities (e.g. Egyptian, Moroccan, Spanish etc.) and a variety of religious groups (e.g. Sunni, Catholic, Baptist, etc.) within the Muslim and Christian faiths. The participants were diverse based on age, ethnicity, education, and religious affiliation. All of the participants were either United States citizens or had been living in the United States for 6 or more years. The ages range from 25 to 55 years old and they occupy a range of social roles (e.g. college students to professional women). To protect the participants' confidentiality and anonymity, their characteristics are presented in composite form. The first section will begin with a demographic description of the Muslim participants' followed by the Christian participants' demographic description.

Muslim participant demographics. Three of the five participants' self-defined as Sunni Muslims, one identified as Shiite and one declined to disclose. Three participants' identified as 25 to 35 years old, one identified as 36 to 45 and one identified as 46 to 55. As for ethnic background, three participants are Egyptian, one Moroccan, and one Caucasian American. One participant was born outside the United States, and one participant moved to the U.S. before the age of two, three of the participants were born in the United States. Three participants' reside in North Carolina, one in Virginia, and one in Georgia. One participant has a bachelor's degree, one is a physician, one a Master's degree, and two are doctoral students. Three participants' identified as being directly affiliated with a mosque in their area and two did not. Two participants' stated that they attend religious or spiritual services one to three times a month, one participant stated that she attends one to three times a week,

and two participants stated that they attend only on religious holidays. Three participants' wore the hijab (head covering or Muslim style of dress for modesty and privacy); two do not.

Christian participant demographics. All five participants' self-defined as Christian, two identified as non-denominational, one as Catholic, one Church of God, and one Baptist. Four participants' identified as being 25 to 35 years old, one identified as being 46 to 55. As for ethnic background, two participants identified as Caucasian, two Spanish, and one African American. One participant was born outside the United States four of the participants were born in the United States. Two participants were located in Virginia, one in North Carolina, and two in Alabama. Three of the participants identified as having one to two years college experience, and two are doctoral students. Four participants identified as being directly affiliated with a church in their area and one did not. Two participants stated that they attend religious or spiritual services one to three times a month, and three participants stated that they attend one to three times a week. To protect the anonymity of the participants they are referred to as Christian or Muslim participants numbered one to five.

Themes

In-depth interviews with participants gave the research team the opportunity to identify specific patterns and themes that appeared frequently across participants' lived experiences. Using the consensual qualitative research (CQR) method, the research team analyzed each set of transcripts comparing codes, categorizing comments, and describing tentative emergent themes.

Significant statements describing the meanings attributed to self and interactions with others emerged with some consistency to describe the development, maintenance and

negotiation of participants' religious, gender, and ethnic identities through life. After formulating relative categories, the researchers came together to develop final meanings based upon the interpretation of the data, careful to use the participants' words.

The research team found four themes listed below in Figure 2. Religion was found to be a pervasive part of each of these themes. Therefore religion was seen as being an essential part to the core of these participants' identity. For many of these women, their faith was described as being so pervasive that it encompassed all of their experiences and roles in life. The three outer layers depict themes of ethnic/gender identity, lived experiences, and finally external influences. The themes were layered from within to depict the participants' expression of importance of the themes. The outer most layers while important are not as fluid as the inner most layer of religious identity.

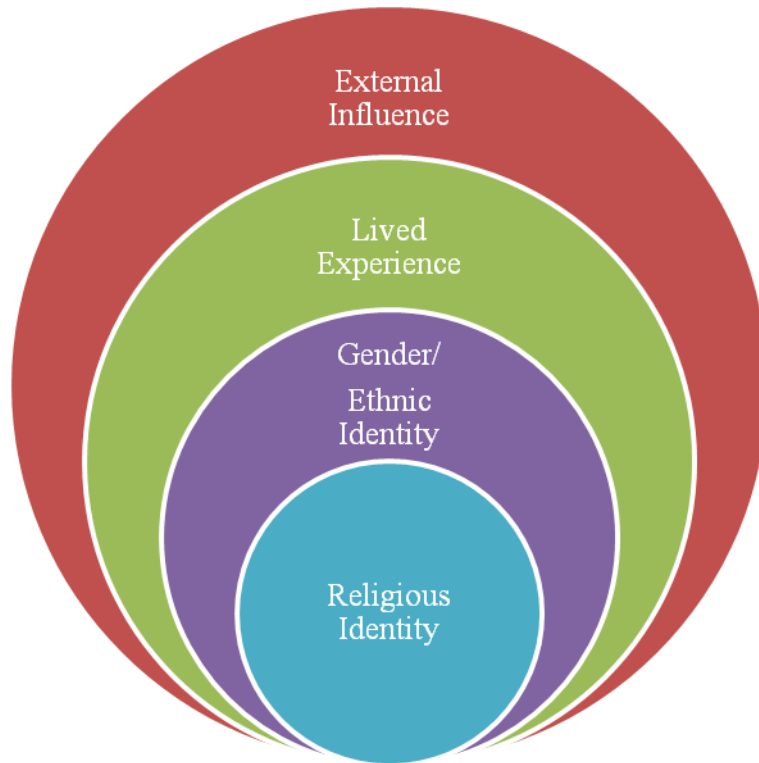


Figure 2: Illustration of Themes from Muslim and Christian Women

Religious core. Religious identity was seen by all ten participants as the most significant aspect of their identities. The participants’ rationalize who they are and how they fit into the world around them through a religious lens. Drawing upon their faith for guidance, the participants continually used their religious lens to filter information. These women believed regardless of differences related to differences in ethnicity, gender, religious practices, and appearance, religion was a source of strength. Furthermore, they believe the best tool to eliminate misperceptions of who they are as Muslim and Christian women was to set a good example and educate others when the time and place are appropriate.

Gender and ethnic influence. “Cultural and Gender Influence,” discusses the impact of ethnicity and gender, in relation to the inner most experiences of a person. This

section includes the qualitative analysis of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure. A discussion will conclude with an evaluation of the results of the MEIM with the implications of the qualitative analysis. After participants' discussed their religion they would address questions based on gender and ethnicity. For these participants religion came first followed by gender and ethnicity. One participant directly stated that when she "left this world my gender and ethnicity will still be here" but her core or her "religious spirit would be gone (Christian participant four)." Therefore gender and ethnicity were expressed as the second layer the person in this study.

Lived experience. As this model depicts the personal experiences are directly related to the core of the participants' identity development. For these women personal experiences varied but there were some consistencies throughout that the research team coded. The codes that fall under lived experience are listed in Figure 3. As one can see these codes vary from experiences of privilege to experience's of fear. Participants' continually spoke to their religion first and then their lived experiences. Therefore, lived experiences were expressed as the third "layer" of their identity.

External influence. Women in this study expressed some very similar and startlingly different external experiences. These experiences can best be summed up with the discussion of the theme "External Influence." Under this theme women from various backgrounds identified some startling similarities. Even through the personal accounts may have been very different; researchers were able to identity similar codes. These codes are discussed in detail this description also addressed the secondary research question. These external experiences were often discussed after participants discussed their religion, gender,

ethnicity, and personal experiences, therefore external influence was listed as the fourth and final layer.

Research Question One

What are lived experiences of Muslim and Christian women of varying ethnicities?

The lived experiences of the participants were seen as a pervasive part of their identity. These life experiences molded their views and shaped the lens in which they view the world. An illustration of this is best depicted in Figure 2. This illustration shows that at the core of these participants identity was their personal religious identity. The third layer consisted of the personal lived experiences of the participants. These experiences impact how the participants view and navigate through the world.

In order to understand the full impact of the participants' life experiences one need to look at the depth of these experiences. Therefore the following section will look at the themes that developed from this research investigation. Following the thematic investigation the researcher reviewed the specific codes which encompassed each theme. When looking at the codes it is here that one has a more thorough understanding of the lived experiences of these participants. Participants' statements were kept in their original form to allow their experiences to be seen.

The following section will go examine each of the codes under the theme "lived experiences." A detailed account follows enhanced with direct quotes from the participant's semi-structured interviews. The quotes are presented in the participants own voices to explain and enhance the essential themes of their identity development.

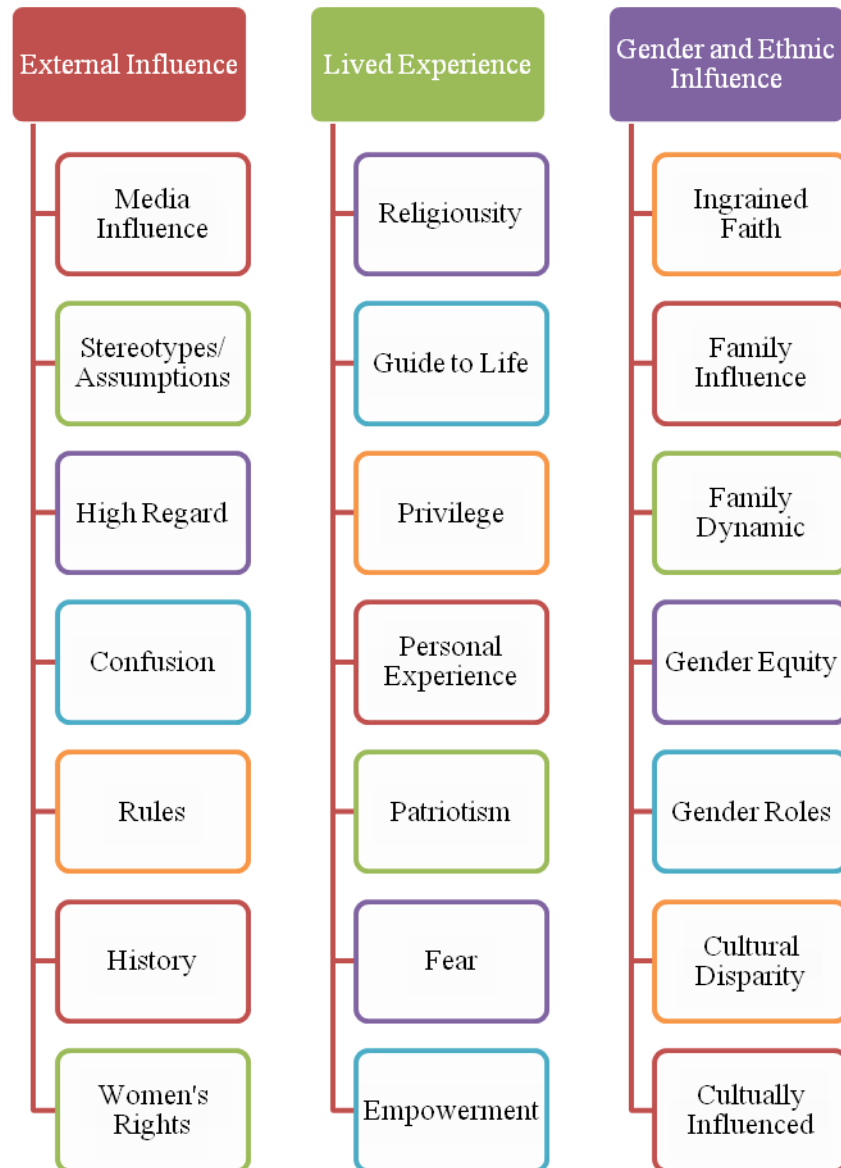


Figure 3 Outline of the Themes and Codes

Religiosity. Religiosity was described as religious activity, dedication, and belief (religious doctrine). Examples of religiosity were apparent in both Muslim and Christian participants. Descriptions varied, although there were some consistencies specifically with the importance of religiosity on the person. Two of the Christian women (three and five) described their personal experiences as a direct reflection of their faith. “Through my life

Christ became real for me. Through my trials and my struggles He became personal for me.....We call that progressive salvation.” Another participant stated, “Some people have a clear case scenario of the day of salvation. Mine has come over time.” Both of these women their personal experiences in life lead them to a deeper relationship with their higher power. This was similar to what was expressed by some of the Muslim participants as well. Muslim woman two stated “I found that the very rigid religion that was taught at school is not the religion. They just told us you do this, this way and do that, that way and pray like this... they just taught us the motions but they did not teach us the spiritual aspect of each and everything we do..... So when I started attending lessons I started understanding a lot. And this is what really pulled me and this is how I found my faith.” For these women, the journey to their faith was an independent experience. Their personal experiences may have shaped their process but overall everything ultimately came down to decision they made from within to practice and observe their religion.

There were other expressions of religiosity expressed that related to direct practice of faith. Christian participant one said, “I left Columbia and I came to NY and I was alone in a big city. It really confronted what my beliefs were and it really gave me the strength.” This participant her religion was a sense of comfort and strength. She found rescue as she navigated through a strange land in her faith. Muslim participant one stated, “Through my divorce. I started having questions. It was a blessing in disguise.” She stated that by realizing “God, he is merciful and forgiving and he will forgive,” this provided her with comfort and strength through a tumultuous time in her life.

Guide to life. Guide to life was described as any description depicting faith as the guidepost of life. Muslim participant three described her religion as “my lifestyle how I live my life daily, what I stand for what I believe in how I raise my children.” Similar to this Christian participant number two stated that her religion is a “guide line” to her life. Religious experience was seen to be a pervasive part in how these women navigate through their lives. Religion directly impacted how they view others as stated by Christian participant four “It is everything to me. It governs my moral beliefs, my everyday actions.” Muslim participant four further stated “it’s more internal to live a certain lifestyle as consistent with what Islam teaches” this was how she viewed Islam as guiding her daily life, experiences, and interactions.

Privilege. Privilege was described as special entitlement granted to an individual or group. Participants described privilege through educational opportunities or socio-economic status. Muslim participant one expressed privilege as being “fortunate to go through medical school” Muslim participant number four also described her privilege as “I went to the private school” With both of these women they acknowledged that they were granted some privileges due to their educational opportunities. Another participant (Muslim participant four) said, “I grew up going to a K-12 Islamic school. That was geared for raising up diplomats.” The Christian women also used education and socio-economic status to illustrate privilege. Christian participant number four stated “the level I am at with a PhD.”

Even with the privilege these women acknowledged one participant noted some perceived differences. Christian participant one stated, “I am privileged to be educated and to have the capacity to speak the language and to still realize that there are differences and

that there are opportunities that are not reachable.” Even with the level of education she has achieved she still saw some barriers because of her gender and ethnicity.

Personal experience. Personal experience was defined as any statement positive or negative regarding an experience someone has had in life. This code revealed the most diverse results. Participants shared rich descriptions both positive and negative that directly impacted their life experiences. Since illustrations are so varied they will be organized as follows: positive Christian women’s experiences, positive Muslim women’s experiences, negative Christian women’s experiences, and negative Muslim women’s experiences.

Positive Christian women’s experiences. “I do live a very sheltered safe life.” “In the summers we went to Vacation Bible School. So it was just a way of life for me.”

Positive Muslim women’s experiences. “After 9/11 people got a lot more interested in my religion.” “People ask me more questions and are buying the Koran more.” “I find some people that are just open and seeking that friendship and unity between all faiths and it is beautiful.”

Negative Christian women’s experiences. “I have been at gatherings where people do not believe in God or Christ and they say ‘Oh you are simple minded, you have to have a higher power in God’ So yes I have been belittled and criticized because of my faith.” “With African American skin yes I have those experiences where I stick out like a sore thumb.”

Negative Muslim women’s experiences. “Even when I first took jihad, the first embrace of Islam, my father who was supporting me through college stopped supporting me.” “I was walking home from school and a boy yelled out “there goes chocolate milk”

cause we were the darkest people that lived in that neighborhood. I was really hurt I think I was in the second or third grade when that happened and I will never forget it.”

Though experiences may vary drastically they have all impacted the personal identity of these participants. Some of these experience's, are still impacting these women today. Whether positive or negative, one can see how dynamic and influential these experiences have become and remained for these participants.

Patriotism. Patriotism was described as the expression of being patriotic regarding being an American. All of the participants expressed a sincere patriotism and support of the United States of America. Despite the stories of stereotypes, fear, and prejudice all of these participants expressed a genuine appreciation and respect for the United States. Muslim participant one stated, “It is the same with America and Islam. I could not choice because I am one of America’s people.” Muslim participant three stated “I have to say that is where I am proud to be an American..... My father and my brothers were veterans. I am proud that my son has chosen this I do hope that he does not get sent to Iraq.” She further discussed, “It is almost hypocritical to not support the military if you are going to live in this country in my opinion. The military does not go into just Iraq but the military guards our borders all over.” For these women being an American is something that they take great pride in. This is not something they take lightly and they instill these values in their children.

Fear. The definition of fear was described as emotional description made by a person in response to other’s perceiving them as terrorists or threatening. The most accurate accounts of fear come from the participants personal accounts a few of these accounts are listed below.

“My husband, I met him in 2002, and there was a time when we were really worried about his deportation status. Even though he had a student visa he was Arab and from Yemen. We were really worried that he would be deported and he would not be able to re-enter. So we actually got married. I guess that is an example of the state people were in if you didn’t have citizenship and you were not born here then you were at risk. Every Arab man had to go and get fingerprinted. There were months and months of long lines and making sure you were not here illegally.” - Muslim participant four

“One time I was coming back from Florida these two men sat right down beside me when I was coming off the plane. I was doing needlework and they kept asking me questions talking to me the whole time. One followed me to the bathroom and followed me back to my seat. I finally realized what was going on. They were suspicious of me! This was after 9/11 then I thought to myself even though this is embarrassing and I was hurt I am just as scared as anyone else.”- Muslim participant three

“Before 9/11, Black people had to deal with that for years. After 9/11 there was clearly a group of people that were added to that group of individuals. I saw a lot of Islamic people getting on planes, and I saw fear in people.” -Christian participant four

Empowerment. Empowerment was determined to be inner power: the feeling of empowerment for women can also be seen through faith. All of the participants stated that their faith empowered them. Differences appeared when discussing their family involvement. When asked if they felt empowered as women answers varied. Christian

woman three stated, “Through my religion yes, through my family no. I guess it varies and depends on my environment and who’s around.”

Similarly Muslim woman four stated, “My husband is Arab he is from Yemen and he is very subtle in the differences. I am empowered on the surface like yes you can be educated, yes you can work. There are very small ways in which I feel not-empowered. Like I always wanted to be an archeologist I wanted to take a whole different path. I was told you need to something more geared towards what women should do. That is why my education is supported, because it is very gender appropriate.”

For both of these women they feel empowered through their faith but their family placed different emphasis on how they empower them.

Research Question Two

What are the similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity as explained by a specific group of women?

Similarities and differences these women expressed can best be summed up with the discussion of the theme “External Influence.” Under this theme women from various backgrounds identified some startling similarities. Even though the personal accounts may have been very different; researchers were able to identity similar codes. These codes are discussed in detail; this description addresses the secondary research question.

Figure 3 illustrates the codes that that fall under the theme, “External Influence.” These codes vary from stereotypes/assumptions, confusion, and history to media influence. These codes had a common theme this was the result of an outside layer imposing on the

person. This was found to be consistent with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which guided the research. Bronfenbrenner labels the two outside layers of his theory as the macrosystem and the chronosystem. The macrosystem is the basic framework of a particular society, including its cultural, economic, political norms, values, and attitudes; the chronosystem consist of life events that have impacted an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theme will look at these two systems and the experiences from the participants as they navigate through their life with the external influences.

Assumptions/stereotypes. The first code addressed is the assumptions/stereotypes that were imposed on these women. This was defined as any depiction of people being or doing certain things that may not accurately represent the individual or ethnic group, statement about an action (physical or verbal) made by a person in response to a stereotype. One notable difference that was observed was how the Muslim and Christian women experienced assumptions/stereotypes. Christian participants expressed this on a more internal level. Muslim participants described events from an external description, often as a direct threat.

Christian women described the assumptions/stereotypes they experiences similarly. Christian participant number 2 stated "That we are prejudice and that all of us are prejudice and rigid.....That we are not excepting of a lot of different races, groups, and other religions." Christian participant number one stated, "I have heard from other faiths that we are too flexible. As Catholic or Christians we do not take things as serious as other religions do like fasting, or that we are a lot more flexible than other religions."

More extreme than the rigid inflexible assumptions/stereotypes Christian women expressed, Muslim women discussed assumptions/stereotypes of terrorism they experienced.

When asked about these assumptions/stereotypes, Muslim participant two stated,

“Islam is the base of terrorism. We all know that with any faith we have moderates and we have the extremist we have those that are simply faith by name. Islam is no exception to that rule. Misconception again is that the woman is oppressed. Again, that is a product of culture claiming that it is the religion when in reality it is the culture not the religion. I know as an American Muslim woman I do not feel oppressed at all.”

Muslim participant number four expressed the assumptions she has encountered. She stated,

“It is believed women are devalued or not treated equally or fairly.... Islam is perceived as rigid, archaic, uncompromising with Western values, it isn't something that can be molded for each person.”

Media influence. Media Influence was the second external influence that directly impacted both groups of participants. Media Influence was seen as how the media can portray and influence the ideas of Muslims and Christians.

Media Influence was found to shape the views of Christian women and reinforce negative stereotypes of Muslim women. Christian participant three stated, “My views got skewed (after 9/11), because I was younger when it happened and I listened more to the media than I do now.” Muslim participant three agreed with the media's influence stating, “You can watch Fox News and it will make us sound like we are the terrorist of the world.

Or you could go to CNN where they say these people have just as much right to build at ground zero than anyone else they are not violating any laws.”

Due to the media’s role in shaping the views of society, Muslim participant one stated, “It took me until 2008 to come to the U.S. because I was hearing of stories from my cousins of things that were happening. Because of the news the media etc., I intentionally held back.” The media influenced her to stay in Egypt rather than moving to the United States as she had initially planned. Regardless of the religion it was very apparent that media had a significant impact on the views and experiences of these women and the lens in which they viewed the world.

Confusion. Confusion was described as ambiguity or unclear statements that result in unclear descriptions. Both Muslim and Christian participants’ expressed concerns over confusion within their faith. The experiences varied from individual it was clear that confusion impacted these women. Muslim participant five stated, “I do not think that very many people when I was growing up knew much about Muslims, it was not until later on in my life that people understood the difference between Muslim and say Hindi or someone who is whatever other religion.” It was not her confusion but other’s confusion that impacted her directly. She later discussed her personal confusion growing up as a Muslim woman. She stated,

“This (confusion within her understanding of being Muslim) sent me the message that there was something wrong with me. That I was not pretty enough, I was not fit enough, I wasn’t skinny enough, and I wasn’t a good singer. I thought all these things and that was why he (her father) was not permitting me to do this. When in

fact, and I did not realize this until I was an adult, that was not the case, it was that he wanted to protect me. Instead of explaining to me what it meant to be modest and that wearing a bathing suit in public affected our religion and our spirituality within our home.”

Christian participant four stated, “With Christianity there are so many different denominations, so many different rules associated with those denominations, that it causes a lot of confusion.” She further stated,

“God is not a God of confusion. So I think that a lot of things that are not biblical are getting caught in our faith. I think that is where a lot of that confusion comes from I do not think that the rules are clear. Because of that ambiguity there is a lot of non-biblical issues getting caught up in the Christian faith.”

History. One notable difference discovered through this research was the influence of history. History was listed as any statement describing historical information related to Muslim or Christian religion, Koran, bible, development of rules/guidelines, religions practices, Muhammad, or Jesus. Muslim participants described a very rich historical account to support their answers to the qualitative analysis. Christian participants relied more on personal accounts and experiences rather than history.

Muslim participant one stated, “We worship one God, we believe in our holy book and all the prophets that came before who we consider our prophet and final messenger. So they have that in common that is all it takes for someone to define themselves as Muslim or regard themselves as Muslim. They can all agree to that one common thread and then everything else is up for grabs.” She further stated,

“We have the prophet and we look to him. Sometimes he would need consultation and he would go to her and she would give him advice. When it came to her raising his kids she gave birth and helped raise them, but he had a very hands on role in raising them. So because they lived a very simple life on a farm he did the farming, sewing, and preparing. Whereas now those roles would be reversed.”

Muslim participants were consistent in looking at how Muhammad lived His life to reference how they were expected to live. For instance Muslim participant two stated, “How the religion asks men to treat women is all in Chapter number 4 of the Koran. It tells us, everybody, not just men but all Muslims, to know how to treat women at home.”

These women believe that Muhammad gave them a guide to life. This was apparent in their responses. Muslim participant three pointed to Muhammad as an example of how women were to be treated. She stated, “In fact the prophet Muhammad’s peace be upon him first wife was much older and considered very wise, people looked to her (the prophet’s wife) for a guide to how women were to be viewed. She was seen as a source of strength and empowerment.” It was apparent that these women felt encouraged and empowered by the life of Muhammad and through his wives.

Only two of the Christian women referenced any historical accounts compared to four out of five of the Muslim participants that used a rich history to support their answers. The two Christian participants that did discuss history did so when discussing the roles of women. Christian participant one stated, “Well there is the whole thing about Joseph being the father and Mary is called Marismo ‘Mother Mary’ the woman the one that takes care of the children kind of the sacrifice person in the family.” Similarly Christian participant four discussed

history when talking about how women are viewed in the church. She stated, “Well in the Baptist church there are the old traditions of women being secondary.....I do think there is still a difference there, but, the divide is not as large. For instance, I grew up in a Penacostal Church, which is a denomination it is close to Baptist but they have extremely strict rules.”

High regard. Regardless of the religion one thing that both of these groups had in common was a high regard for women. High regard was described as any statement about women or men being viewed with high regard, seen as powerful. Both Christian and Muslim participants discussed this idea of a high regard in reference to how women were expected to be treated.

When asked how women are viewed in their religion, Christian participant five stated, men “are expected to love them (women) enough to lay down their lives for them.” Similarly Muslim participant five stated, “Women are to be praised and treated as treasures, to add value to a man’s life.” Christian participant one stated, “Women are to be treated with respect. Women are to be equal to men because that is how Christ views them.” Muslim participant three also stated, “According to the faith itself and the prophet Muhammad it (how women are to be viewed and treated) is ideal.” It was apparent that regardless of religious affiliation there was a common thread in how the religion was intended to regard women, according to these participants.

Rules. Rules were seen as a set of standards or guidelines that direct actions and thinking. Both Muslim and Christian women expressed their faiths as having a set of rules. Muslim participant one stated, “To get into the marriage a man gives a dowry, a monetary gift.” Or as Christian participant three stated, “Rules that my family and I follow,” when

discussing what role her religion played in her life. Similarly Muslim participant two stated, “Islam advises men to treat women.” For all of these women there was a sense that their faith gave them a guide of how to live their lives and raise their families.

Women’s rights. Women’s rights were described as entitlements or freedoms granted to women allowing them equal privileges to men. There was a difference in the two religions with the identification of women’s rights. Muslim women were quick to identify with women’s rights this includes protection of their rights. Muslim participant two stated, “Women in Islam were given their rights,” she felt that women in Islam were granted equal rights. Similarly Muslim participant one also stated, “There are so many things to protect the rights of women,” she felt that women had not only gained equal rights but also that their rights were in fact protected.

Muslim participants’ were quick to recognize the history of unequal rights for women. Muslim participant four recognized that “higher education is (no longer) not exclusively for men.” This is something that in her country was not always true. Muslim participant one recognized her rights by stating, “I know women in Europe were not allow to choose their name. In Islam, my name is my maiden name and it will be my maiden name. Yes we are married but our money and our name our wealth and ownership are a separate identity. In front of God we are one not two.” These participants felt that they were granted equal rights within their religion with these rights they feel empowered and free within their faith.

Overview. In summary there are many similarities between these participants regardless of religious identity. There are also some surprising differences that were

discussed. It seems that the Muslim participants use more historical accounts to guide their present life. Christian women in this research study used more of their life experiences to guide express themselves. Because of the deep historical accounts of the Muslim participants it was not surprising to discover their identification with women's rights. It seems that the Muslim women in this study were able to have a deep understanding of their history both as women and as Muslim women.

Research Question Three

Is there a relationship between religious, gender, and ethnic identity development?

To answer this research question, the researcher looked at the third theme from the qualitative analysis and investigated the findings of the MEIM. This theme, titled "Ethnic and Gender Influence," discusses the impact of ethnicity and gender, in relation to the inner most experiences of a person. Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems this theme looks at the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem. Illustrations from the participants provided personal accounts from their culture, family, faith, and gender. This question was complicated and interconnected just like the participants' experiences. Finally, a discussion concludes that evaluates the results of the MEIM with the implications of the qualitative analysis.

Ingrained faith. Within the context of Cultural and Gender influence the researchers' recognized a consistent discussion of ingrained faith. Ingrained faith was described as the religious affiliation was found within the participant's inner being. There were depictions of ingrained faith from both the Muslim and Christian participants. Listed below was an illustration of ingrained faith.

Muslim participant one stated, "I will always touch base and go back to Islam." Similarly Muslim participant two stated, "I wake up in the morning and do everything for Allah." For these women, their faith was connected to who they are as a woman and who they are in their culture. Faith is seen as a part of themselves not as a separate entity. One question that directly addressed this was the second question in the qualitative analysis. This question stated, "Could you separate your religion from who you are as a woman?" Below is a list of the answers from each participant.

Muslim participant one: "At this point no. Earlier, yes. At this point in my life it is who I am..."

Muslim participant two, "I do not need to."

Muslim participant three "it is engrained in me everything I do from morning until night involves my faith."

Muslim participant four, "I guess I could.....I see my permanent identity as separate from my religious identity, however, my faith in God is my permanent identity."

Muslim participant five, "no, I could not separate who I am from being a spiritual being"

Christian participant one, "That is something tough. I think it has been a painful process in my country"

Christian participant two, "No, not at all, It is a part of me."

Christian participant three, "No it is a part of me, it is the best part of me, no I could not separate it."

Christian participant four, "No, to me faith is everything"

Christian participant five, “No, it is a part of me”

All ten of these women stated that they could not separate their religious identity from that of who they are as women. Therefore, these women were seen as having an inner core as a religious identity illustrated in Figure one.

Family influence. Along with ingrained faith, family influence was seen as an influential aspect of a person’s experience. Family influence was described as the families’ direct influence on an individual. One area in which Muslim and Christian families directly influenced their children was with religion. Christian participant five stated, “I do not know that I would have gone to Christ without having the example of my parents. My parents laid the foundation with their example and their faith. It laid the groundwork for me to follow Christ.” Similarly Christian participant number stated, “My parents are both very very strict in their faith. They are very strong in their faith. Their parents are very strong in their faith. It was just a way of life for us. We grew up in the church going to church a couple of times a week and a couple of times a day sometimes.” Christian participant one stated, “I was raised in a Catholic family my father and mother the majority of my family was Christian,” Muslim participants also stated, “I was born into it really. I took it for granted for many years.” (Muslim participant four) Muslim participant two stated, “Of course I was born as a Muslim. I lived with my family they were practicing Muslims.” Therefore, for these women their parents were the first clear representation of their faith.

Family dynamic. Similar to Family Influence, Family dynamic describes the family in relation to how women are viewed and or treated. Some of the women experienced a

pressure either overt or covertly from their family. In discussing a divorce, one participant talked about her struggle trying to get out of a “bad” relationship. “When I was thinking about getting out of the marriage I had a lot to consider. How would my family feel? I had to think about my brothers only one is married, so what would it be like for the others knowing that they have a divorced sister? It is almost like a shame. You think about your finances your support systems, are you going to be shunned?” This woman knew her rights within Islam and was granted a divorce even though culturally she would have been shunned she was able to advocate for herself and inform her family of the rules of Islam.

Other participants’ talked about their struggles in other ways. Muslim participant five stated, “Family members that are male, there is always this assumption that I do not know what is best for me.” Another participant, Muslim participant two, stated, “As I am pregnant and having a baby, people keep saying oh you do not need to be working. It was really frustrating for me in the beginning. My husband would say do not worry about money, and I would say I am not worried about money I am working to have my independence.” These women expressed a common bond. Despite the gender roles that their family placed on them, they were educated, empowered, and assertive women. They found ways to navigate through their faith and gain access.

Christian participants did not talk as much about the divide with gender in their family. Only two participants’ spoke about the divide. “I work with family and it is a struggle because they do not take me seriously sometimes and they will throw my opinions and ideas out the window because I’m a girl.” Christian participant one stated, “In my

country it has a very clear roll of what women are and what men are supposed to do. Now with personal choices to be independent or to go to school and not have children as soon as possible, it has been more of a struggle with my family, getting them (her family) ok with that (her freedom) was a struggle.”

Gender equity. Gender equity was any description that denotes both genders as equal. When asked “In your religion how do men treat women?” Muslim women varied drastically with their answers to this question. Two of the five stated that Muslim men should treat women equally. “Women are not to be treated as substandard or as un-equals,” another participant stated, “Women are to be treated equally.” However, three of the Muslim women differed from these women in their answers; they discussed the cultural differences in how men treat women. Muslim participant two stated, “There is a difference there culturally. It is always, to me, something I have struggled with. Because culturally and religiously are two separate things..... Some cultures have changed some things and they have changed the laws of Islam.” Muslim Participant one stated, “All it takes for someone to define themselves as Muslim or regard themselves as Muslim. They can all agree to that one common thread and then everything else is up for grabs. Their cultural influences will alter them who they are around their family, their setting, having studies human psychology I know that for a fact.” For Muslim women it appears that ethnicity is so ingrained in who they are that it permeates their religion.

Christian women were pretty consistent with their responses. Christian participant’s consistently stated, “It is pretty much equal. There are women pastors as well as men pastors,

there are women teachers as well as men teachers.” “They are equal there is no superiority,” “Women are to be equal to men because that is how Christ views them.” The Christian women regardless of ethnicity did not point to ethnicity as a factor for how men treated women in their religion. This was found to be a difference with the two religious groups.

Gender role. Both Muslim and Christian women described various roles for men and women. It was clear from the participants’ descriptions that their gender roles were very much a part of their religion and their ethnicity. These were titled gender roles and were simply described as the roles that men and women have as depicted by society. Many of the women pointed to their religion as a determinant of their gender roles. Muslim participant two stated, “The role of the woman is highlighted as the mother and caretaker of the family. Father is mainly the provider. That does not rule out that women cannot do other things because women.” Christian participant one,

“In my country it has a very clear role of what women are and what men are supposed to do. The woman is the one that takes care of the children kind of the sacrifice person in the family. Men are kind of the breadwinners. They are the ones that are supposed to go and work and provide for the family.”

Christian participant four, “I feel like for structure he (God) gave us all roles. Man divided those roles and made something else out of it.” Similar to this, Muslim participant two pointed to her religion as determining her role as a woman. She stated,

“The role of the woman is highlighted as the mother and caretaker of the family. Father is mainly the provider. That does not rule out that women cannot do other things because women in the time of the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him,

they fought wars, they had weapons and they fought. They were nurses and they were merchants. The first wife of Muhammad had merchandise and she traveled. She was a business woman.”

Muslim participant one stated, “You are supposed to look out for me and be there for me and I can fall back on you, to provide and protect. It applies to all the women in his life, his mom, his sister, his wife, daughter, etc. they are just there to look out for us.....that is what my religion says about that but it is up to men how they interpret that.”

Some of the women discussed the hierarchy that men employ on this division of gender. Christian participant five, “Man divided those roles and made something else out of it. He made a hierarchy. I am better than you because I am a man; I am stronger than you because I am a man. I can do things that you cannot.” Christian participant one discussed this hierarchy within the church with the priest being the person in “power.” She stated, “In a place where the person in power is telling people that those things are ok that was pretty severe. But again, I think at this point I am able to separate that that is the person in front of me and not my faith.”

There was also some discrimination with what women and men could achieve in both faiths. Muslim participant four stated,

“I always wanted to be an archeologist I wanted to take a whole different path. But I was told you need to something more geared towards what women should do. That is why my education is supported. Because it is very gender appropriate. I think if I was an MBA I think it would be a lot harder of a struggle. Just the overall double

standard like my husband can have female friends but there is no way in the world I could have male friends.”

Cultural disparity. Throughout the interview process it became very apparent within Islam there seemed to be an ethnic/religious divide. The researchers’ coded this as cultural disparity describing this as the conflict between cultural and religious affiliation. Despite the variations in ethnicities across these two groups, culture and ethnicity was not articulated within the Christian participants. Muslim participant one struggled to articulate her answers stating, “I am trying to filter my thoughts religion vs. culture. Because they kind of overlap. I am trying to be very distinct about this.” Muslim participant three realized early on that, “There is a difference there culturally. It is always, to me, something I have struggled with. Because culturally and religiously are two separate things.” Muslim participant two also stated, “that is a product of culture claiming that it is the religion when in reality it is the culture not the religion.” “Treating women badly is cultural not a product of Islam.” This was according to Muslim participant two, however, she also stated, “You cannot separate culture from religion even though we should separate it.”

So what does this mean for these women? It seems they are all aware that the culture infuses their religion. In many cases, the lines become so blurred it is hard to tell the difference. For instance, Muslim participant four stated, “Morocco as a culture you have variations. You have men who treat women terribly with a total devaluation of women and then you have the total opposite with the women’s liberation movement I find myself debating is that due to Muslim or Arab misconceptions?” She also realized this ethnic/religious divide,

finding herself questioning these differences. It seemed for this participant knowledge was truly power. She discussed the impact of knowledge stating,

“So now if my mom and dad were to say as a girl you are expected to do this, and that, I would say you need to understand that is part of our culture, and not our religion. Religion will always supersede culture. I have the knowledge now, and the power, and I will go to them and say, 1400 years ago they were doing this, and you cannot tell me I am not allowed too.”

For this participant she was able to use her knowledge of Islam to empower herself regardless of the cultural divide.

Culturally influenced. Culturally influenced was described as the ethnicity infusing various parts of a person’s experience. Contrary to cultural disparity, cultural influence could be seen as something positive or negative depending on the individual. For instance, Christian participant four stated, “Growing up in Atlanta, it was the hub; they called it the “Black Mecca” while I was growing up. The civil rights movement had a major impact on the city of Atlanta; it was cool to be black. I did not grow up in a place where it wasn’t cool to be black.” For her, culture was a source of empowerment. However, for others it was not. Take the story Muslim participant two shared,

“Like my maid in Egypt she would come to me and tell me that her mate beats her and takes her money and when I give her a new outfit she would say I wear it for him today because he would like it. I think ‘how could she want him to like it when he does these things to her?’” This was the culture. But this has nothing to do with the

religion. There are so many examples of this in other cultures how women are not allowed to leave the home.”

Muslim participant four talked about her experiences with child bearing. She stated that her husband wanted her to wear the hijab once she has the child. She stated, “I had to explain that this was his culture not him. I explained that if I am going to wear it again, which probably one day I will, I want to do it because I want to not because I need to.” For some women cultural influences guided major life decisions. Muslim participant one talked about the fear that drove her to refrain from coming to the United States. She stated,

“9/11 did have a lot to do with why I stayed in Egypt. I am happy that I came when Obama was getting ready to take office. My religion and my culture taught me to respect the president. So I say this with the upmost respect a lot of people did not agree with the decisions that George Bush made. I was in a part of the world where we were feeling the backlash of his decisions. Maybe in the U.S. they did not feel it unless you had someone in the Army or military to tell you what was happening... I think this being said I felt more comfortable coming now. This was a period where America was going to change.”

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure. Each participant filled out a MEIM this measure was used specifically to assess ethnic identity. The measure looks at the overall ethnic identity of an individual. Previous research shows the MEIM is comprised of two factors, ethnic identity (a developmental and cognitive component) and affirmation, belonging, and commitment. Ethnic identity is said to be reflected in items 1, 2, 4, 8, and 10;

affirmation, belonging, and commitment, items 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12. The range of scores is from 1 to 4. The MEIM is a Likert scale meaning that this measure is also an ordinal measure, there is a fixed order to the responses (1 to 4). The preferred scoring for the MEIM is to use the mean of the item scores; that is the mean of the 12 items for an overall score.

This research looks at the overall means and also specifically at the mean of the specified five items for ethnic identity and the seven items of affirmation, belonging, and commitment. Ethnic identity is said to be reflected in items 1, 2, 4, 8, and 10; affirmation, belonging, and commitment, items 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12 (Phinney, 1992). Figure three reflects the MEIM means for each of the ten participants. As you can see from the MEIM three of the five Christian participants identified as a 3 or higher and four out of five of the Muslim participants identified with a 3 or higher. These participants with a three or higher are said to have a greater understanding and identification with their ethnic identity.

Table 2 Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) Results

Question	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4	CP5	MP1	MP2	MP3	MP4	MP5
1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history traditions and customs	4	1	3	4	2	3	3	4	3	3
2. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group	3	4	4	3	3	3	4	3	3	1
3. I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.	4	3	4	3	3	3	2	4	4	4
4. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.	4	1	1	4	2	3	2	4	3	3
5. I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	4
6. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group	4	4	4	4	2	3	3	4	4	2
7. I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me	4	4	4	4	3	3	2	4	4	3
8. In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group	4	1	2	4	2	3	2	4	4	4
9. I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group	4	4	3	4	2	3	2	3	4	4
10. I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs	3	1	3	4	2	3	2	4	4	3
11. I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group	4	4	4	4	2	3	3	4	4	2
12. I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	3
Individual averages	3.83	2.92	3.33	3.83	2.42	3	2.67	3.83	3.75	3

CP = Christian Participant

MP = Muslim Participant

White= ethnic identity

Gray= affirmation, belonging, and commitment

Ethnic identity. The questions in white specifically address ethnic identity within the individual. One can see from Table 2 that the answers varied; however, the closer the participant response was to four the greater ethnic identity they are said to have. Overall, the cumulative average of ethnic identity for these ten participants was 2.94, the range was .4.

The qualitative interview supports the results of the ethnic identity scale. With statements like “I did not socialize outside of the Arab community so I was in a way in my own little la la land.” It is understandable that Muslim participant four would have a high ethnic identity. She made an effort to understand who she was not only as a woman, and as a Muslim woman but also as an Arab woman. Similar to this Christian participant three stated, “I am not around a lot of other ethnicities. I have not been the minority.” Whether it is choosing to not interact with other ethnicities or the lack of variation, either way these women have identified very strongly with their ethnicity.

The two of the participants with the lowest scores were women that identified as Caucasian between the ages of 46-55. One was born and raised in the United States and one was born and raised in Egypt. These two very different women had very similar stories and very similar responses to the ethnic identity measure. These women did not identify as highly as the other participants however, overall averages were still higher than a 2. This could be because for these women their religious identity was higher than their ethnic identity. For these women their religious identity was “my life; it is how I identify with my God, or my higher power,” and “to me Islam is everything.” Therefore their religious identity superseded the other parts of themselves, everything involved their faith it was “everything” to these women.

Affirmation, belonging, and commitment. Within this measure we must also look at the affirmation, belonging, and commitment. These questions are reflected in Table 2 highlighted in gray. Overall, the participants' means were very high in the level of affirmation, belonging, and commitment with a cumulative average of 3.49. All of the participants' individual averages varied between 3.3-3.7. Affirmation, belonging and commitment were strongly identified in the results of this research. Two of the questions in the MEIM had responses from every participant at a 3 (Agree) or 4 (Strongly Agree). These questions were numbers five and twelve. Question five states, "I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to." Similarly, question twelve states, "I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background." Both of these questions address feelings associated with the larger ethnic group that participants represent. The participants all identified strongly with their sense of belonging and affirmed their identification with these groups despite other differences. One participant recognized that she had certain rights as an American that other women may not experience. Muslim participant three stated, "She may not feel empowered by her religion or bringing her up because they are sticking to certain interpretations and are doing things in a certain way because of the culture; but where I come from and here in the States I feel really empowered." It is this empowerment that likely fuels her strong identification with her ethnic identity.

Conclusion. It appears from the ethnic identity scale that all of these participants have a strong ethnic identity (above a 2.4 on a 4 point scale). What does this mean for a group of women that also expressed a strong religious identity? For some of these women, the two maybe seen as interconnected or interdependent as described earlier. For other

participants, their ethnicity may be something that is “left here” as one participant stated. Either way it is clear that the religious, gender, and ethnic identity development of these women is very complicated and often interconnected. So to answer the question “Is there a relationship between religious, gender, and ethnic identity development?” It appears there is a relationship which is seen as interacting and intersecting throughout their lifetimes.

Summary

This chapter presented themes associated with each of the research questions. Themes and the discussion of the codes directly related to results. Themes reflected the lived experiences of Muslim and Christian women through their thick rich descriptions. Question two was addressed using the theme External Influence to address the similarities and differences of Muslim and Christian women. Figures and tables were used to illustrate the themes, codes, and the MEIM results. Finally, a discussion of the relationship between religious, gender, and ethnic identity development was discussed using themes, codes, and the MEIM to support the results. Examples provided from the text to add richness to the data.

The next chapter, Chapter 5, includes the summary of chapters one through four, a brief synopsis and interpretation of results of chapter four in relation to the original research questions and related literature. Limitations of the study and applications to future research and practice are discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter summarizes the results and relates them to the research goals, methodology and purpose of the study. Limitations of the study, relation to current and previous research and future directions are discussed. The purpose of this study was to utilize a mixed methods approach to understand the lived experience's of these participants. The main goal of this study was to obtain a deeper understanding of religious, gender, and ethnic identity development of Muslim and Christian women in the South Eastern United States. The following research questions were used as a framework for analysis:

- (1) What are lived experiences of Muslim and Christian women of varying ethnicities?
- (2) What are the similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity as explained by a specific group of women?
- (3) Is there a relationship between religious, gender, and ethnic identity development?

Summary

The data analysis utilized a coding team. The coding team members acknowledged their existing biases before they began analysis of the data and continually checked their codes to the original words of the participants to reduce possible bias in the codes. A master code list was created (See Appendix D) and applied to each of the ten qualitative interviews. Although a master code list was created, the researchers derived a list of three themes to analyze the data. Results spoke to the religious, gender, and ethnic identity of these participants. Themes related to gender and ethnic influence, external influence, and lived experience. Religious identity was seen as the most salient aspect of their identities. The participants rationalize who they are and how they fit into the world around them through a

religious interpretative lens. These participants described their faith as a source of strength and empowerment. Drawing upon their faith for guidance, the participants face within-group social barriers related to differences in ethnicity, gender, religious practices, and style of dress.

Validity. Validity checks were implemented throughout the coding and analysis process by comparing results to the original words of participants. The coding team individually coded each section and lesson of the data and then created common codes. Once a coding book had been created and applied to the data, inter-rater reliability was deduced using Kappa. Kappa score was determined separately for each section of analysis and scores were reported in Table 2 of Chapter 4. An auditor was sent four randomly selected sections of the data analysis to reinforce the accuracy of the coding books and emerging themes. The auditor supported the findings as representative of the data. Further, the research team engaged in bracketing to increase validity and illuminate possible biases related to the data. In order to improve validity and support the accuracy of themes and essences, a trained coding team was used, codes were checked against participant' words, inter-rater reliability was assessed, researcher reflexivity strategies were implemented, and an auditor checked common codes and themes for accuracy. Descriptive validity was strengthened by using qualitative analysis methods of triangulation, pilot study, and member checking (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Weston, et. al., 2001).

Summary of Significant Findings

The findings illustrate the complexity of female identity and provide a number of new perspectives and understandings of the nature of identity development for female Muslim and

Christian women. From a thorough analysis of the data, four overarching themes emerged including: (1) impact of external influence, (2) similarities between Muslim and Christian women, (3) differences between Muslim and Christian women, (4) the intersection between religious, gender, and ethnic identity. The women recognized the importance of their faith and expressed a commitment to their beliefs that seemed to infuse every aspect of their beliefs, values, and goals. Religion was instrumental in guiding these individuals through the exploration of the semi-structured interview and described how they fit into the world around them. These women were not able to separate their religious identity from their gender or ethnicity. Still, the study shows more similarities among the participants than differences when it came to their reflections on the meaning of their faith, feelings of equality, and the impact of life experiences. The findings affirm and expand the realm of literature on identity development specifically with Muslim and Christian women.

Core identity. The first key findings showed how important religion is in the lives of Muslim and Christian women. Consistent with the literature, all ten participants indicated religion as a key component of their personal and social identity (Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Ali et. al. 2008) and is integral to the formation of their beliefs, values and meanings (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). Driven by an internal religious identity, being Muslim or Christian overpowered all other ascribed or achieved social identities for this group of women.

For the participants of this study, a religious core identity, or enduring self concept, supersedes ethnicity, gender and all other external identities and is the basis for their personal values and relationships. While they come from different countries of origin, ethnicities, and religious interpretations, the ideology of unity of all believers around a shared faith,

regardless of the diversity of belief, cultures and traditions, permeates every aspect of the these participants' lives (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). Participants strongly suggested their religious worldview was an essential component to developing, maintaining, and negotiating the multiple aspects of their identities. Their faith provides a source of meaning, guidance, comfort, and community (Afridi, 2001; Esposito & Mogahed, 2007) and served as the lens through which all interactions and experiences were filtered.

Question one. The lived experiences' of the participants were described as complicated and interconnected. Participants used various accounts from religiosity, experience, guide to life, fear, patriotism, to empowerment, to describe their life experiences. These life experiences shaped the views and fashioned the lens in which these women view the world.

Religion. Religiosity was seen as a source of strength for these participants. This was consistent with previous findings. Studies have shown the general population, including counselors, places a high value on spirituality and prayer (Weld & Eriksen, 2007). For these participants this was no exception, their religious affiliation is a source of comfort and empowers them. As Christian participant one stated, "I was alone in a big city" her faith provided her a safe haven and a social support that she needed.

Religion was so infused in the participants that it was also discussed as their guide to life. Participants expressed their religion as being a guide-post for how to treat others and how to live their life, a finding consistent with Tummala-Narra's (2009) research which showed that religion was seen as a central aspect to a person's inner life. Muslim participant one stated, "I will always touch base and go back to Islam." Similarly Muslim participant

two stated, “I wake up in the morning and do everything for Allah.” For these women, their religion was interconnected to who they are. Faith was seen as a part of themselves not as a separate entity. Or as Christian participant three stated, about her religious identity “it is the best part of me.”

Privilege. Within the lived experiences, the participants each expressed an understanding of privilege. Regardless of ethnicity or religion, participants were aware and acknowledged specific instances with socio-economic status or education where they realized they were privileged. One could conclude that because of their level of education and socio-economic status that these women were more aware of privilege. However, not all of the participants had college degrees in fact only two of the Christian participants possessed a college degree. Despite their educational background, geographic location, and ethnic differences, these women realized and acknowledged privilege.

Experience and empowerment. Personal experience was discussed in both positive and negative experiences between the two groups of women. These experiences are said to shape and impact the person’s life. Whether admitting to living a sheltered life, or the experience of having been excommunicated from a family, these experiences directly impacted these individuals. It was apparent that each of the ten participants had both positive and negative experiences. Each of these experiences shaped their existence specifically feelings of value and worth each impacting the individual.

Similarly, descriptions of empowerment were discovered in all of the participant’s interviews. This study illustrated that all of the participants saw their faith as a source of empowerment. Differences emerged when discussing empowerment within the family.

Participants were quick to discuss that, while they felt empowered within their religion they did not feel empowered within their family. Some families placed restraints on career, life choices, and even motherhood. The intensity of parental influence varied from one participant to the next. Within participants' struggles to affirm traditional familial and religious values while functioning in 21st century American society, they encountered individual acts of religious discrimination and social and political events, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which made issues of religion even more salient.

Patriotism and fear. Patriotism and fear appeared in various ways for the two groups. Patriotism was only found in the Muslim participants' transcriptions. Each of these participants disclosed times in their lives where they felt pride in America. None of the Christian participants, regardless of ethnicity, discussed feelings of patriotism or pride in America. Fear was something that was discussed among both Christian and Muslim participants. Fear directly influenced and altered the Muslim participants' experiences. One Christian participant talked about the differences in what she saw with Muslim women individuals. She stated, "I saw a lot of Islamic people getting on planes, and I saw fear in people." This was supported in Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, and Timani's (2009) study which pointed out the negative stereotype many Americans perceive regarding followers of Islam. In fact, a poll by the *Washington Post*–ABC News suggested that nearly half of Americans report a negative view of Islam (Deane & Fears, 2006).

Summary. The research suggested female Muslim and Christian women see their religion as a source of strength. Religion was described as a guide for living life.

Participants were aware of privilege and described privilege as being educated and socioeconomic status. Patriotism was only described by the Muslim participants. Both Muslim and Christian participants discussed fear. Muslim participants talked about fear as directly impacting their life, i.e. being or feeling threatened, accused of being a terrorist. All the while Christian participants described fear in an indirect manner i.e. being fearful of others. Overall lived experiences were seen as being an instrumental part in shaping these participant's life experiences.

Question two. Results showed similarities and differences between these two diverse groups of women. This portion begins with a discussion of the differences and similarities between these groups using the codes to guide the process. Within the theme external influence results showed some noteworthy differences in the discussion of history, women's rights, stereotypes/assumptions, and the impact of media influence. Similarities appeared in the discussion of high regard for women, confusion, and rules. Figure four illustrates the similarities and differences that are discussed. Following this, each section discussed the previous research findings when applicable to the current findings.

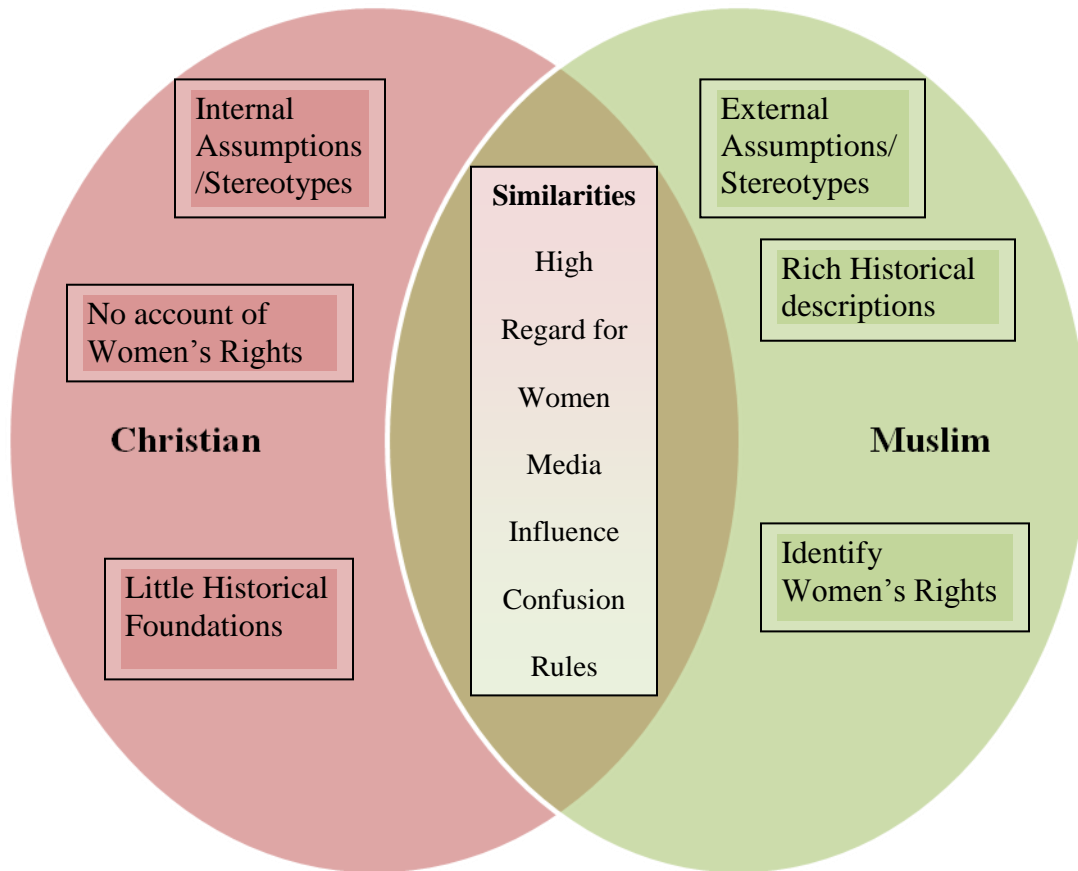


Figure 4: Illustration of Similarities and Differences between Muslim and Christian Participants

Rules. Rules were seen as an instrumental aspect to the religion of both Muslim and Christian women. Participants described rules as a guide to how they should live their lives. Conversely to the discussion of rules rich historical accounts were only found within the Muslim participants. All five of the Muslim participants used historical accounts to support their answers. Only one Christian participant used any form of a historical account to support her findings which failed in comparison to the rich description provided by all of the

Islamic participants. History was expressed as being very important in the Islamic faith this was represented by the participants ability to provide detailed accounts of Muhammad's history and life. Muslim participants were able to use Muhammad's story as a source of strength and empowerment that influenced their daily life. It was clear that the Muslim participants had a strong historical background within their faith. One could argue that this is because three of the five Muslim participants attended an Islamic School. Either way the rich historical account was apparent in all five participants regardless of education.

Women's Rights. Muslim participants were the only ones to acknowledge women's rights. Muslim participants described Islam as empowering women. Participants stated, "Women in Islam were given their rights." Muslim participant one also stated, "There are so many things to protect the rights of women." This was found to support Treacher's (2003) findings which reported feminism was seen as essential to Islam as a source of protection for women.

One glaring difference was the lack of Christian participant's mention of women's rights. Although, this was consistent with previous research findings, Ali, Mahmood, Moel, Hudson, and Leathers (2008), reported Christian participants, while identifying with the goals of feminism, were hesitant to label themselves as "feminists." Similar to the present study, Muslim women in this previous study also did not identify as feminists, but some did state that Islam is a feminist religion (Ali et. al. 2008). The current study adds to the cultural diversity literature by providing insight into religious women's attitudes towards feminism within the Christian and Muslim faiths.

Although there was a marked difference in the discussion of women's rights, the discussion of high regard was consistent with all participants. The women described that women were to be treated with high regard within their religion. This provided a strong example of the religion empowering these women. Results showed that regardless of what the family, society, or the world said about them, these women believed that they were to be treated with "high regard" within their faith.

Role of media. Media Influence found to shape the views of Christian women and reinforce negative stereotypes of Muslim women. Due to the media's role in shaping the views of society, Muslim participants expressed feelings of fear, uncertainty, and isolation. Regardless of the person it became very apparent media had a significant impact on the views and experiences of these women and the lens in which they viewed the world. Common representations of Islam recently given in news media illustrate the assumption that Muslims are, may be, or are like terrorists has remained ever present in well-known mainstream representations of this group since 9/11, even if this assumption is sometimes played with or framed critically (Jackson, 2010). Supporting this ideal, Christian participant three noted, "My view got skewed (after 9/11....I listened to the media." It was clear that the media played a role in her views of Islam. Muslim participant three also echoed this stating, "You can watch Fox News and it will make us sound like we are the terrorists of the world."

Realizing media's tailored view of Islam, it is no wonder that there would be marked difference in how the Muslim and Christian women experienced assumptions/stereotypes. Christian participants expressed assumptions and stereotypes on a more internal level "people think we are too rigid." However, Muslim participants' directly described events

from an external description leading to feelings of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. This was often described as a direct threat. The Muslim participants' acknowledged the media's portrayal "Islam is the base of terrorism." Participants directly experienced assumptions and stereotypes that were manifested from the media and societal views. While stereotypes and bigotry are present throughout American society and directed towards individuals of all cultures, Muslim women who wear the hijab often face increased discrimination even within the Muslim community (Haddad, et al., 2006). Three of the five Muslim participants discussed direct threats, fear, and anxiety more so than their unveiled counterparts.

Confusion. Following the assumptions and stereotypes, it seems likely confusion would quickly follow. The mixed messages participants discussed was startling. Muslim and Christian women were both quick to realize that within their faith women were to be regarded highly. Then we consider how this is portrayed in their external environments by women not being treated in high regard and not treated equally as men, and it seems understandable there would be a marked degree of confusion. Muslim and Christian participants discussed confusion and the impact it has on their lives. One participant pointed out that she realized this confusion was man-made, "God is not the author of confusion." Another participant discussed that in Islam there are fundamental principles but there are aspects "up to man's interpretation."

Summary. The research suggested female Muslim and Christian women share some similarities within the regards of high regard for women, media influence, confusion, and rules. Differences appeared within the areas of assumptions/stereotypes, historical descriptions, and women's rights. Christian women in this sample did not use rich historical

information to support their beliefs. Muslim participants however continuously used rich descriptions filled with verses from the Koran and stories of Muhammad to support their beliefs. Media was seen as having a direct impact on Muslim women and simply skewing the views of the Christian participants. Finally, Christian women did not identify with women's rights whereas Muslim women not only acknowledged but also identified with feminism.

Question three. A relationship appears to exist between religious, gender, and ethnic identity. Clearly, individuals are members of more than one social reality and have many overlapping identities. For example, gender identity was so intertwined within ethnicity and religion it is difficult to separate. All the participants stated they would not be able to separate their religious identity from who they are as women. Furthermore, results from the ethnic identity scale show that all of these participants have a strong ethnic identity (above a 2.4 on a 4 point scale). For some participants' their ethnicity may be something that is "left here" as one participant stated. Either way it is clear that the religious, gender, and ethnic identity development of these women is very complicated and often interconnected. To understand identity, all the multiple parts of an individual must be considered in combination with one another. It appears there is a relationship seen as interacting and intersecting throughout their lifetimes. To answer this question the theme culture and gender influence will be discussed and when applicable previous research will be compared to present findings.

Religion. As part of their core identity, religion, which was seen to encompass ethnicity and gender, is reflected in the participants' social and cultural realities.

Identification with a single social identity versus multiple social identities was not as evident in the qualitative analysis. Thus, religious identity is strongly linked to these participants overall sense of self. The participants showed the interrelatedness of their social identities by making religious meaning out of their experiences and interactions with others.

Religion was seen as ingrained in participants. Ingrained faith was something that nine out of ten participants expressed. Stating they could not separate who they are as a woman from their religious selves. This provided the researcher with the basic answer that, there is a relationship between religion, gender, and ethnicity, at least for these participants. Some participants in this study discussed their faith as being the focus of their life, “Everything I do, I do for Allah.” Results also showed that every question within the qualitative analysis was answered with a religious lens. The women in this study discussed their faith first, followed by explanations of family, society, and experience.

Family influence was seen to be a direct indicator of faith. Nine out of ten participants discussed their parents’ example of faith as a key influence on their religious affiliation. Family was also seen as an instrumental influence in how women were viewed and treated. Family and religious expectations and societal gender roles often affect how the participants are socialized, treated, and judged by themselves and others. Consistent with Josselson (1987, 2005), the participants are motivated to declare their individuality while at the same time maintain a connection to others. Albeit the family provided a strong religious example it may have failed in empowering these women. Although women found empowerment in their religion the family often subscribed to traditional societal roles for women. Participants talked about their experiences advancing with education, not feeling

heard, granted a divorce, and career expectations, all of which families were often another obstacle to gain access.

Gender. When discussing gender, women in this study again used a religious lens to filter answers first. Christian participant's discussed gender equity and roles within their faith. Participants were quick to point out examples of equality within their church, "Men and women pray together," "We have women pastors and men pastors." Christian participants also used this religious lens to discuss roles within the church. Christian participant five stated, "Man divided these roles, he made a hierarchy." Christian participant one also discussed this pointing out, "I am able to separate the person in front of me" from my faith. On the other hand, Muslim participants differed with responses. Muslim women pointed to ethnic and cultural differences as determinants for how women would be treated and what roles they would hold. Results showed that contrary to the Christians in this study Muslim participants relied not only on religion but ethnicity, as well, to determine their perspective of gender equality and their regard to their gender roles.

Ethnicity. Muslim participants expressed difficulty deciphering between ethnicity and religion. These participants were empowered by their faith to navigate through their family as well as around their ethnic differences. Staggering accounts were presented from these five women. Muslim participants were able to use their education and knowledge as power to overcome the negative cultural and ethnic disparities that were imposed on them. These women were quick to recognize the differences between ethnicity and religion. However, the two were so intertwined it was understandable why these women had to have the knowledge of their religion to separate their religion and ethnicity.

Regardless of the cultural differences, both groups of women discussed the ramifications of ethnic influence. However, differences emerged within the context of this influence. Christian participants discussed ethnic differences not in relation to religion; however, Muslim women continuously related these differences back to religion. Results showed the Christian participants were able to separate their ethnicity from their religion. Although Muslim participants recognized the two were separate they struggled with the separation. For instance, "I am trying to filter my thoughts, religion vs. culture or ethnicity, because they kind of overlap," Muslim participant one was very for front with the ingrained ethnic religious component.

Each of the participants' ethnic groups has its own set of values, beliefs, and ways of living. A number of the study's participants have fashioned a strong sense of ethnic identity. This was exemplified in the results of the MEIM. The mean for the MEIM was 2.94 resulting in conclusive evidence of the participant's strong ethnic identity. It appears that their ethnic identity permits them to cope with a wide variety of life situations. For other participants, ethnicity is not a salient aspect of their identification. These women form value judgments and have their own perspectives about the role ethnicity plays in their worldview.

Summary. The research suggested female Muslim and Christian women see their identity at its core as religious. Though even at the religious core, each participant identified religion as intertwined with either ethnicity or gender, individually or simultaneously. Unable to separate these identities, the participants discovered that religion, gender, and ethnicity sometimes reinforce and complement one another while other times they confuse, conflict, and contradict one another. This understanding affects their lived experiences. As a result of

these conflicts, participants continually re-evaluate who they are and how they fit into the world around them.

Limitations.

Like every study, limitations exist in this study. Attempts have been made to strengthen internal validity through researcher reflexivity strategies, bracketing biases, utilizing two trained members in a coding team, and utilizing an auditor. This study utilized a mixed method methodology in that the study utilized descriptive analysis from the MEIM and qualitative interviews to gain information. The perceptions and behaviors of this group may be different than those women in other states or cities of the United States. This study will assist counselors and counselor educators in understanding Muslim and Christian women who have similar life experiences as the participants.

Implications for Practice and Research

Despite these limitations, this study does present some important implications for practice and future research. First, this study suggests that religion can be an important and positive influence in the lives of some women. Given the salience of religion in the lives of some women, it may be important for clinicians (especially those espousing a feminist philosophy) to consider religion as a potential source of empowerment and to discuss with clients and the ways in which they gain strength from their religious beliefs. Clinicians who work in the community may want to draw upon this collaborate with the faith communities in order to provide effective and empowering services for Muslim and Christian women. This study supports previous findings and encourages health care professionals (including counselors, psychotherapists, and educators) to not only respect but to also acknowledge and

integrate their spiritual and religious principles within their patient and client relationships (Frick, Riedner, Fegg, Hauf, & Borasio, 2006; McNichols & Feldman, 2007; Shafranske, 2001).

The current study looked specifically at the southeastern United States, so it is not representative of other national regions. An additional recommendation stemming from the present study includes a replication of the current study with women in different geographic regions of the country where Muslim and Christian populations vary.

Second, the majority of Muslim women identified specific women's rights and expressed equality within their faith. Two Muslim participants identified as feminist. This was in stark contrast to the common perception of Muslim women in American society. The results were strikingly similar to Ali, Mahmood, Moel, Hudson, & Leathers, (2008) research which also reported similar findings. Therefore, it was still encouraged for researchers to better understand the ways in which women do feel empowered by Islam. Using this knowledge could assist in the empowerment of female Muslim clients and help build rapport in the counseling relationship. In contrast to the Muslim participants, research showed that Christian participants did not identify with feminism, even though these women talked about empowerment, and equality they did not identify as feminist. Further research could investigate the division between feminism and Christianity.

Finally, the potential for future research also includes the investigation of the perceptions and experiences of other ethnically diverse women within Muslim and Christian faiths. Focusing on the experiences of counselors who have Muslim and Christian women as clients ought to be explored in order to understand their struggles and challenges regarding

working with these diverse population. Yet another population that is underrepresented would be women who identify as GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgendered, or questioning) Muslim and Christian, research could be enhanced by investigating the lived experiences of this diverse population. It would also be beneficial to look at Muslim men and the issues they might face within their identity negotiation. According to several of the participants in this study, Muslim men often experience greater issues with identity development than Muslim women. Therefore, conducting a similar study with Muslim and Christian men may prove beneficial.

Conclusions

The results of this study provide awareness about this diverse group of Muslim and Christian women with implications for identity development and counseling practice. These insights resulted from the process of framing the study, gathering data and making meaning of the participants' lived experiences. With the changing demographics and cultural movement within the U.S., we find counseling and counselor education mirroring such remarkable and foreseeable change. Thus, counselors must also become more aware of the diverse nature of populations in the United States. As counselors and counselor educators it is inevitable that one will encounter clients similar to the women in this research, it is a hope of this researcher that this study provided insight to the lived experience of these participants. While providing, a glimpse into the religious, gender, and ethnic identity development of these women.

This study showed that participants' identity is shaped by both internal meanings, found to be religious and external messages from family, society, and the media. These

participants were actively engaged in developing and maintain their identity while navigating through a sometimes confusing environment filled with mixed messaged. With strong conviction, all of the participants in the study stressed belief that religion, gender, and ethnicity all play a significant role in defining the choices they make. Perhaps the most important insight gained from this research was the powerfully ingrained role that religion played in these women's lives. They saw their faith as an inseparable aspect of their identity. Even with the confusion that their ethnicity and society often placed on them, these women were able to overcome the odds and exhibit sheer grace and empathy for others in spite of the stereotypes and assumptions that were often placed on them. All the while managing how one views themselves and how others view them, the participants continuously work toward creating synergy among their multiple aspects of self and building and maintaining healthy relationships with others.

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APPENDICES

Appendices A

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH
The form valid from October 13, 2010 to October 13, 2011

Title of Study Case study of Muslim-American women and gender identity negotiation

Principal Investigator Mary Misenhimer Faculty Sponsor (if applicable) Dr. S. Nassar-McMillan – Dissertation Chair

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from participating in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above. The interviews will be held in a private location to ensure confidentiality and to ensure that interviews will not be overheard.

What is the purpose of this study?

I am requesting your participation in a research study, the purpose of which is to explore the experiences of Christian and Muslim American women. Topics will cover religion, gender, ethnicity, and pre and post 9/11 experiences. In order to ensure that the participant is understood the primary researcher will use member checking with the participant. This process allows the participant full access to the transcripts that will result from the tape recorded interviews. These transcripts will be emailed to the participant upon completion by the primary researcher. The participant will have the option to edit any of their words from the transcripts until the participant is satisfied with the wording.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that will be audio taped complete a brief demographic form and a Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes including paperwork. The topics of gender, religion, and pre and post 9/11 experiences will be covered. The questions will be open ended meaning you can answer any way you choose- there are no right or wrong answers. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. The demographic form will take approximately 2 minutes to complete and will cover basic demographic information (age, education, etc.). Time requested for the total interview including the demographic form and the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure is 45-60 minutes. Interviews will be audiotaped for review by the primary researcher. After the interview, the primary researcher will transcribe the tapes verbatim. Participants will be requested to verify and possibly edit their transcriptions after the interview via email, which maybe intercepted by third parties. As an alternative this researcher is willing to meet with the participants and review the transcript verbally (should participant decline the email format). This will allow the participants an opportunity to edit their response should they choose. Individual responses will be described in participants' language and will be documented in the research. A master code list will allow the researcher to transfer the participant's identifying information to a letter while retaining a link to participant identity. This list will be protected by the primary researcher. The participants' identities will be protected by referring to participants in the write up as participant A, B, C, etc., rather than using identifying information. The researcher may retain your identifying information and contact you in the future if you verbalize a willingness to suggest friends and family members as participants in future research studies.

Risks

The aim of this study is to explore the lived experiences associated with a potentially troublesome time in your life, so I ask that you share only those experiences you are comfortable with sharing. At the conclusion of the interview, I would like to speak with you about the experience of participating in the interview.

Benefits

It is anticipated that you might benefit from sharing your story and talking about your experiences.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Direct quotes from the interviews may be used in reports about the research. Data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. Your identity will be protected through the use of code numbers on all study materials. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials. The audio tapes will be destroyed once the research is complete. The researcher will also ensure that the participant's privacy and confidentiality will be respected this will include not mentioning identifying information in the transmittal email nor in the interview transcript.

Compensation

You will not receive any compensation for participating.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Mary Misenhimer, at 520 Poe Hall, NCSU or via email at mmmisenh@ncsu.edu (please specify the title of this study in the subject line).

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate

"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled."

Investigator's signature attesting verbal consent was obtained

_____ Date _____

Appendices B

North Carolina State University is a land-grant university and a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina

**Office of Research
and Graduate Studies
Division of Research Administration**

NC STATE

Sponsored Programs and

Regulatory Compliance

Campus Box 7514

2701 Sullivan Drive

Raleigh, NC 27695-7514

919.515.2444

919.515.7721 (fax)

From: Debra Paxton, IRB Administrator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: October 13, 2010

Project Title: Religion, Gender, and Ethnic Identity Development of Muslim and Christian Women

IRB#: 1650

Dear Ms. Misenhimer and Dr. Nassar-McMillan,

The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. **This approval will expire on October 13, 2011 and the protocol will need continuing review before that date.**

NOTE:

You must use the attached consent forms which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.

This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.

Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.

Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

Sincerely,



Debra Paxton
NC State IRB

Appendices C

Demographic Information Form

Instructions: Please respond to the following questions as thoroughly as possible. Required information includes age, with all other requested information being optional. The information provided on this form will be kept confidential and used for the sole purposes of the research study. Thank you.

Age:

- 25-35 years old 36-45 years old 46-55years old
- 56-65 years old 66 years old and up

What is your ethnicity?

Are you a United States citizen? Yes or No

Where is your country of origin?

What is your country of birth?

If not U.S. how long have you lived in the United States?

Religious or Spiritual Information:

1. Are you currently affiliated (i.e., an official member) with a church or organized place of worship?

- Yes No

If yes, please specify religious identification (e.g., Catholic, Baptist, Sunni, etc.) of your place of worship:

2. How often do you attend religious or spiritual services?

- Almost daily (4 or more times a week)
- At least once weekly (1 to 3 times per week)
- At least once monthly (1 to 3 times a month)

Never or only on observed denominational Holidays (e.g., Christmas, Passover, etc.)

Please write below highest level of education (high school, college, etc.)

Appendices D
Qualitative Questionnaire

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- 1.) What does your religious affiliation mean to you?
- 2.) Could you separate your religion from who you are as a woman?
- 3.) How do men treat women?
- 4.) How are women viewed in your religion?
- 5.) Do you feel that you are empowered as a woman?
- 6.) How did you find your faith?
- 7.) What are some misconceptions surrounding your faith?
- 8.) Have you encountered any negative experiences as a product of your faith?
 - a. What about gender?
 - b. Ethnicity?
- 9.) Can you speak to your experiences before 9/11?
- 10.) After 9/11?

Appendix E

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)

In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Chinese, Filipino, American Indian, Mexican American, Caucasian or White, Italian American, and many others. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be _____

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

(4) Strongly agree (3) Agree (2) Disagree (1) Strongly disagree

- 1- I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.
- 2- I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.
- 3- I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.
- 4- I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.
- 5- I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.
- 6- I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
- 7- I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.

- 8- In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.
- 9- I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.
- 10- I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.
- 11- I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
- 12- I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.

- 13- My ethnicity is
 - (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
 - (2) Black or African American
 - (3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
 - (4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
 - (5) American Indian/Native American
 - (6) Mixed; Parents are from two different groups

(7) Other (write in): _____

14- My father's ethnicity is (use numbers above)

15- My mother's ethnicity is (use numbers above)