PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION, SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS, RELIGIOUS COPING, AND PERCEIVED CLIMATE ON TRAUMATIC STRESS FOR MUSLIM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Posttraumatic stress symptoms have been consistently found to be elevated among people of color due to experiences of discrimination. Current literature on posttraumatic stress symptoms has mainly focused on race and ethnicity. It is possible that Muslim international students, who hold racial/ethnic and religious minority identities, experience posttraumatic stress symptoms due to perceived discrimination and a negative social climate (i.e., racist and Islamophobic). Additionally, researchers have examined the role of social connectedness and religious coping in mitigating negative health outcomes among minority groups. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of Muslim international students in the United States during a social and political shift of increased Islamophobia and anti-immigration policies. In this study of 133 Muslim international students, I hypothesized that social connectedness (i.e., mainstream and Muslim communities) and religious coping would moderate the positive relationship between perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms. The results indicated that perceived discrimination predicted posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond

perceived general stress; however, the present results did not support the roles of mainstream or Muslim social connectedness or religious coping as moderators between perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms. However, mainstream social connectedness was significantly associated with fewer posttraumatic stress symptoms.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Education, have examined a dissertation titled "Perceived Discrimination, Social Connectedness, Religious Coping, and Perceived Climate on Traumatic Stress for Muslim International Students" presented by Sathya Baanu Jeevanba, candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Following the events of September 11, 2001, Muslims and Islam gained increasingly negative attention across the United States (Anwar, 2018; Dimandja, 2017; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Consequently, views on Muslims and Islam became strongly related to terrorism and violence (Anwar, 2018; Lajevardi, 2016). With the increase in negative media coverage on Muslims, the difference between the action of a sect of Islamic extremist groups and the Islamic faith continues to be blurred. In 2012, The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) reported a staggering increase in prejudice and discrimination against Muslim Americans post-9/11 (FBI: Uniform Crime Reporting [UCR], 2017). Then in the 2016 United States presidential elections, we saw further politicization of Islam. Since then, President Trump has spoken ill of Muslim immigrants and alluded to needing to create registries and databases to track them, including his executive order to uphold a travel ban on individuals from predominantly Muslim countries. In addition, a survey by the Pew Research Center (2017) found that about half of the Muslim Americans surveyed said it has become harder to be a Muslim in the United States in the recent years.

As of 2017, the data on Muslim Americans show that about 3.45 million (1.2% of the population United States population) Muslims live in the United States. However, there is no official count on the number of Muslim in the United States because the U.S. Census Bureau does not ask questions related to people's religion (Mohamed, 2017). The Pew Research Center (2017) estimates that about 82 % of Muslims living in the United States are American citizens. It appears that most Muslim Americans, about 20% are of South-Asian descent, 14% are of Middle-East or North African origin, and 13% are Iranian. Even though most

Muslims are American citizens, they feel that the larger American community views them as "outsiders" or not part of the mainstream American community. Particularly, the larger American majority think that Muslim Americans do not adhere to American values (Kinder & Kam., 2010; Peffley et al., 2015). For example, Islam is associated with gender inequality and the *Syariah law* (religious law of Islam) is viewed as a predated and not compatible with Western culture (Kalkan et al., 2009).

The Muslim Identity

Restructuring of the Muslim Identity

Since the increasing backlash on Muslims and the rise in Islamophobia, the Muslim identity has undergone significant social and political shifts. Byng (2008) brings attention to the need of organizing our understanding of social inequality around religious minority identity. Since the events of 9/11, the term *Muslim* was restructured to reflect the systemic inequality related to racial minorities and thus becoming a religious and racial minority label. With religious identity at the center of the social and political conflicts for Muslims, Byng (2008) demonstrates that systemic social inequality similar to racial inequalities can be applied to Muslims. The author argues that the same essentializing ideas that exist in racial inequality; good versus evil, structuring of policies and legislations, and target for discrimination are seen between Muslims as religious minorities in the United States.

In addition, policy changes that were implemented created ripple effects across the lives of Muslim Americans who found themselves subject to increased suspicion, scrutiny, and distrust (Anwar, 2018; Byng, 2008). Overall, bias against Muslims led to institutionalized discrimination. For example, the United States government founded the Patriot Act, introduced the Immigration and Naturalization Service into the National Security

Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), and created the Joint Terrorism Task Force. These policies propelled discriminatory practices against Muslim Americans. The changes in NSEERS led to a legal stance on monitoring and targeting Muslims entering or leaving the country solely based on their religious identity which required the registration of Muslims (Anwar, 2018). Muslims saw a resurgence in the rhetoric that they are a threat to American national security. Byng (2008) describes that once Muslim Americans were formally marked for discrimination through policies, it is inevitable that they face social inequality. Pew Research Center's (2017) survey found that about 48% of Muslim Americans say they have experienced at least one incident of discrimination in the past 12 months.

Hate Crimes

The literature on the Muslim American experience post-9/11 points to a range of discriminatory experiences including violence resulting in deaths. The FBI released data on hate crimes in 2017 which saw an increase of 17% over 2016 totals (FBI: UCR, 2017). According to CNN, this is the first consecutive three-year annual increase and the largest single-year increase since 2001 (Berry & Wiggins, 2018). In 2001, the total number of hate crimes drastically increased from fewer than 30 to 481 (FBI: UCR; 2019). Since then, the number of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the United States has been consistently high with at least a hundred cases per year. In 2015 there were 257 reported cases, in 2016 there were 307, and 273 in 2017 (FBI: UCR, 2019). The recent spike in discrimination toward Muslim Americans has been attributed in part to the attitudes and actions of the current administration, including President Trump's executive order to block travel from six Muslim-majority countries in January 2017 (Lowe et al., 2019; Pew Research Center, 2017).

Overall, hate crimes towards Arab-Americans, Muslim Americans, and individuals

who were perceived to be Arab or Muslim has increased over the years. Despite the release of this very horrifying hate crime data by the FBI, Muslim advocacy groups such as the "Muslim Advocate" and "Arab American Institute (AAI)" have expressed their concern with underreporting the true numbers of hate crimes based on racial and religious beliefs. For example, these two advocacy groups' press releases expressed frustration that the FBI hate crime data did not include three severe racially-biased acts of violence during 2017 (Baddar, 2018; Muslim Advocates, 2018). They state that the FBI statistics did not include the death of Srinivas Kuchibhotla who was shot to death in the city of Olathe, Kansas on February 22nd, 2017 because of his perceived national origin. Similarly, the May 26th, 2017, fatal stabbing of Ricky John Best and Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche aboard a train in Portland, Oregon, nor the August 12, 2017 killing of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville, Virginia, is not reflected in the federal data. Therefore, both Muslim advocacy groups express their concern with the FBI's omission and discrepancy in underreporting hate crimes across the United States.

Gender Differences and Discrimination

Research on Muslims has shown that there exist differences in the way Muslim men and women are perceived and treated (Ali, 2006; Asmar et al., 2004; Dimandja, 2017; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013). Western society tends to have a hegemonic view of Muslim men and women (Soltani, 2016). Muslim men are often portrayed as domineering as well as socially and politically violent, while Muslim women are seen as passive and oppressed (Ali, 2006; Asmar et al., 2004; Soltani, 2016).

There also exist differences in the way Muslim men and women perceive the political and social landscape. For example, in the Pew Research Survey in 2017, results indicated

that women are much more likely than men to perceive unfriendliness from many groups in society (Gecewicz, 2017). The data revealed that about 69 % of Muslim women said the Republican Party is unfriendly toward Muslims, and 81% said President Trump is unfriendly to them. However, only 49% and 68% of Muslim men think the Republican Party and Trump, respectively, are unfriendly toward Muslim Americans.

It is important to note that the multiple intersections of the Muslim identity; race, ethnicity, religion, and gender could help explain part of the differences we see among Muslim men and women's experiences. Asmar et al., (2005) found in a sample of 173 students (93 females and 82 males), larger percentages of women expressed negative or ambivalent views than men. The authors alluded to a *hijab effect* which meant women who wore a headscarf, veil or *hijab* were more noticeable as Muslims and often more likely to be treated differently due to their religious beliefs. Particularly, women who wore the *hijab* expressed more feelings of discomfort or being targeted than Muslim women who did not wear a *hijab*. The *hijab* which has become synonymous with Islam makes it an easy way to identify an individual as Muslim, in this case, women. Western beliefs and ideals tend to view the "veiling" of women negatively - a sign of oppression (Dimandja, 2017; Soltani, 2017). Contrary to Western beliefs, the *hijab* also stands for a symbol of female pride and identification with Islam (Ali, 2014; Dimandja, 2017; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013).

In another study by Tummala-Nara and Claudius (2013), female students reported negative responses directed toward them as a result of wearing a *hijab*, while their male counterparts reported being perceived as terrorists. Participants with visible markers (e.g., some form of veiling, accents, and darker skin tone) appeared to have higher levels of overt forms of discrimination compared to their Muslim counterparts who were less "visibly

Muslim". For example, participants who were deemed less "visibly Muslim" were perceived to be more of European American descent because they did not have any visible minority markers (e.g., accent, darker skin tone, or wear any type of veil). Therefore, it is important to recognize the role of visible markers may contribute to the varying differences across the Muslim experience in the United States.

Muslim American Students

Muslim students have received very little scholarly attention from researchers in the field of higher education (Dimandja 2017; Shammas, 2017). Shammas (2017) expresses concern regarding the gap in the campus diversity literature while referencing two national surveys (AAI, 2007; Muslims in the American Public Square, 2004) that reported alarmingly high rates of discrimination in the school and workplace among Arab and Muslim Americans of traditional college-age (18 to 29 years old).

Research on Muslim American students consistently show that they experience prejudice and discrimination based on their Muslim identity (Lowe et al., 2019; Shammas, 2009, 2017). In Lowe et al., (2019), 78% of their participants who identified as Muslim American students reported "any lifetime experience of discrimination" due to their Muslim identity. It was found that higher levels of past-year perceived discrimination were associated with more severe DSM-related trauma symptoms and discrimination-related PTSD symptoms. In a sample of Arab American Muslims and non-Arab American Muslim students, higher levels of perceived discrimination lowered students' sense of belonging to campus (Shammas, 2015). In a previous study, Shammas (2009) found that campus climate indicators showed Arab American and Muslim American students are likely to perceive discrimination two to four times more than non-Arab and non-Muslim students. In recent

years, studies on racial/ethnic minorities have found that perceived racial/ethnic discrimination is significantly and positively related to posttraumatic stress symptoms (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2005; Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Wei et al., 2012).

Traumatic Stress

The lack of inclusion for life experiences such as racial/ethnic discrimination in developing trauma-like symptoms in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* fourth edition (DSM-IV) led to the development of an alternative model of trauma introduced by Carlson (1997). Carlson's (1997) model of trauma takes into account emotional and psychological factors that contribute to developing traumatic stress. Carlson (1997) defined traumatic experiences within these three components (a) subjective perception of the event as negative, (b) the event is sudden, and (c) the event as out of one's control. Experiencing the above can result in posttraumatic stress symptoms which include intrusive thoughts and images, avoidant behaviors (i.e., avoiding places, people, thoughts, feelings associated with the traumatic event), and physiological arousal (i.e., hypervigilance, difficulty concentrating, or sleeplessness). Where the current DSM-V's conceptualization of posttraumatic-stress disorder is limited, race-based trauma fulfills by taking into account frequent racial/ethnic discriminatory experiences.

In response to a dearth of literature on race-based trauma came the development of the Race-Based Traumatic Stress Injury (RBTSI) model by Carter (2007) which is derived from the aforementioned model by Carlson (1997) on traumatic stress. The RBTSI model (Carter, 2007) applied Carlson's (1997) traumatic stress model to view the emotional pain that arises from discriminatory experiences as the core stressor of trauma rather than the threat to one's life, distinguishing traumatic stress from PTSD. Carter's (2007) framework

connects reactions to a specific memorable racial encounter to emotional symptoms that include avoidance of situations, hypervigilance, intrusive thoughts, depression, anger, somatic symptoms, and low self-esteem. These aforementioned symptoms reflect emotional injury, not a mental health disorder.

In short, RBTSI (Carter, 2007) is: (a) an individual-level based experience; (b) emotional and psychological in nature; (c) reported as an encounter that was negative or emotionally painful, sudden and out of one's control, (d) includes a cluster of symptoms: depression, anger, low self-esteem, physical reactions and at least two core reactions of: intrusion, avoidance, or arousal: and (e) linked to psychological impairment. Carter (2007) first proposed the concept of race-based trauma as a form of trauma stemming from racial/ethnic discrimination. The RBTSI provides a foundation to understand how often times ongoing discriminatory experiences (i.e., racist and Islamophobic events) can lead to traumatic stress symptoms (Carlson, 1997; Carter 2007; Carter et al., 2012). In a sample of 289 undergraduate students, Pieterse et al., (2010) found Asian and Black students experienced more discrimination than White students. They also found that among Asian and Black students, perceptions of racial/ethnic discrimination significantly contributed to trauma-related symptoms (after controlling for general life stress). It is important to note that, to date, studies have interchangeably used the terms "traumatic stress", "traumatic-related symptoms", and "posttraumatic stress symptoms". Therefore, I will be using these terms interchangeably in this study.

Utilizing the RBTSI model (Carter, 2007) in considering ongoing discriminatory experiences among marginalized populations could help us understand the intersection of race and religious trauma. After the events of 9/11, Islam and individuals associated with

Islam experienced increased backlash from the larger American society (Pelofsky, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2017). Throughout those years after 9/11, incidences of Islamophobic abuse, prejudice, racism, and discrimination and have been documented both within and outside the campus communities (Abualkhair, 2013; Cole &Ahmadi, 2003; Heyn, 2013; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2014; McDermott-Levy, 2011; Seggie &Sanford, 2010). Recently, the infamously known "Muslim ban" introduced by the Trump administration prohibiting entry of citizens of seven majority Muslim nations further propelled the climate of Islamophobia (Pottie-Sherman, 2018; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017). Also, there have been significant decreases in the number of international students from predominantly Muslim countries which indicates there may be an underlying issue among Muslim international students' comfort in studying in the United States. For example, research studies show that Muslim students (both American Muslims and international Muslim students report higher perceived levels of prejudice compared to those from other religious groups (Dimandja, 2017; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). In addition, international Muslim students and immigrants have expressed their experiences of being discriminated against in the United States due to their racial and religious backgrounds (Tummala-Narra & Cladius, 2013).

Given the current sociopolitical climate on Islam and Muslims, it is important to examine the way ongoing discrimination affects marginalized populations such as Muslim international students. This could include examining the way race-based and religious-based trauma (i.e., through racist and Islamophobic events) affect Muslim international students' overall health. Research studies have linked experiences with racial discrimination to traumatic stress symptoms (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2005; Carter & Forsyth, 2010).

However, to my knowledge, there is no study that has investigated the intersection of race and religious based discrimination on traumatic stress symptoms.

With the current development of traumatic stress symptoms and the call to carry out research in consideration of the intersection of multiple identities (Cole, 2009), it is important to consider the Muslim international student experience in the United States inclusive of race and religious identity. In order to further understand the experiences of Muslim international students in the United States, the present study will examine the associations among perceptions of racial discrimination, religious discrimination, perceived climate, and posttraumatic stress symptoms in a sample of Muslim international students. In addition, I will investigate the role social connectedness and religious coping might play in reducing the negative effects of racial and religious discrimination among Muslim international students. Results from this study could contribute to the growing literature regarding Muslim international students' experiences in the United States and help inform culturally informed interventions to work with this population.

Complexity of the Muslim Identity

Muslims in the United States are a diverse group in terms of their racial and ethnic backgrounds, national origin and immigration histories, and religious practices and participation. However, Muslims are typically viewed as a homogeneous group despite the diversity within this group, therefore making it difficult to parse the differences in discrimination based on a singular identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, or religion). Recent articles have indicated the research challenges in understanding the intersection of multiple identities within the Muslim identity (Amer & Bagasra, 2013; Wang et al., 2019). The tendency to view Islam as a monolithic religion has affected the view of Muslims through a narrow lens

panned down to stereotypes and generalizations, void of nuance and context.

In Wang et al., (2019), a phenomenological study with 11 Muslim Americans explored what it means to be "Muslim American". In the study, four main themes emerged; (a) a "built in community", (b) "a lot of ethnic diversity, (c) "a religious practice", and (d) "a feeling that we all have to be a very united group." These findings were very telling of the complex nature of being a Muslim in the United States. Participants also shared the impact of the sociopolitical climate of Islamophobia on shaping their identities. For example, participants discussed the need to present as a homogenous group to reflect a "united front" and "homogeneity" despite within group differences. Nevertheless, some participants discussed the beauty of coming together as a group despite other social identities. They recognized that their support system differed from other minority groups for being able to connect across various demographic variables.

It is important if not imperative for researchers who delve into the Muslim population to recognize the breadth of diversity inherent in this population. In Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2011), they discuss complexities of using arbitrary labels to describe Muslims. For instance, the conflation between the term Arab (defined as an ethno-linguistic term whereby members of the group speak the Arabic language and share similar cultural practices; TeachMideast, 2017) and Muslims (defined as followers of Islam regardless of ethno-linguistic origins) which tend to remove the conversation around the degree of religiosity within the Muslim population and the influence of one's national and racial/ethnic identity (Bakalian & Bozorgmehr, 2011). The authors also admit to omitting South Asian Muslim identities from their writing which further perpetuates the notion of "one Muslim identity". Therefore, Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2011) argue that after 9/11 Muslim Americans are viewed as

being pan-religious and almost pan-ethnic.

Amer and Bagasra (2013) suggests researchers to ask more detailed demographic questions to address both racial and religious-based experiences among Muslims. Therefore, in this study I will ask participants questions pertaining to their racial groups, years lived in the United States, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious markers (i.e., *hijab, burqa,* donning a beard, skull cap, etc.), and income level. Amer and Bagasra (2013) also address the difficulties of separating the effects of race and religion in studies on Muslims. To address this concern, I ask questions specific to both racial and religious-based discrimination to capture the intersection of these two identities in Muslim international students.

The following is a review of the literature on Muslim international students in the United States. The literature review is divided into three sections. The first section provides an overview of international students in the United States and specifically, the Muslim international student experience as well as current research trends within this population. The second section identifies pre-departure conditions that affect Muslim international students applying to study in the United States. Finally, the third section covers post-departure issues that typically affect the general international student population before describing specific factors that affect Muslim international students' while in the United States based on the scope and interest of this study (e.g., traumatic stress, sociopolitical climate, social connectedness, and religious coping).

International Students

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) describes globalization as a multidimensional transactional process across economic,

technological, social, and cultural thresholds (UNESCO, 2000). In a sense, globalization can be understood through the international student diaspora. Universities in the Western countries began recruiting international students for two main purposes: cultural and economic gains (McFadden et al., 2012). For instance, The National Association of Foreign Student Advisers (NAFSA): Association of International Educators' latest analysis found that international students studying in the United States contributed $36.9 billion and helped support more than 450,000 jobs in the United States economy between 2016 and 2017 (NAFSA, 2017). The Wall Street Journal (n.d) reported that most of the revenue comes from the full tuition fees international students pay as well as the money they spend on housing and other goods during their time in the United States.

There have been different yet overlapping definitions of the term "international student." These students are also often referred to as *foreign students*, *study abroad students*, *exchange students* and *credit-mobile students*. *Foreign students* specifically refers to non-citizens (students with non-resident visas and those with permanent residency status) who are enrolled in tertiary education degree programs (Migration Data Portal, 2018). The terms "study abroad students," "exchange students," and "credit mobile students" are defined as students who are receiving a small number of credits from a foreign country while remaining enrolled in degree programs from their home country (Migration Data Portal, 2018). With these overlapping definitions, organizations such as UNESCO, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the European Union's Statistical Office (EUROSTAT) decided to select the term "internationally mobile students" to refer to those who are in a foreign country for a tertiary degree and beyond. The length of stay is anywhere from a year and more (averaging up to 7 years). However, for the scope of this

study, we will refer to "internationally mobile students" as "international students" in order to reflect the terminology used in current research regarding this population. It is noteworthy to recognize the complexity and various lived experiences of international students based on the context surrounding their status.

Data on International Students

Education at a Glance 2017 (a series of reports released by OECD) captured a rising and expanding trend of students studying abroad across the globe (ICEF Monitor, 2018). The report estimated that there are 5 million students enrolled in tertiary education in a foreign country. This number is projected to increase and reach approximately 8 million as globalization and internationalization affect trends to study outside of one's home country (ICEF Monitor, 2018). The major players in the higher education market are the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia (Brown & Jones, 2013; Marginson et al., 2010). Within the United States, American universities have become the top host country for international students with 24% of all international student migration.

In 2004, the International Institute of Education (IIE) reported a 2.4% drop in international student enrollment in the United States. This was the first drop in international student enrollment in the United States since 1971. This decrease of new student enrollment could be attributed to the restrictions put forth by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Service and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) on international student visas. Nevertheless, since 2006, international student numbers started climbing again despite the restrictions put forth by the DHS and SEVIS on international student visas. The rise of new international student enrollment since 2006 could be due to the efforts made by the United States government (i.e., introduction of a 2 year extension on the Optional

Practical Training program for students in the STEM field during Obama's administration) and non-governmental agencies such as NAFSA to rectify the then declining international student numbers.

The numbers of international students in the United States from 2017-2018 reached a record high of 1.09 million (Morris, 2018). Despite a record-breaking number of students enrolled in college within the 2017-2018 academic year (including international students admitted in the past), there is a drop in new international student enrollment (Morris, 2018), a trend similar to the previous 2016-2017 academic year (Moss, 2017). The current increase in the total number of international students are related to the Optional Practical Training (OPT) which allow international students to gain practical skills in their field for a year after graduating or for 2 years if they earned a degree in STEM fields (Morris, 2018). The Open Doors reported a 3.3% overall decrease of new international student enrollment during the 2016-2017 academic year which has since doubled to 6.6% in the 2017-2018 academic year (IIE, 2017). The latest data on the decrease of new international student enrollment corroborates the "The Fall 2017 International Student Enrollment Snapshot Survey" by IIE which reported a 7% decline in new international student enrollment (IIE, 2017).

A 2018 Forbes article outlined some of the reasons for the decreasing enrollment (Younger, 2018). Some of the key factors cited include increasing costs of higher education in the United States., more stringent visa processes, and the tumultuous social and political climate in the United States. The last reason could be due to the nation's latest travel ban on predominantly Muslim countries (Iran, Syria, Sudan, Yemen, Libya, and Somalia), and safety reasons due to the increase of White supremacy rhetoric (Younger, 2018). McCarthy (2018) stated that the decrease of international students in the United States could also be

explained by the Trump administration's plans to further restrict international students' ability to work after graduation by discontinuing STEM OPT (an extension of 2 years to the Optional Practical Training program for international students in the STEM field).

Muslim international students. Despite knowing the trends in international student enrollment in the United States, it is difficult to distinguish the exact percentage or numbers of Muslim international students in the United States because data collection practices refrain from asking students' religious affiliation. These numbers are hard to determine as there are no official statistics on these students' religious beliefs. Despite the lack of specific information on the number of Muslim international students in the United States, we do know that there are international students from predominantly Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, North Africa, Malaysia, Indonesia, and others (Institute of International Education; IIE, 2018). For example, a large number of Muslim international students come from Saudi Arabia, which ranks fourth on the list of countries international students in the United States are from. Most international Saudi students in the United States use the King Abdullah Scholarship (KAS) program, which provides students with living expenses and fully covers their tuition costs while studying abroad (Saudi Academic Cultural Mission, n.d.;Yakaboski et al., 2018). With Saudi Arabia being a predominantly Muslim country, probably most if not all of the students who come through the KAS program are Muslim students (Saudi Ministry of Higher Education, n.d; Yakaboski et al., 2018).

Most recently, there have been significant shifts in the number of students from predominantly Muslim countries. For instance, the IIE (2018) reported in their Open Doors report for 2017-2018 that there has been a 15.5% decline in the total number of students from Saudi Arabia (current total of 44,432 students). Additionally, there were declines in the

number of students from other Muslim-majority countries such as Iraq (-15.3 %; current total of 1,438), Libya (-18.8 %; current total of 1,064), Syria (-12.2 %; current total of 726) and Yemen (-21.4 %; current total of 517). On the contrary, there is reported increase in the number of students from Somalia from 23 to 67 students (34%) and Sudan (2.2%). The overall trend of enrollment shows a decline in international students from Muslim majority countries in the United States.

Current Research Trends

The majority of studies on international students have focused on the overall experience of international students or specifically international Chinese students. The reason for there being more research on Chinese students is due to the majority of international students in the United States from China (IIE, 2018). In addition, most research on international students focuses on their experiences within the higher educational setting. Most studies on international students have focused on their adjustment and learning experiences in the United States, many of these being dissertations (Yakaboski et al., 2018). Studies have indicated numerous adjustment challenges, language barriers, and psychopathology that are widely associated with the international student experience (Akanwa, 2015; Banjong, 2015; Rabla, 2017; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013).

It is hard to come across studies done in the United States that have been focused on the Muslim international student experience despite the rise in Islamophobia. There are only a few studies on Arab Muslim international students (Abunab et al., 2017), Saudi international students (Yakaboski, 2018), and a handful on Muslim international students (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Anwar, 2007). Interestingly, as pointed out by Yakaboski et al., (2018), most of these studies have been dissertations published over a 30 year period.

Through my search of studies on Muslim international students, most of these studies were done qualitatively. Topics of interest were mostly focused on adjustment and learning experiences on campus and in the classroom. However, there have been some studies that examined Muslim international students' (including Arab Muslim and Saudi students) experiences of discrimination, campus climate, and overall psychological adjustment (Rundles, 2013; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013; Yakaboski et al., 2018). To my knowledge, there has been no study focusing on Muslim international students' experiences in the current sociopolitical climate. As a result, this study will explore the Muslim international student experience in relation to the current sociopolitical climate in the United States.

Studies on Muslim international students are limited, however, one qualitative study reported on this population's experiences in the United States (Tummala-Nara & Cladius, 2013). Using conventional content analysis, Tummala-Nara and Claudius (2013) analyzed interviews with 15 graduate Muslim international students in the United States. Their findings uncovered five categories: diverse views of the new cultural environment, social isolation, experiences of discrimination, religious identity, and protective factors in adjusting to living in the United States. Participants described the struggle they faced with acculturation due to discriminatory experiences. These experiences of discrimination also differed based on gender with women reporting negative responses due to "markers" linked to Islam such as wearing the *hijab,* and men being accused as terrorists. Discriminatory experiences also appeared to be related to feeling socially isolated in addition to feeling distant from their usual support system network (i.e., friends and family in their home country). In order to navigate the challenges experienced as a Muslim international student,

some participants indicated utilizing their religious faith and community in the United States.

Muslim international students face similar adjustment issues to other groups of international students, which include language barriers, navigating a new culture, and homesickness (Abunab et al., 2017; Herlevi et al., 2000). In addition, Muslim international students must also learn to manage the psychological distress that stems from being a religious minority in a predominantly non-Islamic society with rising Islamophobic sentiments (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). In recent studies, international Muslim students and immigrants have expressed their experiences of being discriminated against in the United States because of their religious backgrounds and raising their concerns about the fears they face as members of a religious minority (Tummala-Narra & Cladius, 2013). Research studies have linked such experiences with racial discrimination to traumatic stress symptoms (Carter et al., 2005; Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2010).

Other studies have focused on more specific groups of students within the Muslim population, such as Arab Muslims, and Saudi international students (Albuakhair, 2013; Rabla, 2017; Yakaboski et al., 2018). In Yakaboski and colleagues' study, 18 Saudi graduate students were interviewed regarding their experiences on a campus in a mid-sized university in the Western part of the United States. Participants indicated mostly positive experiences with faculty, some negative experiences with staff, and limited or negative interactions with American students. They described incidents of both covert (i.e., not being included in group projects, American students showing little interest in getting to know them) and overt discrimination (i.e., being called a terrorist, questioned for wearing a *hijab*, etc.). Participants painted an overall picture that showed a lack of cultural and religious understanding among local students, faculty, and staff. Among the women participants, experiences of

discrimination included pervasive gender stereotypes for those who chose to wear the *hijab* or *abaya* (a long robe or cloak that is usually worn over casual clothing by Muslim women).

In addition, Rabla (2017) took a strengths-based perspective to investigate factors that helped Arab international students (from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Oman, and Iraq) be successful in the United States. This qualitative study found that while many had limited or no friendships with Americans, they found friendships with other Muslims on campus or within the Muslim community immensely helpful. In addition, individuals who had family in the United States experienced less homesickness. In addition, those who have lived in the United States for a longer period of time found it easier to form intercultural relationships due to increased acculturation. They also cited student support services such as student success departments as helpful in improving their English fluency when it came to successfully completing assignments. Some participants also cited participating in extracurricular activities allowed them to meet both local and other international students to foster friendships which helped prevent feelings of isolation.

Taking into consideration current research trends and gaps in literature, the following literature review will focus on pre-departure conditions and post-departure conditions related to the Muslim international student experience in the United States. These sections will consider the effect of both the social and political nuances related to this international student population. The first section, "pre-departure conditions affecting Muslim international students" includes an exploration of the immigration process, which details research regarding the challenges faced by Muslim international students prior to coming to the United States. The financial aspect of the immigration process and the challenges of

successfully securing a student visa are explained.

The next section of the literature review will focus on "post-departure conditions affecting Muslim international students" in the United States, which include the social and cultural challenges which pertain to language barriers, financial and employment limitations, racial/ethnic discrimination, and anti-Muslim sentiments in the United States.

Pre-Departure Conditions Affecting Muslim International Students

The international student experience of preparing to further their education begins even before they set foot in the United States. Prospective international students will undergo various preparations prior to being approved by the USCIS to receive an international student visa (i.e., the F-1 or J-1 visa). Therefore, it is important to contextualize their experiences even before they begin to live in the United States to fully understand the international student experience. Muslim international students may face additional scrutiny due to their religious beliefs and/or the country they are coming from given the increasingly Islamophobic climate in the United States. As such, I cover the common pre-departure experiences international students experience prior to arriving in the United States and then go on to provide more contextual information regarding the Muslim international student experience.

Across all international student populations, preparing to move to a new country for educational purposes brings about numerous challenges on prospective international students and their families. They first have to navigate pre-departure challenges successfully which mainly involves the requirements of the immigration process (e.g., securing adequate financial resources and passing the visa interview) and then overcome any post-departure challenges. These challenges include socioeconomic, cultural, psychological, and educational

barriers to fulfill their goal to attain a "world-class education" (Anwar, 2007). Prospective students first have to gain admission to a United States institution. However, once provided with an acceptance or admission letter, a vigorous and costly immigration process quickly ensues. It is not uncommon for families of prospective international students to sell property, borrow money, or use up life savings to help finance their child's education (Anwar, 2007). It is common for local universities and agencies to help prospective international students to navigate the process of going through the immigration process. For example, the Education USA network has 400+ advisers who work in advising centers in over 100 countries. They are typically located in the United States. Embassies and Consulates or a variety of partner institutions, including Fulbright commissions, bi-national cultural centers, United States nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and at international NGOs, universities, and libraries (EducationUSA advisers,n.d). However, these support services are mostly geared towards increasing international student enrollment rather than offering support for prospective international students once they are in the United States (Lee & Rice, 2007; Wecker, 2017).

Financial Resources

Adequate financial resources are needed for prospective international students to obtain tertiary education in the United States. This requirement starts well before they need to pay full tuition. The fees associated with the immigration process can be hefty. They are required to pay a Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee to be eligible to undergo the immigration process (Haidar, 2018). The SEVIS fee for a student visa can cost between $180 to $200 depending on the student visa type (Haidar, 2018). Thereafter, prospective international students complete an online application and pay the visa

application fee, also known as the Machine Readable Visa Fee (MRV fee) which costs an additional $160 (Haidar, 2019). Thereafter, prospective students need to show that they have adequate financial resources for both education fees and living expenses. Evidence of finances must be current and equal or exceed the costs of the first year of studies. The approximate value of first-year costs varies based on region and type of university (public or private). College Board (2018) estimated the cost of tuition and living expenses of a typical college or university as of 2017-2018 ranges anywhere between $17,580 (community college) to $50,900 (private non-profit four-year college). The financial costs can place a huge burden on families supporting their children to further their studies in one of the world's most popular educational destinations. Contrary to popular belief, international students do not mostly come from high income earning families. A recent survey by "The Chronicle" (an independent news organization at Duke University) found that in the Class of 2022, the average international student has lower family income distribution than the average domestic student (Butchireddygari, 2018). Also, given the strict regulations imposed by the DHS on international students, relying on potential income through work or employment is not advisable. Therefore, financial support for international students are primarily sourced by their governments and/or family (Anwar, 2007). For this reason, international students in the United States must do their due diligence to ensure their financial needs are met to be able to have a rewarding educational experience.

Visa Process

Changes in immigration policies post-September 11, 2001, (9/11) led to stricter and more extensive visa processes as a response to antiterrorism and immigration reform (Johnson, 2016). Following efforts to curb terrorism, migrants were the focus of antiterrorism

reforms which led the Bush administration to introduce Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT) laws, the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2001 (EBSVERA), Homeland Security Act of 2002, and the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS). In addition, the international student applicant must prove a bona fide nonimmigrant status as required by the INA 24(b). The INA 24(b) asks for applicants to show evidence that they intend to return to their home country by establishing ties usually through disclosing if they have family members residing in the United States or in their home country, financial means, and future plans. However, the visa process is often subjective and inconsistent which means even if students have their application complete but with minor errors, they might be rejected (Surana, 2018; University of Virginia, n.d.).

These aforementioned policies include procedures that negatively affected the previously growing international student trend. For example, Alkanat (2011) conducted a phenomenological qualitative study involving 6 participants, who were either SEVIS Primary Designated School Officers or administrators and who had overseen the SEVIS process at their school. All of the participants had at least 15 years of experience working with international students, being familiar with the immigration system overseeing students' visa process. All of the participants described NSEERS as "unfair" and "not welcoming" towards students who were from Muslim majority countries such as Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (Alkanat, 2011). In their experience, international students who were from these countries were held to more extensive security measures compared to international students

from other countries. They were required to undergo biometric identification, reporting location/tracking, and increased surveillance (Johnson, 2016). It is unheard of that universities with international students and specifically their international student affairs offices report on international students' visa issuance, personal and family details, and attendance (Johnson, 2016; Urias & Yeakey, 2009). However, international students from predominantly Muslim countries and/or profiled as Muslims have become targets to rising xenophobia and Islamophobia in the United States with the added security measures they have to undergo. International students such as Muslims, Arabs, and Asian Indians received increasingly hostile treatment and suspicion when it came to receiving a visa (Johnson, 2016). This is partly due to the stricter and more extensive visa regulation put in place for migrants from the Middle East region. The terrorists involved in the 9/11 attacks were identified as part of an Islamist group, al-Qaeda who potentially entered the country through an international student visa. And therefore, there has been an increased level of suspicion placed on international students who come from the Middle East as well as Muslim majority countries for fear of suspected terrorist activity (Johnson, 2016).

Fast forward over a decade from the incidents of 9/11, immigration policies continue to change and shape the experiences of international students. The Trump administration's June 2018 effort to ban immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries once again affected Muslim international students negatively (Reardon, 2018). The travel ban effectively impacted individuals (immigrants and travelers) traveling to the United States from five majority-Muslim nations — Iran, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Somalia — and Venezuela and North Korea (Reardon, 2018).

The results of the ban likely increases the difficulties for students to obtain or renew

the student visas if they are from any of the countries banned. They are also subject to the increased scrutiny, racial profiling, and hostile treatment that comes with the United States' Islamophobic immigration policies and practices. For instance, Muslim international students have reported being singled out because of racial profiling (i.e., their attire, skin tone, facial features; Anwar, 2007). Toutant's (2009) qualitative study highlights the increased difficulties students from Africa, the Middle East, and some Asian countries face in the visa process. Toutant (2009) described the visa process post 9/11 as being more unpleasant for prospective international students from regions of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia than their European counterparts. In this sample, international students who were from African, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries recalled experiences of being subjected to tougher questions and stricter regulations more so than European international students.

That being said, with the patterns of stricter immigration regulation following 9/11, it is safe to anticipate the visa process to continue to pose difficulties for international students from predominantly Muslim countries following the 2018 travel ban. For instance, Rivas (2018) anticipated that the travel ban will affect international student enrollment in upcoming years. Ahmed Mohamed, referenced in Rivas article, who is a trial attorney of the Council of American-Islamic Relations highlighted these concerns, "The Muslim ban will deter international students from applying to schools in America. In turn, the United States and Americans will be deprived of talent that is instrumental to a thriving world."

Moreover, in an article on POLITICO.com, the drop in overall visa issuance in the United States from 2017-2018 was highlighted (Toosi et al., 2018). The authors described the steepest drops in visitor visas, which includes student, temporary workers, and tourists. The data analyzed by POLITICO shows that there is a 19% decline in visa issuance of some 50

Muslim-majority countries when compared to fiscal year 2016. The US State Department data show F-1 visa issuance in Muslim countries declining from fiscal year 2016-2017. For example, F-1 visa issuance in Iraq has declined by 53%, Iran by 24%, Libya by 64%, Saudi Arabia by 29%, and Indonesia by 33%. This decline in student visas are not unique to Muslim-majority countries. For example, there has been a 24% drop in students from China. Whereas, among European countries, the decline in number of visa issuance is a mere 0.12% for the fiscal year of 2016-2017 (Travel.State.Gov, 2017). Resources online speculate that visa issuance numbers among African, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries are declining due to stricter visa regulations, anti-immigrant rhetoric, and increasing competition of other higher education destinations (ICEF Monitor, 2018). However, ICEF Monitor (2018) stated that United States government officials have confirmed that the current United States administration has explicitly revised its guidance for consular officials in order to encourage greater scrutiny of student visa applicants.

These extensive immigration practices prior to arriving in the United States only tells one part of the international student experience. International students upon arrival will typically experience an ongoing cultural and socialization process described as acculturation (Berry, 1997).

Post-Departure Conditions Affecting Muslim International Students

Once international students arrive in the United States, they are likely riddled with mixed emotions. There may be excitement and relief for getting through the extensive immigration process but also anxiety or uncertainty of what awaits them. They are exposed to various cultural socialization processes within the host culture which they may not be familiar with. Research regarding international students' cultural adjustment or acculturation

process in the United States identifies various challenges such as English language proficiency, food and customs, limited financial resources, change in social network, and academic differences (Abualkhair, 2013; Dimandja, 2017; Rabla, 2017; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013).

Research on acculturation has found the process to be stressful across various immigration experiences (Berry, 1997). However, Yoon et al., (2008) research on Korean immigrants highlight the positive aspects of acculturation as a growth and learning process to enhance one's cultural competency. They found acculturation to have a direct positive effect on subjective well-being. Interestingly, they also found social connectedness to one's ethnic community increases subjective well-being (Yoon et al., 2008). Despite promising research findings on the relationship between acculturation and immigrant experiences, there is a dearth of research on Muslim international students' experiences in the United States (Dimandja, 2017; Tummala-Nara & Cladius, 2013). Many of the studies that have examined Muslim international students' experiences have been focused on Arab Muslim international students in Canada and much less in the United States (Abualkhair, 2003; Abukhattala, 2004; Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006; Mostafa, 2006; Seggie and Sanford, 2010; Shammas, 2009). The few that focus on Muslim international student experiences in the United States do provide some insight on Muslim international students' experiences after arrival (Dimandja, 2017; Tummala-Nara and Claudius, 2013).

The following section includes a review of Muslim international students' experiences in the United States, post-departure. The review will cover (a) language barriers: research on the educational and acculturative challenges experienced by international students, (b) financial and employment limitations: research regarding the stressors of

financial constraints, (c) racial/ethnic experiences: review of the effects of racial/ethnic discrimination on ethnic minority international students, and (d) religious experiences: research on anti-Muslim sentiments experienced by Muslim international students.

Language Barriers

In Western countries, English proficiency is viewed as a crucial component in opening doors for economic and social opportunities among immigrant populations (Dow, 2011). For most international students, lack of English language proficiency has been repeatedly reported as a common stressor (Akanwa, 2015; Banjong, 2015; Lin & Yi, 1997; Lin, 2012; Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Yeh and Inose (2003) investigated the role of self-reported English language fluency, age, gender, social connectedness, and social support satisfaction in predicting acculturative distress among 372 international students (undergraduate and graduate) from a large northeastern urban university. They found that English fluency was significantly related to lower levels of acculturative distress. Specifically, international students who used English in daily communication, had higher fluency level, and higher degree of self-reported level of comfort in communicating in English displayed less acculturative distress. Yeh and Inose (2003) found that higher levels of self-reported English fluency predicted lower acculturative distress ($R^2 = .05$, $p < .001$). Specifically, participants with higher English frequency and fluency, and greater degree of comfort speaking English, reported lower levels of acculturative distress because it may have helped create a more positive social interactions with English native speakers. As such, Akanwa (2015) highlights how Westernized instructional style that emphasizes student participation may prove to be difficult for international students who are not used to speaking up in class and are less confident in their English fluency. However, Akanwa (2015) also

emphasized the role culture plays in affecting international students who come from educational backgrounds that are less "active" or "interactional" than in the United States and may find a switch to a more active role in the classroom difficult. Overall, studies have found links between English fluency, social adjustment, and academic success among international students. For example, international students who feel more confident in their English language fluency may feel more comfortable and less self-conscious when interacting with American peers and faculty members and overall perform better in academic settings (Banjong, 2015; Chittooran & Sankar-Gomes, 2007; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Zhang and Goodson, 2011).

Abualkhair (2013) discussed how Arab Muslim international students are often maneuvering the communication and cultural differences that exist within the campus community. Difficulties with communicating can oftentimes create uncomfortable social interactions for international students (Barratt & Huba, 1994). Muslim international students who already experience challenges in communicating may find themselves with an added challenge stemming from cultural differences. With the lack of clear communication, cultural differences can often become additionally challenging to manage despite their efforts to integrate (Coilingridge, 1999). For example, Arab Muslim students, and Asian Muslim students who speak English as a second language might find themselves less likely to participate in class not only because of language difficulties but due to the academic culture they come from. Some of these cultures from which most Muslim international students come from regard it disrespectful for students to question professors or teachers (Abualkhair, 2013). In other international student populations such as those from Latin America, Wilton and Constantine (2003) found that Latin American and Asian students deal with greater

levels of stress in comparison to their European counterparts due to acculturative factors such as language and cultural differences. Overall, current research has examined the overarching international student experience but none of this research has specifically focused on Muslim international students' experience in the United States under a sociopolitical lens (Singh, 2017; Pottie-Sherman, 2018).

Financial and Employment Challenges

As previously mentioned in the literature review, international students are required to provide evidence of sufficient finances in their visa application process. However, once international students arrive in the United States, the financial burdens or daily expenses can add up and require securing funding opportunities aside from their family. There are complex and robust employment guidelines imposed by the DHS, which are outlined by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for each visa category. International students are mainly F-1 (Academic Students), M-1 (Vocational Student), and J-1 (Exchange Student) visa holders. Also, with the strict regulations imposed by the DHS on international students, relying on potential income through work or employment can be challenging. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) outlines specific employment guidelines for each immigrant visa category. For F-1 (Academic Student) and M-1 (Vocational student) visas, students are only allowed off-campus employment after completing their first year of education. Also, any off-campus employment must be related to their area of study and be authorized by the Designated School Official (the person authorized to maintain the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and by USCIS before starting work (USCIS, 2018).

The guidelines for on-campus employment do not require the approval of USCIS,

which makes the employment process more cost effective and quicker. Though it is a relatively easier option, international students are restricted to working 20 hours a week on campus and many schools require the international student affairs office to approve their on-campus employment, and may not even allow for first year students to work their first year (USCIS, 2018; InternationalStudent, n.d.). In addition, on-campus hourly wages may be inadequate to cover living and tuition expenses. Therefore, most international students cannot solely rely on on-campus employment to meet their financial needs.

Financial pressure adversely impacts international students' level of school performance and moderates their decisions to quit school or persevere in their studies (Bennett, 2003). It may be that financial pressure is particularly salient to international students who come from lower income households or countries with weaker economies whereby currency exchange rates are volatile, therefore affecting both their tuition and living expenses. In Geo (2008), among a sample of college students, those who had financial crises had poorer academic performance. These students, because they could not handle the stress associated with the lack of finance, ended up going to the counseling center to seek help.

In another study, Banjong (2015) found that among a sample of 349 international students, financial pressure negatively affected international students' academic performance. Students who may not have full funding for their education in the United States might rely on on-campus employment which is limited. They may then feel overwhelmed with managing their academics while accumulating enough financially to complete their education. Unsurprisingly, in a qualitative study by Lin (2012) with 6 doctoral level graduate students, financial resources and stability were found to be crucial to their academic success. Over half of the participants were not fully funded, and half did not receive financial support from the

university or their governments. A theme of "fear" was found across participants who were not fully funded and relied on either family support or part-time on-campus jobs to fulfill their financial needs. Even more so, individuals who had an assistantship and some family support, found it difficult to make ends meet and felt constantly worried about their financial situation. Nevertheless, racial/ethnic minority international students, face an added challenge of perceived discrimination which can add to the overall stress they experience.

Racial/Ethnic Discrimination

Perceived discrimination is commonly associated with acculturative stress, especially among racial/ethnic minority international students (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013; Wei et al., 2012). Studies have also noted experiences of overt discrimination due to Muslims country of origin (Rabla, 2017; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013). Upon arrival in the United States, Muslim international students have found themselves to be open to more scrutiny from airport and/or immigration officials. They have also found themselves to be portrayed in a negative light in the media by being associated with terrorists due to their religious beliefs and country of origin (Rabla, 2017; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013).

Studies have highlighted how racially discriminatory experiences have resulted in Muslims (American and international students) feeling targeted and second-class in the community of which they are a part (Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013). A study by Tummala-Nara & Claudius (2013) found that among the 15 Muslim international graduate students, there was a common theme of reported race-based discrimination compared to religious-based discrimination. Participants stated experiencing racially-motivated discrimination due to their phenotypic features which resemble stereotypes of Muslims or

individuals from the Middle East (skin color, facial features, accents, etc.). Individuals who appeared to have features resembling European ancestry were less likely to report discriminatory experiences (Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013). Studies have also found that individuals, particularly women who wear veils find themselves more vulnerable to unpleasant racial experiences and difficulties in feeling a sense of belonging on campus compared to their other peers (Abualkhair, 2013; Awad, 2010; Bevis, 2002; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003).

Specifically, there appears to be a rise in hate crimes against individuals who are Muslims (Kishi, 2017; Masci, 2019). Incidences of Islamophobic abuse, prejudice, racism, and discrimination and have been documented both within and outside the campus community (Abualkhair, 2013; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Heyn, 2013; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2014; McDermott-Levy, 2011; Seggie & Sanford, 2010; Schatz, 2008). Muslim students (both American Muslims and international Muslim students) have reported higher perceived levels of prejudice compared to those from other religious groups (Dimandja, 2017; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992).

Islamophobia

The term, *Islamophobia* is defined as the "irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against Islam or people who practice Islam" by Merriam-Webster dictionary (Islamophobia, 2019). After the events of 9/11, Islam has received media scrutiny mostly focusing on the negative rhetoric and display of the religion. Individuals who practice Islam or who are profiled as Muslims, experience backlash from the American majority culture (Pelofsky, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2017). The executive order introduced by the Trump administration infamously known as the "Muslim ban" prohibiting entry of citizens of seven

majority Muslim nations further propelled the climate of Islamophobia (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017; Pottie-Sherman, 2018). International Muslim students are not only the targets of racially motivated acts of discrimination, but also religiously-motivated attacks. A qualitative study by Tummala- Nara and Claudius (2013) found Muslim graduate international students identifying themes of difficulty in practicing one's faith in the host culture, negotiating symbols of religious identity, and reexamining religious beliefs. They found that women in particular had to negotiate misinterpretations, stereotypes, and assumptions about their faith due to wearing a *hijab* (Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013). For instance, Muslim international students may decide to conceal their Muslim identity by not wearing a *hijab* to protect themselves from discriminatory experiences.

Brown et al.,'s (2015) findings of Muslim international students in Britain highlight the continuous struggle Muslim international students' face in having to act as a spokesperson for their religion to fight against the denigrating effects of negative media portrayal. The media portrayal of Islam is typically described in simplistic terms and ignores the heterogeneity that exists within Islam and the Muslim community, often lumping all Muslims as fundamentalists and a threat to national security (Brown et al., 2015). The role of the media coupled with political rhetoric and policies against Muslims in general adds concerns for the overall safety of Muslim international students who are in the United States (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017). Overall, Muslim international students are likely to experience distress with expressing and practicing their religion in the United States due to negative perceptions of Muslims.

A study by Awad (2010) highlights the increased level of perceived discrimination Muslims face. In their sample of 177 Arab or Middle Eastern descent Americans, they found

a shared level of perceived discrimination due to their ethnic/racial background. However, upon further investigation of religious affiliation, it was found that Muslim Arab Americans reported higher levels of discrimination than their Christian counterparts - highlighting the role religious minority identity plays in discrimination faced by racial/ethnic and religious minorities.

Traumatic Stress and Muslim International Students

Recent studies have captured international Muslim students' concerns and experiences of being discriminated against in the United States not only due to their racial/ethnic identity but their religious background as well (see Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013; Awad, 2010; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017; Pottie-Sherman, 2018). Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood (2017) highlight the uncertainty, fear, and stress Muslim international students faced after the Muslim ban introduced by the Trump administration went into effect. In addition, Pottie-Sherman (2018) conducted a qualitative study with 18 recently graduated international students to examine their immigration experiences during the Trump administration. Participants reported fear for their safety (after the introduction of the Muslim travel ban) and discussed recent hate crimes (i.e., the shooting of two Indian nationals that led to the death of one in Olathe, Kansas by a White man spewing anti-immigrant rhetoric).

These aforementioned articles on international student experiences underlines the occurrence of possible racial/ethnic and religious discrimination. The international Muslim student populations are often not only targets of racially motivated acts of discrimination but also religiously-motivated attacks. Studies have shown that frequent exposure to racial discrimination among racial minorities increase risks of developing posttraumatic stress

symptoms, but we do not know the effects of religious-based discrimination on the development of posttraumatic stress symptoms. Therefore, it will be important to assess Muslim international students' experiences of racial and religious discrimination utilizing the race-based traumatic stress injury model as a framework to better understand their experiences.

The area of research surrounding race-based trauma is fairly new, but research has already found a strong association between racial/ethnic discriminatory experiences and posttraumatic stress (Carter, 2007; Flores et al., 2010; Pieterse et al., 2010; Wei et al. 2012). For example, Pieterse et al. (2010) found perceived ethnic discrimination predicted posttraumatic stress symptoms among ethnic minority college students (Asian/Asian American and African American students) after controlling for general life stress. Research studies on race-based trauma among racial/ethnic minority international students are fewer. A study by Wei et al. (2012) found that among Chinese international students, perceived racial discrimination positively predicted posttraumatic stress symptoms after controlling for general life stress, similar to the findings of Pieterse et al., (2010). Wei et al. (2012)'s findings expand current research findings on racial/ethnic international student populations and further emphasizes the association between racial/ethnic discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms.

It appears that current research has not utilized Carter's (2007) model of Race-Based Traumatic Stress Injury among Muslim international student populations. The Muslim international student population fits the criteria for increased risk in experiencing racial and religious discrimination with the rise in Islamophobia and race-based hate crimes which could contribute to posttraumatic stress symptoms. Therefore, this study intends to apply past

research findings from other racial/ethnic minority populations to identify the predictive power of racial and religious discrimination on outcomes such as posttraumatic stress symptoms utilizing the Race Based Traumatic Stress Injury (RBTSI) model (Carter, 2007).

Perceived Climate

The term climate can be defined as the way individuals perceive their environments (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). However, most literature on student populations, specifically students of color have focused on *campus climate* as a construct. Campus climate is described as the behaviors, attitudes, perceptions, and practices that cumulatively reflect an institution and its members (Hurtado et al., 1998; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). In campus climate literature, climate is operationalized to reflect a warm, comfortable, hostile, or tense environment based on the observation an individual makes (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). For example, an individual could describe their campus as "hostile" and "unwelcoming" based on racist or Islamophobic comments made by a group of students.

Current research underscores that students of color (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans and Latinx) feel isolated, powerless, and experience negative health-related outcomes due to racial and ethnic discrimination on campus (Arellano & Vue, 2019; Sanchez, 2019; Pietrese et al., 2010; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Findings on campus racial climate have found that there exist differences in perceptions across racial groups. For example, a study by Pietrese et. al (2010) found that among a sample of 289 ethnically diverse undergraduate students (170 White/European American students, 47 Black/African American, 71 Asian/Asian American), Asian and Black students reported higher instances of discrimination. Black students reported the highest level of discrimination (M = 35.02) compared to White (M = 21.05) and Asian students (M = 26.31) on campus. Black students

(*M* = 8.97*)* and Asian students (*M* = 7.64) reported significantly higher perceived campus racial climate than White students (*M* = 7.42). Furthermore, through hierarchical regression analysis, the authors found when general life stress is controlled for, perception of discrimination predicted an additional 10% variance in trauma-related symptoms for Black students ($\Delta R^2 = .10$, $p = .020$) and racial climate did not ($\Delta R^2 = .00$, $p = .86$). For Asian students, after controlling for general life stress, both perception of discrimination ($\Delta R^2 = .04$, $p = .047$) and campus racial climate ($\Delta R^2 = .07$, $p = .005$) contributed to additional trauma-related symptoms ($\Delta R^2 = .04$, $p = .005$). Therefore, this study shows the potential differences of racial climate across racial/ethnic minority groups.

Overall, in the current literature there has been a focus on climate within the campus or university context. In a qualitative study by Mwangi et al., (2018), they express the lack of applying a broader societal racial climate lens to studies on campus racial climates. Among a sample of Black students, they found themes related to students contextualizing campus racial climate to current United States' racial climate, therefore taking on a larger sociopolitical lens. Students also reported being very aware of the racial tensions in the United States through media and personal experiences. They described seeing a clear similarity between national or societal racial climates on their lives and on campus. Therefore, it may be useful to not only examine the role of campus climate on perceived discrimination but the overarching societal role involved.

To date, there has been no specific study that has investigated the relationship between Muslim international students' experiences and campus climate and/or societal climate. Existing literature suggests that Muslim international students experience discrimination based on their religious and racial identities. Taking the intersection of this

population's racial and religious identity, it will be important to conceptualize their perceptions of both racial and religious tensions in the United States. Therefore, this study will explore Muslim international students' perception of the current climate in the United States which includes campus, societal, and nationalistic dimensions.

Social Connectedness: A Higher Level Construct

In considering the Muslim international students' perceived climate, initial research has highlighted its relationship with feelings of belongingness, isolation, and alienation (Rabia, 2017). Therefore, social connectedness refers to a type of belongingness that individuals experience through constructs of self-psychology: identification and belongingness to their social environment (Lee & Robbins, 1995, 1998). Social connectedness was first introduced by Lee and Robbins (1995) as a construct related to Kohut's self-psychology (1971, 1977, 1984). It can be described as the subjective sense of interpersonal closeness and togetherness towards one's social world. Social connectedness can also be conceptualized as a higher-order construct of social support by taking into account an individual's perception of their social environment rather than the quantity or quality of their relationships (Lee & Robbins, 1995, Wei et al., 2012). Individuals internalize social experiences over time and form a pervasive sense of connectedness, which then becomes relatively stable across relationships (Yoon et al., 2012).

Until recently, social connectedness (SC) as a construct was broken down into two components: Ethnic SC and Mainstream SC to help capture ethnic minorities' experience of paradoxically existing in both the ethnic and mainstream community. The concepts of Ethnic SC and Mainstream SC were culminated by integrating concepts of acculturation and enculturation (i.e., the process of retaining one's traditional or ethnic cultural values and

norms while living within a dominant culture; Yoon et al., 2013; Yoon, 2006).

Ethnic SC is defined as perceptions of subjective closeness and togetherness in one's ethnic community. Perceptions of subjective closeness and togetherness in mainstream society or larger American society is referred to as Mainstream SC (Yoon, 2006). Unlike general social connectedness, which is strongly related to personality factors such as extraversion (r = .55 to .58), specific community social connectedness had moderate associations (r = .34 to .44, Yoon et al., 2012). In addition, Yoon et al., (2012) hypothesized and found support for specific community social connectedness (i.e., Ethnic SC and Mainstream SC) being independent and explaining unique variance beyond general social connectedness in relation to ethnic minorities' subjective well-being.

Moreover, various studies have documented the role of social relationships and variables-alike (i.e., social connectedness) in positive psychological and physical outcomes (Yoon et al., 2008; Yoon et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2012). It has also consistently been found that positive social relationships are related to increased well-being. A study by Yoon et al., (2008) examined the association between acculturation/enculturation and subjective well-being with social connectedness as a mediator among Korean immigrants. The authors found that while social connectedness in the ethnic community (ethnic SC) fully mediated or explained the relationship between enculturation and subjective well-being, social connectedness within the mainstream community (mainstream SC) partially mediated the relationship between acculturation and subjective well-being. Their findings indicated that social connectedness is at least partially responsible for the positive relationship between enculturation and subjective well-being, suggesting that immigrants' closeness within their ethnic community is an important aspect of their overall well-being and can potentially

alleviate the stressful effects of the immigrant experience.

On that note, literature on social support among international students has found links between social support, stress, and mental health (Chen et al., 2002; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Chen et al. (2012) found social support from university student support services, such as the International Student's Office (ISO) to help buffer the effects of psychological distress and perceived racism. However, literature on the specific role of social connectedness among Muslim international students is limited. A recent study by Fatima et al., (2017) was conducted with a fully Pakistani sample of 150 men and women. Pakistan is an Islamic republic and has the world's second largest Muslim population (Esposito, n.d.). As such, Fatima et al.'s (2017) findings are relevant to the interest of this study. They examined the role of social connectedness as a mediator between self-esteem and social anxiety. Results revealed that the relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety was fully explained by social connectedness. Another study by Asmar (2005), which was done on an Australian campus, examined the differences in international and domestic Muslim students' experiences at an Australian university. Findings revealed that due to religious differences, Muslim students in general lacked a sense of belonging and had difficulties integrating with overall campus culture. For example, Muslims' beliefs prevent them from consuming alcohol, which on campus can be a typical experience for most college students. However, Muslim international students seemed to experience more trouble with feeling a sense of belongingness when compared to local Muslim students. Due to their religious beliefs and cultural differences (i.e., alcohol consumption, and women wearing a *hijab)*, Asmar (2005) found that both local and international Muslim students felt some level of disconnection from

the campus community.

In addition, Yeh and Inose's (2003) study found social connectedness among international students to be the most significant contributor in predicting acculturative stress (18% of variance explained in comparison to 11.4% of variance accounted for by region, and 5.2% variance explained by English fluency). Furthermore, they found that non-European international students, including Asians (M = 3.22, SD = .83), Africans (M = 3.02, SD = .95), and Latin/Central American international students (M = 2.92, SD = .97) were significantly more likely to experience higher levels of acculturative stress compared to their European counterparts (M = 2.40, SD = .80). The authors explained that social connectedness may be more important for individuals from collectivistic cultures which include Asians, African, and Latin/American international students because of the emphasis that's placed on interdependence and social connections (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Although social connectedness is important to all international students, those from collectivist cultures may be more vulnerable to the effects of losing a once stable social network (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Immigrants from more interdependent cultures who highly value interpersonal connections coupled with losing their existing social network (which tends to happen after immigration) add to their experience of increased acculturative stress. With increased acculturative stress, international students from more collectivist cultures (including Muslim culture) are at risk for negative mental health outcomes when they lose a substantial part of their social connections (Fatima et al., 2017; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Yoon & Lee, 2010; Yoon et al., 2012).

A study by Rabia (2017) outlined the benefits of increased social support systems among Arab international students from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Oman, and Iraq in the United States. She found that while many had limited or no

friendships with Americans, they found friendships with other Muslims on campus or within the Muslim community immensely helpful. In addition, individuals who had family in the United States experienced less homesickness. Also, those who have lived in the United States for a longer period of time found it easier to form intercultural relationships due to increased acculturation. The participants also cited student support services, such as student success departments, as helpful in improving their English fluency when it came to successfully completing assignments. Some participants also cited participating in extracurricular activities allowed them to extend their social support system by meeting both local and other international students, which helped prevent feelings of isolation. Therefore, for this study, we examine social connectedness to the Muslim community and the larger mainstream community.

Religion as a Coping Mechanism

Using religion as a resource to overcome major stressors in life has been documented in research over the years (i.e., *religious coping;* Gardner et al., 2014; Park et al., 2018; Van Dyke & Elias; 2007). In contemporary literature, religious coping is conceptualized as either positive or negative religious coping. Positive religious coping is described as feeling confident and trusting of God whereas negative religious coping paints an insecure relationship with God. Positive religious coping strategies include seeking religious support and making benevolent religious reappraisals. Negative religious coping includes strategies such as religious discontent and making punitive religious reappraisals (Hebert et al., 2009 cited in Park et al., 2018).

In a longitudinal study done over 2.5 years, researchers found positive and negative religious coping styles to independently predict well-being indicators (depression, anxiety,

self-esteem, and meaning in life) among African Americans (Park et al., 2018). In Koenig and Larson's (2001) review of over 850 articles findings revealed that about two-thirds of the studies found a positive relationship between religious coping and mental health. It appears that recent literature on religious coping indicate its potential for reducing negative mental health outcomes (ie., depressive symptoms, anxiety, PTSD symptoms; Park et al., 2018) while increasing level of happiness (Lewis & Cruise, 2006; Sahraian et al., 2013).

There is a dearth in the literature investigating religious coping among Muslim international students in a non-Muslim country (Gardner et al., 2014). However, there are a small number of studies that have investigated the role of religion among Muslims living in a non-Muslim country (Asmar, 2005; Braam et al., 2010; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013). Given the lack of studies on religious coping among Muslim international students in the United States, I included reviews of studies examining religiosity among Muslim international students, Muslims in the United States, and Muslims who are minorities in the country they live in.

Specifically, research has indicated that religion for Muslims in the United States can act as an important source of social connection and or social support. Religious coping among Muslims in the United States show usefulness in managing the stress of adjusting to a new environment (Asmar, 2005; Tummala-Nara and Claudius, 2013). Although Muslim international students come from various countries, each with its unique culture and tradition, they share a common religious tradition, Islam, which in the United States is regarded in a negative light (Tummala-Nara and Claudius, 2013). The mainstream perception of these students as foreign from the general population in the United States can contribute to a shared experience as racial and religious minorities (Fine & Sirin, 2008; Tummala-Nara &

Claudius, 2013).

In addition, a year long ethnographic study by Brown (2009) found that among Muslim international students in the United Kingdom, many found their religious affiliation to act as a medium for fostering friendships across nationality and cultures. In the sample of 150 graduate students of different religious groups (i.e., Buddhist, Hindus, and Christians) it was among Muslim students that faith emerged as a central theme to their adjustment experience. Brown (2009) discussed the way Islam acts as a medium that allows individuals of various cultures and nationalities to find commonality through their religious affiliation. The students who were interviewed in this ethnographic study discussed the ease of establishing a relationship with other students who are Muslims, especially at a time when the majority culture in the United Kingdom saw a rise in Islamophobia. The participants also discussed the importance of having a shared experience through cultural practices to help overcome the feelings of loneliness and alienation during times of religious significance. For instance, practicing the *Ramadan* fast and celebrating *Eid Mubarak* with individuals of similar faith but different cultural backgrounds evoked a sense of "home" and belonging. The participants spoke of how it was easier to overcome the challenges of fasting in a Christian country with friends who understood their experiences

Moreover, having friendships formed through an Islamic religious affiliation helped ameliorate the negative effects of practicing their religion in a non-Muslim majority country with anti-Islamic sentiments (Brown, 2009). Notably, many of the Muslim participants in this study spoke of a sense of security they felt within their religious community. An example of a female Muslim student withdrawing from interacting with non-Muslims after being verbally and physically abused for wearing a *hijab* helps illustrate why religion may act as an

important support system among Muslim international students living in a society with rising Islamophobic attitudes (Brown, 2009).

In a quantitative study examining religious coping among Muslim university students in New Zealand, Gardner (2014) found participants indicated very high levels of spirituality/religiosity. When compared to domestic Muslim students, Muslim international students used more positive and negative religious coping strategies. Gardner et al., (2014) suggested this difference of religious coping between domestic and international Muslim students could be due to Muslim students who live in New Zealand becoming more integrated to its culture and therefore finding other coping strategies to manage stress. In addition, for Muslim international students, positive religious coping was positively related to quality of life and decreased stress, whereas for domestic Muslim students, negative religious coping was negatively related to quality of life and stress. Their findings highlight the nuances of religious coping between international Muslim students and Muslims who permanently live in a predominantly non-Muslim country. Therefore, it is important to examine how Muslim international students in the United States may use religion to cope with being in a non-Muslim majority country.

Purpose Statement

Research on Muslim international students' experience in the United States is limited. Most studies that have been done are qualitative and focused on the psychological factors associated with educational and learning outcomes. The goal of this study is to expand the literature on Muslim international students' experience by examining their levels of perceived discrimination in relation to traumatic stress symptoms, utilizing quantitative methodologies. As mentioned earlier, Muslim international students may face specific

challenges related to their racial and religious background, given the rise in Islamophobic rhetoric and race-based hate crimes in the United States. Studies have found that Muslim international students often face more racial/ethnic discrimination due to their religious background, which further exemplifies the complexities of their experiences (Alkanat, 2011; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013). These findings may suggest that Muslim international students are more susceptible to negative psychological outcomes if they do not receive the required support to manage symptoms of distress specific to racial and religious discrimination.

The proposed study will expand the literature by examining the applicability of the traumatic stress injury model for Muslim international students with particular attention to the associations among perceptions of racial discrimination, perceived climate (exploratory), social connectedness, religious coping, and trauma-related symptoms in a sample of Muslim international students. Results from this study could contribute to the growing literature regarding Muslim international students' experiences in the United States while helping inform culturally-relevant interventions focused on coping through discrimination and feeling connected. I specifically propose the following hypotheses and research questions:

1. Muslim social connectedness will moderate the positive relationship between discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms after controlling for perceived general stress; specifically, high Muslim social connectedness will weaken the relationship between discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms.
2. Mainstream social connectedness will moderate the positive relationship between discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms after controlling for perceived general stress; specifically, high mainstream social connectedness will weaken the relationship

between discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms.

3. Religious coping will moderate the positive relationship between discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms after controlling for perceived general stress; specifically, high religious coping will weaken the relationship between discrimination and posttraumatic stress.

In addition to these hypotheses, I also investigated the following research questions:

1. Does perceived climate significantly correlate with posttraumatic stress symptoms?
2. Does social connectedness to a) Muslim community, b) mainstream community, and c) religious coping moderate the relationship between perceived climate and posttraumatic stress symptoms?

CHAPTER 2

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction and Review of the Literature

There have recently been significant shifts in the number of students from predominantly Muslim countries matriculating in U.S. institutions. The International Institute of Education (IIE) reported in their Open Doors report for 2017-2018 that there has been a 15.5% decline in the total number of students from Saudi Arabia (current total of 44,432 students). Additionally, there were declines in the number of students from other Muslim-majority countries such as Iraq (-15.3%; current total of 1,438), Libya (-18.8%; current total of 1,064), Syria (-12.2 %; current total of 726), Sudan (-7.7%, current total of 36), and Yemen (-21.4%; current total of 517). On the contrary, there is a reported increase in the number of students from Somalia from 23 to 67 students (34%).

Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2017) partly attributed the decline in Muslim international student enrollment to the uncertainty, fear, and stress Muslim international students faced after the "Muslim ban" introduced by the Trump administration went into effect. In addition, recent studies have captured international Muslim students' concerns and experiences of being discriminated against not only due to their racial/ethnic identity but to their religious background as well (see; Awad, 2010; Pottie-Sherman, 2018; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017; Tummala -Narra & Claudius, 2013). A recent qualitative study of 18 recently graduated international students that examined their immigration experiences during the Trump administration, showed that the participants feared for their safety due to an introduction of the Muslim travel ban and increase in the number of hate crimes. Participants discussed the impact of recent hate crimes (e.g., the shooting of two Indian

nationals that led to the death of one in Olathe, Kansas by a White man spewing anti-immigrant rhetoric; Pottie-Sherman, 2018) on them.

To further our understanding of Muslim international students' experience in the United States, we must better understand the intersecting role of discrimination based on their identities as Muslims and racial minorities. This could include examining the way race-based trauma and religious-based trauma (i.e., through racist and Islamophobic events) influence Muslim international students' overall health. There are only a few studies on Arab Muslim international students (Abunab et al., 2017), Saudi international students (Yakaboski et al., 2018), and a handful on Muslim international students (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Anwar, 2007).

Using conventional content analysis, Tummala-Nara and Claudius (2013) analyzed interviews with 15 graduate Muslim international students in the United States. They specifically examined Muslim international cultural adjustment experiences in a new environment by looking at experiences of acculturation, engagement with religion, and negotiation of social support. Their findings revealed five categories: (a) diverse views of the new cultural environment, (b) social isolation, (c) experiences of discrimination, (d) religious identity, and (e) protective factors in adjusting to living in the United States. Participants disclosed the struggle they faced with acculturation due to discriminatory experiences. Discriminatory experiences also appeared to be related to them feeling socially isolated in addition to feeling distant from their usual support system network (i.e., friends and family in their home country).

In addition to experiencing interpersonal discrimination, being a part of a historically oppressed group can also affect how individuals experience their environment or climate

(Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). Currently, most research on climate and marginalized populations have focused on *campus racial climate.* Racial climate, defined as behaviors, practices, and attitudes that reflect the level of acceptance or rejection of racial diversity, affects the way people may interact with each other (Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Chavous 2005; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003; Solórzano et al., 2000). Researchers suggested that a negative racial climate perception might be associated with poorer psychological functioning (Carter, 2010; Chavous, 2005; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003), which is related to trauma-related symptoms. Researchers have linked such experiences with racial discrimination to traumatic stress symptoms (Carter et al., 2005; Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2010). As such, this study will explore the potential effects of perceived climate on traumatic stress symptoms among Muslim international students.

In examining the role of climate on traumatic stress, several studies have focused on experiences of specific groups of students within the Muslim population, such as Arab Muslims, and Saudi international students (Abualkhair, 2013; Rabla, 2017; Yakaboski et al., 2018). In Yakaboski and colleagues' study, 18 Saudi graduate students were interviewed regarding their experiences on a campus in a mid-sized Western university in the United States. Participants indicated mostly positive experiences with faculty, some negative experiences with staff, and limited or negative interactions with American students. They described incidents of both covert (i.e., not being included in group projects, American students showing little interest in getting to know them) and overt discrimination (i.e., being called a terrorist, questioned for wearing a *hijab*, etc.). Participants painted an overall picture that showed a lack of cultural and religious understanding among local students, faculty, and

staff.

Abualkhair's (2013) qualitative study describes the experiences of eight Muslim international students in the United States by focusing on their classroom, curricular, and faculty interactions. The findings illustrate a mix of positive and negative experiences related to their racial and religious backgrounds. On a positive note, some participants indicated they have welcomed non-Muslims' desire and interest to understand their culture which helped them feel accepted amidst the negative media portrayals of Muslims. Others described instances of feeling rejected by peers and faculty members due to their Muslim and/or racial identity. In particular, among the 4 female participants, half described experiencing non-Muslims express negative reactions towards their *hijab*. One male participant noted a time where his instructor ridiculed Muslim women for wearing a *hijab*.

These two aforementioned articles on international student experiences (Abualkhair, 2013; Yakaboski et al., 2018) highlight the occurrence of possible racial/ethnic and religious discrimination. The international Muslim student populations may not only be targets of racially motivated acts of discrimination but also of religiously-motivated attacks. Studies have shown that frequent exposure to racial discrimination among racial minorities increases their risk of developing posttraumatic stress symptoms, but the effects of religious-based discrimination on the development of posttraumatic stress symptoms remain unknown.

Muslims in America

Following the events of September 11, 2001, Muslims and Islam gained increasingly negative attention across the United States (Anwar, 2018; Dimandja, 2017; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Consequently, views on Muslims and Islam became strongly related to terrorism and violence (Anwar, 2018; Lajevardi, 2016). In 2012, The Federal Bureau of

Investigations (FBI) reported a staggering increase in prejudice and discrimination against Muslim Americans post-9/11 (FBI, 2012). Then, in the 2016 United States presidential elections, we saw further negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims as a violent religion related to terrorism (Anwar, 2018; Lajevardi, 2016).

In 2017, an estimated 3.45 million Muslim Americans lived in the United States. There is no official count on the number of Muslims in the United States because the U.S. Census Bureau does not ask questions related to people's religion (Mohamed, 2017). The Pew Research Center (2017) estimates that about 82% of Muslims living in the United States are American citizens. Even though most Muslims are American citizens and of varied cultural backgrounds, many feel that the larger American community views them as "outsiders" or not part of the mainstream American community (Peffley et al., 2015; Pelofsky, 2011).

Complexity of the Muslim Identity

Muslims are typically viewed as a homogeneous group despite the diversity within this group (i.e., racial and ethnic backgrounds, national origin and immigration histories, and religious practices and participation), and it can be difficult to understand the intersection of multiple identities within the Muslim identity (Amer & Bagasra, 2018; Wang et al., 2019). Wang et al. (2019) conducted a phenomenological study with 11 Muslim Americans and explored what it means to be a Muslim American. Four main themes emerged: (a) a "built-in community," (b) "a lot of ethnic diversity," (c) "a religious practice," and (d) "a feeling that we all have to be a very united group." Many of the participants discussed the need to present as a homogenous group to portray a "united front" and "homogeneity" despite within group differences. Other participants acknowledged the beauty of coming together as a group

despite other social identities.

Given the diversity of this group, using arbitrary labels to describe Muslims is problematic due its limitations in accounting for heterogeneity within this population Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2011). For instance, the conflation between the term Arab, which often refers to people originating from the Arabian Peninsula or practice the Arab culture and customs (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), and Muslim, a follower of Islam, ignores the varying levels of religiosity within the Muslim population and the influence of national and racial/ethnic identity on this group (Bakalian & Bozorgmehr, 2012).

Restructuring of the Muslim identity. The Muslim identity has undergone significant social and political shifts since the increase in Islamophobia. With religious identity being at the center of the social and political conflicts experienced by Muslims, Byng (2008) compared the systemic social inequalities experienced by Muslims to those experienced by racial minorities in the United States. Byng argues that the ideas surrounding racial minority identity can be applied to religious minority identities, because concepts related to racial inequality, such as good versus evil, structuring of inequality through policies and legislations, and target for discrimination are also relevant to religious minorities.

Consider the institutionalization of the Patriot Act that introduced the Immigration and Naturalization Service into the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) and the creation of the Joint Terrorism Task Force. These institutionalized discriminatory practices veiled as policy propelled discriminatory practices against Muslim Americans. The changes in NSEERS led to a legal stance on monitoring and targeting Muslims entering or leaving the country solely based on their religious identity (Anwar,

2018). It also required the registration of Muslims, which essentially criminalized the Muslim identity. Muslims saw a resurgence in the rhetoric that they are a threat to American national security. Byng (2008) concluded that once Muslim Americans were formally marked for discrimination through policies, it was inevitable that they would face social inequality. A Pew Research Center's (2017) survey found that about 48% of Muslim Americans say they have experienced at least one incident of discrimination in the past 12 months. Muslims in the United States found themselves subject to increased suspicion, scrutiny, and distrust (Anwar, 2018; Byng, 2008).

The literature on the Muslim American experience post-9/11 points to a range of discriminatory experiences, including violence resulting in deaths. According to CNN, between 2015 to 2018 marked the first consecutive three-year annual increase of hate crimes and the largest single-year increase since 2001; a time where hate crimes targeted Muslims in America. (Berry & Wiggins, 2018). In 2001, the total number of hate crimes drastically increased from less than 30 in 2000 to 481 (FBI:UCR, 2019). Since then, the number of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the United States has been consistently high with at least a hundred cases per year. In 2015, there were 257 reported cases, in 2016 307 cases, and in 2017, 273 cases (FBI:UCR, 2019). Between 2016 and 2017, there was a 17% increase in crimes (FBI:UCR, 2017). The recent spike in discrimination toward Muslim Americans has been attributed in part to the attitudes and actions of the current administration, including President Trump's executive order to block travel from six Muslim-majority countries in January 2017 (Lowe et al., 2019; Pew Research Center, 2017).

Despite the drastic increase of hate crimes against Muslim Americans (FBI:UCR, 2017), Muslim advocacy groups such as the Muslim Advocate and Arab American Institute

argued that these numbers reflect an underreporting of the actual number of anti-Muslim hate crimes. These two advocacy groups' press releases expressed frustration that the FBI hate crime data did not include three severe racially-biased acts of violence during 2017 (Baddar, 2018; Muslim Advocates, 2018). For example, the death of Srinivas Kuchibhotla, who was shot to death in the city of Olathe after the assailant shouted anti-Muslim remarks; the fatal stabbing of Ricky John Best and Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche aboard a train in Portland, Oregon; and the killing of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville, Virginia at a Unite the Right rally were not included.

It is also important to note that there are differences in the way Muslim men and women are perceived (Ali, 2004; Asmar et al., 2014; Dimandja, 2017; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013). Muslim men are often portrayed as domineering as well as socially and politically violent, while Muslim women are seen as passive and oppressed (Ali, 2014; Asmar et al., 2004; Soltani, 2016). There also exist differences in the way Muslim men and women perceive the political and social landscape. For example, results from the Pew Research Survey indicated that Muslim women are more likely than men to perceive unfriendliness from many groups in society (Gecewicz, 2017). Specifically 69% of Muslim women reported that the Republican Party is unfriendly toward Muslims and 81% claimed that President Trump is unfriendly to them. In comparison only 49% and 68% of Muslim men think the Republican Party and Trump, respectively, are unfriendly toward Muslim Americans.

It is important to note that the multiple intersections of the Muslim identity (e.g., ethnicity, race, immigration status, gender, and religion) could potentially explain part of the differences we see among Muslim men and women's experiences. Asmar et al. (2004) found

in a sample of 175students (93 females and 82 males), that a larger percentage of women expressed negative or ambivalent views on university sense of belongingness, support, and satisfaction than men. The authors alluded to a *hijab effect,* meaning that women who wore a headscarf, veil, or *hijab,* were more noticeable as Muslims and treated differently due to their religious beliefs. Western beliefs and ideals tend to view the "veiling" of women negatively -(Dimandja, 2017; Soltani, 2017), and as a symbol of oppression, whereas for Muslim women the *hijab* is a symbol of being a woman and of cultural pride (Ali, 2014; Dimandja, 2017; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013).

In a study of college students by Tummala-Nara and Claudius (2013), women students reported negative responses directed toward them as a result of wearing a *hijab*, while their male counterparts reported being perceived as terrorists. Participants with visible markers (e.g., some form of veiling, accents, and darker skin tone) experienced higher levels of overt forms of discrimination compared to their Muslim counterparts who were less "visibly Muslim." Therefore, it is important to recognize the role that visible markers may contribute to the differences in discrimination and stressors experienced by Muslims in the United States.

Studies have shown that frequent exposure to racial discrimination among racial minorities increases their risk of developing posttraumatic stress symptoms, but the effects of religious-based discrimination on the development of posttraumatic stress symptoms remain unknown.

Traumatic Stress

Experiences of discrimination can be psychologically damaging and lead to posttraumatic stress symptoms (Carter, 2007; Wei et al., 2012). The lack of inclusion for life

experiences such as racial/ethnic discrimination in developing trauma-like symptoms in the fourth edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) led to the development of an alternative model of trauma introduced by Carlson (1997). Carlson's model of trauma takes into account emotional and psychological experiences that can result in the development of traumatic stress. Carlson described three components of traumatic experiences: (a) subjective perception of the event as negative, (b) the event is sudden, and (c) the event was out of one's control. Experiencing such trauma can result in posttraumatic stress symptoms, which include intrusive thoughts and images, avoidant behaviors (i.e., avoiding places, people, thoughts, feelings associated with the traumatic event), and physiological arousal (i.e., hypervigilance, difficulty concentrating, or sleeplessness).

Ten years after Carlon's 1997 initial stress model, Carter (2007) published the Race-Based Traumatic Stress Injury (RBTSI) model. The RBTSI model applied Carlson's (1997) traumatic stress model to view the emotional pain that arises from discriminatory experiences as the core stressor of trauma rather than the threat to one's life, distinguishing traumatic stress from PTSD. Carter's (2007) framework connects reactions to a specific memorable racial encounter to emotional symptoms that include avoidance of situations, hypervigilance, intrusive thoughts, depression, anger, somatic symptoms, and low self-esteem. Often ongoing discriminatory experiences, such as racist and Islamophobic events, can lead to traumatic stress symptoms (Carlson, 1997; Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2013). In a sample of 289 undergraduate students, Pieterse et al. (2010) found that Asian and Black students experienced more discrimination than White students. They also found that among Asian and Black students, perceptions of racial/ethnic discrimination significantly contributed to trauma-related symptoms (after controlling for general life stress). It is important to note that,

to date, studies have interchangeably used the terms “traumatic stress,” “traumatic-related symptoms,” and “posttraumatic stress symptoms.”

Utilizing the RBTSI (Carter, 2007) model in considering ongoing discriminatory experiences among marginalized populations could help us understand the intersection of race and religious trauma in Muslims in the United States. After the events of 9/11, Islam, individuals associated with Islam, and individuals perceived as associated with Islam experienced increased backlash from the larger American society (Pelofsky, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2009). In the years following the 9/11 attacks, incidences of Islamophobic abuse, prejudice, racism, and discrimination were documented in several communities, including on college campuses where Muslim international students were the targets of this discriminatory treatment (Abualkhair, 2013; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Gregory, 2014; Heyn, 2013; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2014; McDermott-Levy, 2011; Seggie & Sanford, 2010; Schatz, 2008).

Previous studies have shown the role moderators, such as social connectedness, play in mitigating the effects of perceived discrimination among ethnic minorities (i.e., Asian international students in Wei et al., 2012 and Korean immigrants in Yoon et al., 2010).

Social Connectedness

Social connectedness is a construct found to be related to positive psychological and physical outcomes (Yoon et al., 2008; Yoon et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2012), and could potential serve as a moderator between perceived discrimination and traumatic stress symptoms. It has the potential to mitigate the possible negative effects of ongoing discrimination, such as racism and/or Islamophobia. Social connectedness was first introduced by Lee and Robbins (1995) as a construct related to Kohut’s self-psychology

(1971, 1977, 1984). It refers to a type of belongingness that individuals experience through constructs of self-psychology: identification and belongingness to their social environment (Lee & Robbins, 1995, 1998). Social connectedness is conceptualized as a higher-order construct of social support by taking into account an individual's perception of their social environment rather than the quantity or quality of their relationships (Lee & Robbins, 1995, Wei et al., 2012). Various studies have documented the role of social relationships and variables-alike (i.e., social connectedness) in positive psychological and physical health outcomes. It has also consistently been found that positive social relationships are related to increased wellbeing (Rabia, 2017; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013; Yoon et al., 2008; Yoon et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2012).

Social connectedness (SC) as a construct is conceptualized into two components: Ethnic SC and Mainstream SC to help capture ethnic minorities' experience of paradoxically existing in both the ethnic and mainstream community (Yoon et al., 2013; Yoon, 2006).

Ethnic SC is defined as perceptions of subjective closeness and togetherness in one's ethnic community. Whereas, Mainstream SC is defined as perceptions of subjective closeness and togetherness in mainstream society or larger American society (Yoon, 2006). It has been found that the two constructs of social connectedness (ie., Ethnic SC and Mainstream SC) are independent of each other and explain unique variances beyond general social connectedness in relation to ethnic minorities subjective well-being (Yoon et al., 2012).

To our knowledge, the concept of social connectedness has not been used among Muslim international students. However, a study by Rabla (2017) outlined the benefits of increased social support systems among Arab international students from Saudi Arabia,

Kuwait, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Oman, and Iraq in the United States. The findings that while many participants had limited or no friendships with Americans, they found friendships with other Muslims on campus or within the Muslim community immensely helpful. In addition, individuals who had family in the United States experienced less homesickness. Also, those who have lived in the United States for a longer period of time found it easier to form intercultural relationships due to increased acculturation. The participants also cited student support services, such as student success departments, as helpful in improving their English fluency when it came to successfully completing assignments. Some participants also cited participating in extracurricular activities allowed them to extend their social support system by meeting both local and other international students, which helped prevent feelings of isolation. Therefore, for this study, we examine social connectedness as two separate constructs: social connectedness to Muslim community and social connectedness to the larger mainstream community.

Religious Coping

Religious coping may also function as a moderator between perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Studies have indicated that religion for Muslims in the United States can act as an important source of social connection and or social support (Asmar, 2005; Braam et al., 2010; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013). Although Muslim international students come from various countries, each with their unique culture and tradition, they share a common religious tradition, Islam, which in the United States is regarded in a negative light (Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013). The mainstream perception of these students as foreign from the general population in the United States can contribute to a shared experience as racial and religious minorities (Fine & Sirin, 2008; Tummala-Nara &

Claudius, 2013).

A year-long ethnographic study by Brown (2009) on Muslim international students in the United Kingdom showed that students' religious affiliation acted as a medium for fostering friendships across nationalities and cultures. The study, which examined students of different religious groups (i.e., Buddhist, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians), showed faith emerged as a central theme to the adjustment experience for Muslim students. The students discussed the ease of establishing a relationship with other students who are Muslims, especially at a time when the majority culture in the United Kingdom saw a rise in Islamophobia. The participants also discussed the importance of having a shared experience through cultural practices (i.e., *Ramadan and Eid Mubarak)* to help overcome the feelings of loneliness and alienation during times of religious significance. Moreover, having friendships formed through an Islamic religious affiliation helped mitigate the negative effects of practicing their religion in a non-Muslim majority country with anti-Islamic sentiments (Brown, 2009).

Purpose of Study

The area of research surrounding race-based trauma is fairly new, but researchers have begun to document a strong association between racial/ethnic discriminatory experiences and posttraumatic stress (Carter, 2007; Flores et al., 2010; Pieterse et al., 2010; Wei et al., 2012). For example, Pieterse et al. (2010) found that perceived ethnic discrimination predicted posttraumatic stress symptoms among ethnic minority college students (Asian/Asian American and African American students) after controlling for general life stress. Research, however, on race-based trauma among racial/ethnic minority international students is far less common, but some evidence has been documented. In a

study conducted by Wei et al. (2012), perceived racial discrimination positively predicted posttraumatic stress symptoms among Chinese international students after controlling for general life stress.

In this study, Carter's (2007) RBTSI model was used to investigate whether the Muslim international student population is at an increased risk in experiencing racial and religious discrimination due to the rise in Islamophobia and race-based hate crimes, and whether such experiences contribute to posttraumatic stress symptoms. In addition, this study examined whether social connectedness and religious coping buffered posttraumatic stress symptoms.

1. Muslim social connectedness will moderate the positive relationship between discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms after controlling for perceived general stress; specifically, high Muslim social connectedness will weaken the relationship between discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms.
2. Mainstream social connectedness will moderate the positive relationship between discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms after controlling for perceived general stress; specifically, high mainstream social connectedness will weaken the relationship between discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms.
3. Religious coping will moderate the positive relationship between discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms after controlling for perceived general stress; specifically, high religious coping will weaken the relationship between discrimination and posttraumatic stress.

In addition to these hypotheses, I also investigated the following research questions:

1. Does perceived climate significantly correlate with posttraumatic stress symptoms?
2. Does social connectedness to a) Muslim community, b) mainstream community, and c) religious coping moderate the relationship between perceived climate and posttraumatic stress symptoms?

Methods

Participants

To participate in this study, participants had to identify as at least 18 years old, an international student in the United States (holding a F-1 or J-1 student visa), and Muslim. An a priori G*power analysis determined that a minimum of 74 participants was needed for a regression analysis (Faul et al., 2007). However, a moderation analysis includes interaction terms, which required more participants to enhance statistical power (Aguinis & Gottfredson, 2010). Therefore, I planned to recruit a minimum of 170 participants in order to surpass the common recommendation of having 100 +10 (number of predictors) when running a regression analysis that includes interaction terms for a moderation analysis.

Of the 201 cases obtained, 68 cases (33%) were deleted as a result of significant missing data; specifically, 9 participants did not answer any items, 5 participants did not meet the criteria for the study (i.e., not an international student and/or not Muslim). The remaining 54 only completed the demographic items and/or the first set of questions on perceived general stress, leaving a total of 133 useable cases.

Participants mostly identified within the gender binary as women (n = 65) and men (n = 66); while two participants identified as nonbinary. Participants' mean age was 27. Median annual income ranged between $25,000-$30,000. Additionally, most participants in this

study were pursuing a doctoral degree (n = 64; 48.4%). As seen in Table 1, most participants identified as Asian (n = 52). The top three countries of origin were Saudi Arabia (n = 52), Pakistan (n = 16), and Bangladesh (n = 15). Table 2 shows that most participants were residing in Kansas (n = 15), Missouri (n = 53), and Oregon (n = 25; See Appendix I). Many were Engineering students (n = 35; see Appendix J). The mean for length of time in the U.S in years among participants was M = 5.00, SD = 4.57. Furthermore, 56.4% (n= 75) reported that they did not have any visible Muslim markers, while 43.6% stated they did - hijab (25.6%; n = 34), beard (11.3%; n= 15), beard and skin tone (2.3%; n= 3), apparel (0.8%; n = 1), Aqeeq ring (0.8%; n = 1), name (0.8%; n = 1). Participants reported the sizes of their campus as large (59.4%; n = 79), medium (35.3%; n = 47), or small (3.8%, n = 5*).* As seen in the Appendix H, most participants identified as heterosexual (84.6%, n = 110).

Table 1.
Responses by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	*n*	Percent
African	3	2.3
Albanian	2	1.5
Amazigh	1	.8
Arab	1	.8
Asian	52	39.1
Awan	5	3.8
Bangali	1	.8
Bengali	1	.8
Black	9	6.8
Hazara	1	.8
Indian	1	.8
Indonesian	3	2.3
Kurdish	2	1.5
Kyrgyz	1	.8
Malay	1	.8
Middle Eastern	8	6.0
Muhajir/Bihari	1	.8
North African	1	.8
Pakistani	4	3.0
Palestinian	1	.8
Pashtun	3	2.3
Persian	3	2.3
Punjabi	3	2.3
Sindh	2	1.5
Somali	4	3.0
South Asian	1	.8
South East Indian	1	.8
Syrian	1	.8
Turkish	9	6.8
White	3	2.3
Yoruba	1	.8
Total	132	99.9
Missing	1	.8

Table 2.
Responses by Country of Origin

Country	*N*	Percent
Algeria	2	1.5
Bahrain	1	.8
Bangladesh	15	11.3
Cote D'Ivoire	1	.8
Egypt	5	3.8
India	4	3.0
Indonesia	4	3.0
Iran	4	3.0
Iraq	4	3.0
Israel	1	.8
Jordan	1	.8
Kosovo	1	.8
Kuwait	4	3.0
Kyrgyzstan	1	.8
Lebanon	1	.8
Malaysia	5	3.8
Morocco	1	.8
Nigeria	1	.8
Pakistan	16	12.0
Palestine	3	2.3
Saudi Arabia	31	23.3
Somalia	4	3.0
Sudan	1	.8
Syria	1	.8
Turkey	10	7.5
UAE	2	1.5
UK	1	.8
Ukraine	1	.8
Total	131	98.5
Missing	2	1.5

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. A demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) was included with 16 questions about participants' gender, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, relationship status, number of children, religious markers, nationality, ethnicity, age, level of education, English fluency, length of time in the United States (in months and

years), state in United States currently living in, size of campus, annual income, and visa status.

Perceived general stress. The Perceived Stress Scale-4-item (PSS-4; Cohen et al., 1983; see Appendix B) was used to measure participants' general perception of stress. This measure acted as a control variable by measuring participants' general perception of stress. I used this measure to determine if posttraumatic stress symptoms accounted for variance above and beyond general life stressors.

The PSS-4 is a self-report measure that assesses the degree to which situations in one's life were perceived as stressful during the past month. This scale consists of 4-items. A sample item is "How often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?". Items are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*). Higher scores on the PSS indicated a greater level of perceived general stress. Total scores can range from 0 to 16. This scale has been used with Chinese international students (Tsai, 2011; Wei et al., 2012). The coefficient alpha for scores on the PSS-4 scale was .74 in Tsai (2011) and .63 for Wei et al., (2012). The construct validity was supported by a positive association between perceived general stress (i.e., PSS-4) and perceived discrimination among Chinese international students (Tsai, 2011). The internal validity for this measure was low, with a Cronbach's alpha of .62.

Religious coping. The Psychological Measure of Islamic Religiousness (Abu Raiya et al., 2008) consists of 70 items with eight subscales: Islamic Dimensions (which includes additional subscales - *Beliefs Dimension, Practices Dimension, Ethical Conduct-Do Dimension, Ethical Conduct-Don't Dimension, and Islamic Universality Dimension*), Islamic Religious Conversion Subscale -Short Form, Islamic Positive Religious Coping-Subscale-

Short Form, Islamic Negative Religious Coping Subscale- Short Form, Islamic Religious Struggle Subscale-Short Form, Islamic Religious Internalization-Identification Subscale, Islamic Religious Internalization-Introjection Subscale, and Islamic Religious Exclusivism Subscale-Short Form.

For purposes of this study, only the Islamic Positive Religious Coping Subscale-Short Form (IPRC-SF; see Appendix C) was used. The IPRC-SF consists of seven items, which assess for the extent to which Muslim individuals use positive religious coping methods to deal with general life stressors. This subscale includes items such as, "When I face a problem in life, I look for a stronger connection with Allah" and "When I face a problem in life, I read the Holy Qura'n to find consolation." Participants rated each item on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*I do not do this at all*) to 4 (*I do this a lot*), with higher scores reflecting more positive religious coping (score range: 7 to 28). In a sample of Muslims in the United States post 9/11, Abu-Raiya et al., (2011) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .95 for the IPRC-SF. Concurrent validity for the IPRC-SF was provided by positive associations with greater purpose in life, general well-being, positive relations with others, and negative associations with depressed mood, physical health, anger, and alcohol use. Cronbach's alpha for this scale with the current sample was .91.

Perceived discrimination. The Perceived Discrimination (PD) subscale of the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; see Appendix D) was used to assess perceived racial discrimination in the context of being an international student in the United States. Each item begins with: "Because of my different cultural background as a foreign student, I feel that…." Sample items are "Others are biased toward me" and "I am treated differently because of my race." This wording ensured that

students' responses to discrimination experiences were related to their experiences of being international students. The PD scale is originally an eight-item scale, but an additional question pertaining to religious discrimination was added for the purpose of this study (i.e., "I am treated differently because of my religious belief"), resulting in nine items. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale that ranges from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Raw scores on each item were summed to determine an overall score, which could range from 9 to 45, with higher scores indicating greater perceived discrimination. Coefficient alpha for the scores on the PD subscale ranged from .90 to .93 (Jung et al., 2007; Wei et al., 2012; Ye, 2005) for international students. Evidence for concurrent validity for scores on the PD subscale was evidenced by positive associations with depressive symptoms, general stress, and cultural shock, as well as a negative association with life satisfaction among international students (Jung et al., 2007; Wei et al., 2012; Ye, 2005). Cronbach's alpha for this scale and sample was .93.

Social connectedness. Social connectedness was measured utilizing two scales: the Social Connectedness in the Ethnic Community Scale (SCETH) and the Social Connectedness in Mainstream Society Scale (SCMN; Yoon, 2006). The SCETH was modified to be reflective of the Muslim American community rather than a specific ethnic community and therefore, renamed as Social Connectedness to Muslim American community (SCMA). The SCMA was used to assess a sense of connection, belonging, and closeness to other Muslim Americans in the community, whereas the SCMN was used to measure a sense of connection, belonging, and closeness to Americans in the U.S. society.

The scale items were modified to reflect the sample; "Chinese/Taiwanese" was replaced with "other Muslims in America" or "the Muslim American community". The

SCMA and SCMN (see Appendix E) have two parallel sets of five items. For example, the item, "I feel a sense of closeness with Chinese/Taiwanese" will be modified to "I feel a sense of closeness with other Muslims in America". Sample item of SCMN is, "I feel a sense of belonging to U.S. society." Participants were asked to respond using a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Each subscale's raw score (e.g., SCMA and SCMN) was summed to determine a total score (score range: 5 to 35). Higher scores indicate stronger SCMA and SCMN.

Coefficient alpha ranged from .94 to .95 for scores on the SCETH and .88 to .89 for scores on the SCMN among Asian international students (Wei et al., 2012; Yoon et al., 2012). The scales evidenced convergent and divergent validity through their associations with acculturation and enculturation (Yoon et al., 2012). The internal consistency for scores on the SCMN subscale in this sample was .88 and was .94 for the SCMA subscale.

Posttraumatic stress symptoms. The Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist (PCL; Weathers et al., 1994) assesses the presence of stress-related symptoms that correspond to the diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder in the DSM-5. The original version of the PCL has 17 items. For this study, the PCL-short version (six items; PCL-6; see Appendix F) was used. The PCL-6 was developed and validated through a series of comparisons among four abbreviated PCL versions (Lang & Stein, 2005). The correlations between scores on the six-item and 17-item versions were .97 and .96 in two independent samples (Lang & Stein, 2005). According to its authors, the questions may be worded generally to refer to "stressful experiences in the past" (PCL-C; Civilian Version) or to describe reactions to specific events (PCL-S; Specific Version). Sample items are: "Repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of racial/religious discrimination experiences" or "Feeling very upset when

something reminded you of racial/religious discrimination experiences."

Participants were asked how often they have been bothered by each symptom in the past month. The response scale ranges from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). The coefficient alpha for PCL-S-17 scores was .93 (Blanchard et al., 1996) and among Chinese international students, the PCL-6 was .89. Validity evidence was supported by a positive association (r = .93) between scores on the PCL-S-17 and scores on the Clinical Administered PTSD Scale (Blanchard et al., 1996). Each item's raw score was summed to produce an overall score (scores can range from 5 to 30). Higher scores reflect higher degrees of posttraumatic stress symptoms. Cronbach's alpha was .86 for this sample.

The Perceived General Climate Scale. (PGC; Jeevanba et al., unpublished; see Appendix G) is a 12-item self-report measure that assesses Muslim international students' perceptions of the racial and religious climate based on 3 domains; campus climate, city climate, and national climate. Each subscale consists of 4-items. Participants were asked to respond to each statement on a 5-point scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). .

This measure was developed utilizing The Racial Climate Scale (RCS; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003), an eight-item self-report measure that assesses perceptions of racial climate on college campuses. This measure was used as a reference to help generate items to reflect perceived climate in relation to racism and Islamophobia.. I used this scale to help develop items because of its established relationship with campus racial climate. The measure consists of two subscales; Racial Experiences (RE; 5-items), to assess the extent to which students view the racial climate as negative, and University Perceptions (UP; 3-items), to assess the extent to which students view the university environment as welcoming to

people of all racial groups. The authors of the scale reported reliability coefficients of .70 for RE and .74 for UP. In Pieterse et al., (2010), the reliability coefficients were .81 for Asian students, .76 for White students, and .66 for Black students. The validity of RCS has been established through positive associations with a general campus climate scale as well as significant racial group differences on the measure, with White students reporting fewer negative racial experiences than did students of color (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003).

Items were generated for the PGC to capture a perceived climate related to campus climate, city climate, and the larger national climate. Campus climate items were created to assess for perceptions of racial and religious-based discrimination among Muslim international students on their campus (e.g., *The racial climate of this campus is uncomfortable, In my opinion, this campus environment is Islamophobic*, and *The people in this campus are welcoming*). Similarly, city climate included items that assessed for perceptions of Muslim international students' perceptions of racism and Islamophobia of the surrounding city they live in (e.g., *If I had to do it all over again, I would come to this city to pursue my studies,* and *In my opinion, this city is racist*). Finally, the national climate included items generated to capture Muslim international students' perceptions of racism and Islamophobia in the U.S (e.g., *In general, this current political climate negatively affects me, The racial climate in this country is uncomfortable,* and *In my opinion, this country is Islamophobic*).

In addition, two doctoral level Muslim students provided feedback on items developed and suggestions for additional items. To pilot this measure, two undergraduate Muslim international students completed this measure. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was done to determine the suitability and interpretation of the scale. Please see the results

section for further analysis and explanation.

Procedures

Once IRB approval was obtained, I recruited participants through snowball and convenience sampling to garner as many Muslim international student participants as possible. Recruitment for this research study was posted on social media sites such as Facebook, Reddit, and Instagram. Emails were also sent to listserv moderators of international student offices and international student organizations related to Muslim student groups at several universities. All postings included a brief description of the study, eligibility criteria, and a hyperlink to the study.

The survey was administered via an online survey tool (www.qualtrics.com). The survey was presented in English. Participants indicated their consent after reading the informed consent and clicked "Continue" as an indication of consent with the study protocol. Participants were informed that the study's purpose is to "examine the Muslim international student experience." They were informed that the study would take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete, and that they could discontinue at any time without penalty. Due to the sensitive nature of the questions, health referrals were included at the end of the survey for the National Suicide Hotline and campus counseling services. All participants who completed the survey had the option to participate in a raffle worth $25 (24 participants would be randomly chosen) by providing their contact information (e.g., email address) on a separate link.

Results

Data Cleaning and Examination

To ensure normality of data, histograms were plotted for each predictor variable; all

were relatively normal in their distribution curves. Maximum and minimum values associated with each predictor variable z-score were assessed; there was no indication of univariate outliers (i.e., all were within the normal range of -3.30 and +3.30). Levene's test for homogeneity of variances had a nonsignificant *p*-value, indicating the assumption of variances across the sample of participants was not violated.

Multicollinearity was assessed by looking at the Variation of Inflation Factor (VIF) and examining Pearson *r* correlations. All VIF values were around 1, indicating that there were no issues of multicollinearity among the predictor variables (Warner, 2013). Pearson's *r* correlations ranged from -.025 to .588, also indicating no multicollinearity among the variables. The normal P-P Plot of regression standardized residual scatter plots shows that variables were linear. The Standardized Regression Scatter plot also shows that the results were homogeneic.

The Mahalanobis test statistic was used to examine the distribution of scores for each predictor variable, the relationship between pairs of predictor variables, and among the subset of these variables. A regression analysis was done with seven predictor variables to inspect the Mahalanobis distance values. Then, the Mahalanobis index was converted to probability of obtaining an outlier and saved as mh_prob using the formula [1- cumulative distribution function of Chi-Square (Mahalanobis distance values, degrees of freedom/number of predictors)]. All p-values were assessed and found to be above .001, thus indicating no multivariate outliers.

Zero-order correlations, means and standards deviations of the variables assessed in the main analyses are shown in Table 3. Correlation analysis was also conducted to determine any potential covariates by examining the relationship between all demographic

variables (age, gender, length of time in the United States, level of English fluency, and annual income) and variables used in the main analysis. The results showed that participants who had lived in the United States (in years), the higher their level of perceived discrimination, $r = .227$, $p < .001$ and posttraumatic stress symptoms, $r = .175$, $p = .05$ Also, individuals with higher levels of English fluency indicated more likelihood to have higher levels of social connectedness to mainstream community, $r = .174$, $p = .05$. No potential covariates were identified.

Several one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the relationship between visible Muslim markers (yes/no) and posttraumatic stress symptom, perceived discrimination, and social connectedness (i.e., Muslim and mainstream community). There was no significant effect of visible Muslim markers on posttraumatic stress symptoms; $F(1,127) = .063$, $p = .803$, social connectedness to Muslim community; $F(1,131) = 2.817$, $p = .096$, and social connectedness to mainstream community; $F(1,131) = .108$, $p = .743$. However, results indicate a significant effect of visible Muslim markers on perceived discrimination; $F(1,131) = 4.247$, $p = .041$.

Additionally, one-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine the relationship between campus sizes (excluding participants who are from small campuses due to low sample size , $n = 5$) and posttraumatic stress symptoms, perceived discrimination, and social connectedness (i.e., Muslim and mainstream community). There was no significant effect of campus size (i.e., small, medium, or large) on posttraumatic stress symptoms; $F(1,120) = .038$, $p = .845$, perceived discrimination; $F(1,124) = .157$, $p = .692$, social connectedness to Muslim community; $F(1,124) = .513$, $p = .475$, and social connectedness to mainstream

community; $F(1,124) = 1.917$, $p = .169$.

The mean perceived discrimination score in this study ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.71$) is higher compared to other studies on international students; Chinese international students ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.77$; see Wei et al., 2012; $M = 2.37$, $SD = 0.72$; see Ye, 2006), and with Asian international students ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.80$; see Wei et al., 2008). Similarly, scores on religious coping in this study ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 1.30$) were similar to other studies that found high average scores on positive religious coping measures with mean scores on the higher end of range of scores (Khan & Watson, 2006; Gardner et al., 2014). For example, Gardner et al., (2014) found that the mean score for positive religious coping (Brief RCOPE; Pargament et al., 2011) was 4.60 ($SD = 0.51$), highest score of 5.00 on a five-point Likert scale with strong ceiling effects.

Scores on social connectedness to mainstream community ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.91$) was also found to be similar to one other study with Chinese international students ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.22$;Wei et al., 2012). Scores on posttraumatic stress symptoms score was found to be higher in this study among Muslim international students ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.05$) when compared to those found in other racial/ethnic minority groups. For example, in a study with Chinese international students , the mean posttraumatic stress symptoms score was $M = 1.82$, $SD = 0.80$ (Wei et al., 2012), was $M = 2.04$, $SD = 0.72$ among Asian college students, and $M = 1.87$, $SD = 0.56$ among Black college students (Pieterse et al., 2010).

Preliminary data analyses revealed a positive correlation between perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms (see Table 3). The findings also highlighted that perceived discrimination was negatively correlated to social connectedness in mainstream community but not social connectedness to Muslim community. Perceived

discrimination indicated large negative correlation sizes towards each subscale of perceived general climate (i.e., campus, city, and national) such that higher perceived discrimination scores was associated to poorer perceptions of each perceived climate category. Additionally, a small negative correlation was found between posttraumatic stress symptoms and mainstream social connectedness. Moreover, as hypothesized, posttraumatic stress symptoms were negatively correlated to all subscales of the Perceived General Climate scale and with medium effect sizes.

Development of Perceived General Climate Scale

Because the Perceived General Climate Scale was new and had only been developed for the purposes of this study, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) utilizing Principle Axis Factoring (PAF) and orthogonal Varimax rotation was used to determine the factor structure of the scale (Yong & Pearce, 2013). Initially, the factorability of all 22 items was examined. First, the correlation matrix was examined to determine how many items had high and low correlation coefficients (r < +/- .30 or r > +/- .90). Secondly, the Kaiser-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .87, which is above the recommended .50 (Yong & Pearce, 2013). Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(231) = 1616.15$, p <.001). The diagonals of the anti-image correlation matrix were also above .50 for all items. Given all the above indicators, EFA was deemed suitable for all 22 items.

Using an eigenvalue cut-off of 1.0, there were 5 factors that explain the cumulative variance of 69.1%. Initial eigenvalues indicated that the first 3 factors explained 39.5%, 10.9%, and 7.7% of the variance, respectively. The fourth and fifth factors had eigen values just above 1.0 and explained about 5% of the variance. After substantive consideration, we decided on retaining the first 3-factor solution that explained 58.0% of the variance because

a) of the leveling off of the eigenvalues on the scree plot after three factors, and b) the lack of primary loadings and difficulty of interpreting the fourth and fifth factors.

We re-ran the analysis with 12 items. The 10 items that were removed included Campus Climate subscale items 1 (I feel unsafe in this campus), 2 (If I had to do it all over again, I would come to this university), 3(fit in with other students on campus here), and 4 (I feel left out of things here at the university); City Climate subscale items 9 (I feel unsafe in this city), 10 (If I had to do it all over again, I would come to this city to pursue my studies), and 11 (I feel left out of things here in this city); and National Climate subscale items 16 (I feel unsafe in this country's current political climate), 17(If I had to do it again in this political climate, I would come to this country) and 19 (The political climate in this country is welcoming). These items were deleted (see Appendix K for all item factor loadings) because they loaded (i.e., >.40) on more than one factor making them complex variables and/or where they were not significant to our model theoretically due to language relating to participants' sense of physical safety, likelihood of making the same decision to move to environment in question in hindsight and feeling a sense of belonging to the environment in question.

Results confirmed the findings of retaining 3 factors. The 3 factors explained a cumulative variance of 75.38% with eigenvalues above the 1.0 cut off. Appendix K shows the factor loadings after rotation using a significant factor criterion of .40 (Yong & Pearce, 2013). The total scale Cronbach's alpha was .87. The correlations among the Campus Climate, City Climate, and National Climate subscales indicate a moderate to strong intercorrelational relationship, ranging from r = . 44 to r = .83 (see correlation table). The Cronbach's alpha for Campus Climate subscale was .86, City Climate subscale, .88, and

National Climate subscale, .90.

Conducting the EFA allowed us to determine that the remaining 12-items on the scale identified as three subscales (i.e., campus, city, and national climate). Each subscale consists of 4-items. Participants were asked to respond to each statement on a 5-point scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). Campus climate items assess for perceptions of racial and religious-based discrimination among Muslim international students. Similarly, city climate included items that assesses for perceptions of Muslim international students' perceptions of racism and Islamophobia of the surrounding city they live in. Finally, the national climate, included items generated to capture Muslim international students' perceptions of racism and Islamophobia in the U.S.

A test of unidimensionality was done to assess the scale's ability to assess for perceived general climate as one factor with the sum of the 3 subscales (i.e., campus, city, and national climate). The one factor, with eigenvalue of 5.93, explained a cumulative variance of 49.4%. Therefore, all subscales were summed up to determine a general perceived climate score that can range from 5 to 60. Lower scores indicate a more negatively perceived general climate while higher scores indicate a more positively perceived general climate.

Table 3.
Correlation matrix for variables used in main analysis

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. PSS	—									
2. PD	.329**	—								
3. PTSS	.351**	.571**	—							
4. RC	-.214*	.004	-.117	—						
5. Muslim SC	-.214*	-.045	-.168	.487**	—					
6. Mainstream SC	-.161	-.283**	-.182*	.102	.348**	—				
7. GC-Campus	-.167	-.488**	-.390**	-.099	.117	.093*	—			
8. GC-City	-.184*	-.369**	-.308**	-.116	.140	.175**	.373**	—		
9. GC-National	-.298**	-.450**	-.464**	-.023	.227*	.234**	.257**	.521**	—	
10. GC-Total	-.224*	-.566**	-.470**	-.056	.186*	.296**	.675**	.832**	794**	—
Mean	1.347	4.950	2.457	5.526	3.415	3.156	5.209	4.454	3.278	13.541
SD	0.580	1.707	1.048	1.300	1.033	0.907	0.726	0.830	0.860	1.863

Note: PSS = Perceived Stress Scale, PD = Perceived Discrimination, PTSS = Post-traumatic Stress Symptoms, RC = Religious Coping, SC= Social Connectedness, GC= General Climate
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.*

Main Analysis

Frazier et al., (2004) recommendations were used for the moderation analyses in this study. All of the main variables involved in the analyses were mean-centered first before

being entered into the hierarchical regression models.

Hypothesis 1. A four-step hierarchical regression model was conducted to test hypothesis one, whether social connectedness would moderate the relationship between perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Perceived general stress (control variable) was entered in Step 1. Perceived discrimination was entered in Step 2 and social connectedness in Muslim community was entered in Step 3. The interaction term of perceived discrimination and social connectedness in Muslim community was entered in Step 4.

The results showed that perceived discrimination was a unique and significant predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by perceived general stress (the control variable), Step 2: F (2, 130) = 34.752, R^2= .356, ΔR^2= .232, ΔF (1, 130) = 45.418, p < .001. Social connectedness in the Muslim community was not unique significant predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms, after accounting for the variance explained by perceived general stress and perceived discrimination (Step 3: F(3, 129) = 24.089, ΔR^2 = .011, ΔF(1, 129) = 2.137, p =.146). Finally, the interaction term of perceived discrimination and social connectedness in the Muslim community did not significantly add to the model, Step 4: F (4, 128) = 19.452, ΔR^2= .019, ΔF (1, 129) = 3.876, p = .051. Thus, hypothesis 1 was not supported, indicating that the interaction of perceived discrimination and social connectedness to the Muslim community did not help explain the variance in posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by the main effects (i.e., perceived discrimination and social connectedness in Muslim community).

Table 4.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms from Perceived Discrimination and Muslim Social Connectedness

Variable	*B*	*SE*	B	ΔR^2	ΔF
Step 1					
Perceived general stress	.643	.152	.351	.123	17.845**
Step 2					
Perceived discrimination	.315	.047	.511	.232	34.752**
Step 3					
Muslim SC	-.079	.054	-.107	.011	24.089
Step 4					
PD X Muslim SC	-.012	.006	-.142	.019	19.452

*Note: SC= social connectedness PD= perceived discrimination *p < .05. **p <. 01.*

Hypothesis 2. Similarly, to test my second hypothesis a four-step hierarchical regression model was conducted to test whether social connectedness to mainstream community would moderate the relationship between perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Perceived general stress (the control variable) was entered in Step 1. Perceived discrimination was entered in Step 2 and social connectedness in mainstream community was entered in Step 3. The interaction term of perceived discrimination and social connectedness in mainstream community was entered in Step 4.

The results showed that perceived discrimination was a unique and significant predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by perceived general stress (the control variable), Step 2: F (2, 130) = 34.752, R^2= .356, ΔR^2= .232, ΔF(1, 130) = 45.418, p < .001. Social connectedness in the mainstream community was not a unique significant predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms, after accounting for the

variance explained by perceived general stress and perceived discrimination (Step 3: $F(3, 129) = 22.993$, $\Delta R^2 = .000$, $\Delta F(1, 129) = .016$, $p = .898$). Consequently, the interaction term of perceived discrimination and social connectedness in the mainstream community did not significantly add to the model, Step 4: $F(4, 128) = 17.742$, $\Delta R^2 = .008$, $\Delta F(1, 128) = 1.639$, $p = .203$. Thus, hypothesis 2 was not supported, indicating that the interaction of perceived discrimination and social connectedness to mainstream community did not help explain the variance in posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by the main effects (i.e., perceived discrimination and social connectedness in mainstream community).

Table 5
Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms From Perceived Discrimination and Mainstream Social Connectedness

Variable	*B*	*SE*	β	ΔR^2	ΔF
Step 1					
Perceived general stress	.643	.152	.351	.123	17.845**
Step 2					
Perceived discrimination	.315	.047	.511	.232	34.752**
Step 3					
Mainstream SC	-.008	.063	-.010	.000	.016
Step 4					
PD X Mainstream SC	-.009	.007	-.095	.008	1.639

*Note: SC= social connectedness PD= perceived discrimination *p < .05. **p <. .01.*

Hypothesis 3. To test hypothesis 3, a four-step hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test whether religious coping would moderate the relationship between perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Perceived general stress (the

control variable) was entered in Step 1. Perceived discrimination was added in Step 2 of the regression, religious coping in Step 3, and the interaction term (perceived discrimination x religious coping) in Step 4.

The results showed that perceived discrimination was a unique and significant predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by perceived general stress (the control variable), Step 2: F (2, 130) = 34.752, R^2= .356, ΔR^2= .232, ΔF(1, 130) = 45.418, p < .001. However, religious coping was not a significant predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by perceived general stress and perceived discrimination (Step 3: F(1, 129) = 23.509, ΔR^2= .005, ΔF(3, 129) = 1.014, p = .319). The interaction term of perceived discrimination and religious coping did not add to the model, Step 4: F (1,130) = 17.534, ΔR^2= .001, ΔF(4, 128) =.111, p = .740. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was not supported such that the interaction term of perceived discrimination and religious coping did not explain the variance in posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by the main effects (i.e.., perceived discrimination and religious coping).

Table 6
Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms From Perceived Discrimination and Religious Coping

Variable	*B*	*SE*	B	ΔR^2	ΔF
Step 1					
Perceived general stress	.643	.152	.351	.123	17.845**
Step 2					
Perceived discrimination	.315	.047	..511	.232	45.418**
Step 3					
Religious coping	-.077	.076	-.074	.005	1.014
Step 4					
PD X Religious coping	-.003	.009	-.025	.001	.111

*Note: PD= perceived discrimination *p < .05. **p <.01.*

Research Question 1. A correlational analysis was used to examine the relationship between the perceived general climate (i.e., subscales Campus, City, National) and posttraumatic stress symptoms (see correlational table). Results indicated a negatively correlated significant relationship between post-traumatic stress symptoms and perceived campus climate, $r = -.390$, $p<.001$, perceived city climate, $r = -.308$, $p<.001$ and national climate scores, $r = -.464$, $p<.001$. In addition, results indicated that poorly perceived general climate, $r = -.490$, $p<.001$, was significantly related to higher posttraumatic stress symptoms (see Table 6).

Research Question 2a. A three-step hierarchical regression model was conducted to test whether social connectedness to the Muslim community would moderate the relationship between perceived general climate and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Perceived general climate was entered in Step 1 of the regression, social connectedness in the Muslim community in Step 2, and the interaction term of perceived general climate and social

connectedness in Muslim community (perceived general climate x Muslim SC) in Step 3.

The results showed that perceived climate was a significant and unique predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms, Step 1: F (1, 131) = 28.411, R^2 = .161, p<.0011. However, social connectedness in Muslim community was not a significant predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by perceived general climate, Step 2: F (1, 130) = 16.679, ΔR^2= .001, ΔF(1, 130) = .233, p = .630. The interaction term of perceived general climate and social connectedness in Muslim community did not explain the variance in posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by the main effects (i.e.., perceived general climate and social connectedness in Muslim community), Step 3: F (1, 129) = 12.429, ΔR^2= .000, ΔF(1, 126) = .058, p = .809.

Table 7
Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms From Perceived General Climate and Muslim Social Connectedness

Variable	*B*	*SE*	B	ΔR^2	ΔF
Step 1					
Perceived general climate	-.236	.044	-.412	.161**	28.411**
Step 2					
Muslim SC	-.028	.058	-.038	.001	.233
Step 3					
Perceived general climate X Muslim SC	-.002	.006	-.019	.000	.058

*Note: SC= social connectedness *p < .05. **p <.01*

Research Question 2b. Similarly, a three-step hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test whether social connectedness to the mainstream community would moderate the relationship between perceived general climate and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Perceived general climate was entered in Step 1 of the model, social

connectedness in the mainstream community in Step 2, and the interaction term of perceived general climate and social connectedness in mainstream community (perceived general climate x Mainstream SC) in Step 3.

The results showed that perceived general climate was a significant and unique predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms, Step 1: F (1, 131) = 28.411, R^2 = .161, p<.001. However, social connectedness in mainstream community was not a significant predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by perceived general climate, Step 2: F(1, 130) = 16.598, ΔR^2= .000, ΔF(2, 130) = .060, p = .807. The interaction term of perceived general climate and social connectedness in Muslim community did not explain the variance in posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by the main effects (i.e.., perceived general climate and social connectedness in mainstream community), Step 3: F (1, 129) = 12.652, ΔR^2= .005, ΔF(3, 129) = .867, p = .353.

Table 8
Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms from Perceived General Climate and Mainstream Social Connectedness

Variable	*B*	*SE*	β	ΔR^2	ΔF
Step 1					
Perceived general climate	-.236	.044	-.412	.161**	28.411**
Step 2					
Mainstream SC	-.016	.066	-.020	.000	.060
Step 3					
Perceived general climate X Mainstream SC	.005	.006	.071	.005	.867

*Note: SC = social connectedness *p < .05. **p <. .01.*

Research Question 2c. Finally, a three-step hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to determine whether religious coping would moderate the relationship between perceived general climate and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Perceived general climate was entered in Step 1 of the regression, religious coping in Step 2, and the interaction term of perceived general climate and religious coping (perceived general climate x religious coping) in Step 3.

The results showed that perceived climate was a significant and unique predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms, Step 1: F (1, 131) = 28.411, R^2 = .161, p<.001. However, religious coping was not a significant predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by perceived general climate, Step 2: F(1, 130) = 17.170, R^2 = .249, ΔR^2 = .007, ΔF(2, 130) = 1.287, p = .259. The interaction term of perceived general climate and religious coping did not explain the variance in posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by the main effects (i.e., perceived climate and religious coping), Step 3: F(1, 129) = 13.048, ΔR^2 = .004, ΔF(3, 129) = .776, p = .380.

Table 9
Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms From Perceived General Climate and Religious Coping

Variable	*B*	*SE*	β	ΔR^2	ΔF
Step 1					
Perceived general climate	-.236	.044	-.412	.161**	28.411**
Step 2					
Religious coping	-.091	.080	-.088	.007	1.287
Step 3					
Perceived general climate X religious coping	-.007	.008	-.067	.004	.776

*p < .05. **p <. .01.

Discussion

This dissertation, based on the RBTSI model by Carter (2007), examined ongoing discriminatory experiences and the perceived general climate as they relate to Muslim international students' experiences in the United States.

This investigation set out to use a correlational research design to explore the relationships among perceived discrimination, social connectedness to mainstream and Muslim community, perceived climate, and religious coping in relation to posttraumatic stress symptoms among Muslim international students in the United States. Previous research has linked perceived discrimination and perceived climate to posttraumatic stress symptoms (Carlson, 1997; Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2013) with one study focused on international students (Wei et al., 2012). Additionally, social connectedness (i.e., to mainstream and Muslim community) and religious coping were assessed as moderators based on previous research studies that found social connectedness (Yoon, 2006; Yoon et al., 2008; Yoon et al., 2012) and religious coping (Asmar, 2005; Braam et al., 2010; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013) can ameliorate positive health outcomes for immigrant populations. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between perceived discrimination and perceived climate on posttraumatic stress symptoms, and the impact of protective factors such as social connectedness (mainstream and Muslim community), and religious coping among Muslim international students in the United States.

Preliminary Analysis: Development of Perceived General Climate

Previous studies have documented that racial-ethnic minority students (i.e., Black, Latinx, and Asian international students) tend to have more negatively perceived campus climates (Carter et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2012; Pieterse et al., 2010). These studies have also

found that poorly perceived campus climates are related to negative health outcomes (i.e., traumatic stress symptoms, depression, and anxiety). However, no specific study or assessment tool exists to assess for a broader perceived climate focused on Muslim international students' experiences. To assess for the role of the current sociopolitical climate of increased Islamophobia, the General Climate Scale was developed.

The 12-item General Climate Scale was first developed by utilizing the eight-item Racial Climate Scale (RCS; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003) as reference, through the feedback of two doctoral level Muslim students, then piloting the measure with two undergraduate Muslim students, and an exploratory factor analysis. The results of the exploratory factor analysis revealed three subscales (i.e., campus, city, and national climate). As expected, the correlational analyses revealed that PGC scale was significantly and negatively related to measures of Perceived Discrimination and Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms (note: higher scores of PGC meant a more positively perceived climate). Interestingly, among the social connectedness variables (Muslim SC and Mainstream SC), only Mainstream SC was significantly and positively correlated to PGC. This latter finding further highlights the important connection between perceived climate and a sense of social connectedness to the general American community.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis stated that social connectedness to Muslim community will moderate the relationship between perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms. As predicted, perceived discrimination and social connectedness to Muslim community were significant predictors of posttraumatic stress symptoms, with large and small effect sizes respectively, after accounting for the variance explained by perceived

general stress. This finding fits that of other studies that found social connectedness to one's community helped explain unique variance beyond general social connectedness which promoted ethnic minorities' subjective well-being (Yoon et al., 2008; Yoon et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2012). However, social connectedness in the Muslim community did not act as a moderating variable in the relationship between perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms in this sample. Though statistical significance was not reached, it is important to note that this may be due to Type II due to a small sample size which affected power. Additionally, it is possible that there may be subtle differences between feeling connected to the Muslim community and one's ethnic community. It is important to consider that one's religious community may not provide the same level of social connectedness when Muslim communities are very diverse in ethnic, racial, and national identities. This finding may be alluding to the complexity of social connectedness in the Muslim community above and beyond religious connection and towards national and ethnic identities too (Amer & Bagasra, 2018; Wang et al., 2019). Therefore, future research might consider assessing for social connectedness to participants particular ethnic or racial Muslim community.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis stated that social connectedness to mainstream community will moderate the relationship between perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms. In this proposed model, perceived discrimination had a large effect size in predicting posttraumatic stress symptoms. However, contrary to our expectations, greater social connectedness to mainstream community did not predict lower posttraumatic stress symptoms. While social connectedness did not explain variance above and beyond

discrimination, it was correlated with posttraumatic stress symptoms (see Table 3).

The rationale underlying this hypothesis was reflective of acculturation theory which posits dominant culture constraints (i.e., immigration status) interacts with strategies used in the acculturation process (Berry, 1994; Yoon et al., 2013; Yoon, 2006). Acculturation in this study included social connectedness to mainstream community (i.e., general American society). One explanation for non-significant results may be that regardless of social connectedness to mainstream community, effects of perceived discrimination still exist due to factors not assessed in this model. It could be that participants in this study did not feel very connected to mainstream United States society. Similarly, in Wei et al., (2012), among Chinese international students, mainstream social connectedness did not act as a protective factor against perceived discrimination. The mean scores of mainstream social connectedness in this study was also found to be comparable to Wei et al's (2012) study on Chinese international students. The authors indicated that a possible explanation for their findings is that if participants feel less connected and experience discrimination from the same cultural group, it is less likely for mainstream social connectedness to act as a moderating variable. Future research could explore if the moderation effect of mainstream social connectedness depends on a third variable. For instance, bicultural competence (i.e., the ability to function well in two or more cultural environments) is linked to positive psychological well-being in studies among ethnic minority students (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Wei et al., 2010) and ethnic identity has found to be a buffer against psychological distress among Muslims in the United States (Ali, 2006).In other words, something other than social connectedness to mainstream community may interact with perceived discrimination to moderate

posttraumatic stress symptoms.

It may be important to note that maybe social connectedness to mainstream community does not provide the same alleviation to negative health outcomes among Muslim international students as social connectedness towards the Muslim community would. For example, a study by Rabla (2017) highlighted the importance of friendships within the Muslim community as more helpful among Arab international students in the United States; this could help explain the lack of effect and statistical significance found. Additionally, a study by Yoon et al., (2008) found that among Korean immigrants, social connectedness within the mainstream community only partially explained the relationship between acculturation and subjective well-being. It may also be that the statistical analysis lacked power to detect an effect in this sample size. Regardless, it may be important to consider if social connectedness to mainstream community provides enough of a buffer towards perceived discriminatory experiences among Muslim international students.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis, which hypothesized that the relationship between perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms would be moderated by religious coping, was not supported. It is important to note that perceived discrimination had a large effect size and was a unique and significant predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the control variable. Additionally, results indicated that religious coping did not predict lower posttraumatic stress symptoms. The rationale for this hypothesis was based on the presumption that increased religious coping would be associated with negative mental health outcomes (Park et al., 2018), such as posttraumatic stress symptoms, and that decreased religious coping would be associated with higher levels of posttraumatic stress

symptoms.

To my knowledge, no other study has assessed for religious coping as a moderating variable between perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Given the dearth of literature on religious coping on Muslim international students in the United States, this hypothesis was postulated on studies that looked at the role of religiosity among Muslims living in the United States (Asmar, 2005; Tummala-Nara & Claudius, 2013). The results of this present study did indicate that religious coping was positively and significantly correlated with social connectedness to the Muslim community. Thus, perhaps the way we assessed for religious coping, which was focused on one's relationship with God, did not reflect previous studies which indicated religious identity and/or faith helped them cope with the effects of discriminatory experiences by helping create social connections with other Muslims and commonality through cultural traditions (Brown, 2009; Gardner et al., 2014; Tummala-Nara & Cladius, 2013). Therefore, it might be important to consider the role of religious identity or religious affiliation in helping buffer the effects of negative mental health outcomes among Muslim international students. It is also important to consider the diversity within the Muslim faith in which there are various forms of practice which may not have been captured by the assessment tool used (i.e., PRIM; Abu Raiya, 2008) based on the religious sect participants belonged to.

Research Questions

The exploratory analyses regarding perceived general climate revealed large effect sizes in the correlational analysis of relationship between each perceived general climate subscale (i.e., campus climate, city climate, and national climate) and posttraumatic stress

symptoms, with perceived city climate having the lowest effect size of the three.

Additionally, in the exploratory moderation analysis, perceived climate showed a medium effect size in uniquely predicting posttraumatic stress symptoms, which was reflective of previous research on the effects of negative racial climate (Carter et al., 2005; Carter, 2007; Carter, 2010; Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Chavous, 2005; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). However, protective factors (i.e., social connectedness in Muslim community and mainstream community, and religious coping) did not act as significant and unique predictors of posttraumatic stress symptoms above and beyond the variance explained by perceived general climate. There may have been a lack of power to detect the potential effect of the hypothesized protective factors due to the small sample size. In addition, there may be other protective factors that were not accounted for in buffering the role of perceived climate in predicting posttraumatic stress among Muslim international students, such as social acceptance and ethnic identity.

In summary, the results extend our understanding of contemporary sociocultural factors affecting Muslim international students while highlighting the difficulties in capturing the complexity of Muslim international student identities in a quantitative research design. Although moderation tests were not significant in that the interaction terms did not predict above and beyond predictor variables, strengths of main effects (i.e., perceived discrimination and perceived climate) highlighted the significance of the predictor variables in explaining posttraumatic stress symptoms.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The limitations of this study include 1) research design, 2) data collection and sampling methods, 3) psychometric properties of the measures, and 4) operationalization of

identity variables (race, ethnicity, and religion).Specifically in the current study, internal validity is limited by the type of research design used - correlational research. In this type of research participants are not selected at random, and conditions are not manipulated by the researcher. Without these key characteristics, causality cannot be inferred.

Second, the sampling method employed limited statistical validity. The snowball method, a type of convenience sampling, was used to collect responses to an internet survey. Convenience sampling introduces the problem of representativeness and results in limited generalizability. In particular, selection bias, as noted in the current study procedures, excludes individuals without access to the internet. With an internet survey, little control can be exhibited over the contexts in which data are obtained, likely resulting in threats to data quality in the present study. Non-responses to demographic questions occurred in part because participants were able to opt out of responding. Participant recruitment was also an added challenge, which led to a small sample size, a problem often documented within research focused on Muslims (Amer & Bagasra, 2013).

Particularly, in this study, the sample size, $n = 133$ was smaller than the recommended sample size of $n = 170$. I believe the small sample size affected this study's power to detect effect as evident by the closeness of reaching a significant p-value of .50 for Hypothesis 1 ($p = .051$).

Based on my dissertation timeline, I was recruiting participants in summer 2020. Recruiting participants for this study at the time had its added challenges due to the impact of the COVID-19. For example, many universities were moving their classes online due to health safety concerns but due to the stringent nature of student visas, international students are only allowed to take up to 3-credits of online courses therefore leaving international

students in a bind of either violating their visa status and/or having to delay their course of study. International student affairs offices and listserv managers were posed with challenges in helping international students navigate the changes related to the pandemic and some had to decline my request to help share my study with their students. Moreover, it is possible that potential participants were not interested in completing the survey due to increased anxiety about their international student status.

Moreover, similar to other studies I used convenience sampling, which may not be reflective of the larger Muslim international community. For instance, most participants in this study self-identified as Asians, a broad term that represents a wide range of regional, cultural, and religious differences, which is difficult to generalize. For instance, a small number of participants identified as White (n = 3; 2.3%). Given that the sample of individuals who identified as White was too small to compare amongst other participants, it is possible that their responses were not reflective of the results of the other participants who are both racial and religious minorities. It is possible that their religious identity is not perceived because of their racial identity (i.e., not being profiled as a Muslim based on phenotypic features) which may affect experiences of traumatic stress. However, it is also important to note that although some participants self-reported as White, they may not be perceived to be White in the United States and still experience racial discrimination. A Times analysis explored the complicated relationship of Whiteness among the Muslim American community by highlighting their reports of racism and Islamophobia (Parvani & Simani, 2019). For example, the analysis found that more than 80% of individuals of Southwest Asian, Middle Eastern or North African descent self-identified as White in past census surveys but many continue to experience racism and Islamophobia regardless of their self-

reported White racial identity.

Additionally, for this study, scales had to be modified and one created (i.e., PGC; Jeevanba et al., unpublished) due to the lack of culturally sensitive measures available to investigate Muslim international students' experiences. These modifications to psychometric scales may have affected the validity of the scores on the instruments. It is possible that modifying items used from a measure that was not created for my population of interests affects the measures content validity which may have affected the findings. Additionally, previous research studies by Soheilian and Inman (2009) found that language barriers often lead to misunderstanding or confusion of English phrases. Particularly, the PSS-4 measure had a low Cronbach's alpha coefficient. It is possible that the PSS-4 does not capture perceived general stress well due to cultural differences in stress manifestations, particularly among a mostly Asian sample. Similar to Wei et al., (2012), I re-ran the analysis without the scale and the significance pattern found was identical to the results with the PSS-4 included. Therefore, the low Cronbach's alpha reliability of this measure did not seem to affect the study's findings. Additionally, using a measure I created for this study poses its own challenges. For example, the PGC scale items created were made specifically to help measure perceive climate among Muslim international students in the U.S. Operationalization and personal biases may affect the way I conceptualized and interpreted the measure and therefore effecting the overall content validity (Morgado et al., 2018).

Lastly, researchers have documented the challenges with psychological research approaches used to examine the experiences of Muslims in the United States (Amer & Bagasara, 2013; Wang et al., 2019) due to issues with operationalizing identity variables. As previously noted by Amer and Bagasra (2013) and Wang et al. (2019), this study was unable

to separate the effects of religious identity, race, and ethnicity due to the inherent diversity among Muslims, which led to encouraging participants to focus on their experiences as a "Muslim international student." Doing so, may have led to losing the nuances in the complexities of their identities. Additionally, similar to other studies (Gardner, 2004; Abu-Raiya et al., 2007) this study had a high mean score and low variance (M = 5.53, SD = 1.30) on religious coping which makes it difficult to detect any effects. Taken together, the moderating models proposed in this study lacked adequate sample size, relied on proxy measures, and likely presented oversimplification of the process.

Future research directions. Future researchers may want to improve the sampling method by targeting a specific population of Muslim international students to address the issue of representativeness or external validity of the study. For instance, future research may improve external validity by focusing on Muslim international students from a specific ethnic group and/or nationality (Amer & Bagasra, 2013). Additionally, future research can improve upon internal validity by utilizing research tools such as questionnaires and measures developed with the participation of the community. This can be done by involving Muslim international students with shared identities to the target population of interest in the process of developing questionnaires to ensure cultural sensitivity and relevance.

The moderation analyses were all found to be non-significant. The lack of effect could be 1) due to a small sample size being unable to generate enough power to detect effect causing a Type II error and/or 2) a third variable not explored in this study. To increase data collection, future studies may consider using an already established connection with individuals involved with Muslim international students (i.e., Muslim student organizations

and local religious leaders) to help with data collection. Additionally, future studies might explore the role of racial or ethnic identity as a moderating variable due to recent research findings on its role in decreasing psychological distress (Ali, 2006; Abu-Rayya et al., 2011; Nguyen et al., 2015).

Moreover, the development of the PGC scale helps future researchers expand their assessment of Muslim students' perception of a general sociopolitical climate beyond campus climate. The PGC scale can be used to assess a broader perceived climate unlimited to campus climate to capture Muslim immigrants' experiences in the United States by taking into consideration both city/town and national climate. In particular, this study found that all three subscales (i.e., campus climate, city climate, and national climate) of the PGC scale had large correlational effect sizes to both perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms. This measure helps address and amplify the need for more culturally sensitive psychometric measures for Muslims in America. Thus, future studies may want to consider conducting reliability and validity studies to assess for its use among specific Muslim international student populations based on ethnic and/or racial identities.

Future research could focus on expanding this study's research aims by doing a qualitative research design. It may be helpful to conduct interviews and focus groups in participants' preferred language for a more culturally sensitive research methodology by discussing participants' experience with the current sociopolitical climate and uncover specific protective factors used to manage the stressors. Wang et al., (2019) documented the need to "explore the experiences of Muslim Americans, in an exploratory, interpretivist manner" (p. 7), which can be expanded to include research on Muslim international

students.

Theoretical & Clinical Implications

As counseling psychologists, understanding the effects of perceived discrimination related to religious identity and immigration status during a socio-politically turbulent time is important to better support and advocate for Muslim international students living in the United States.

The findings of this study suggest that perceived discrimination is an important topic to discuss when working with Muslim international students. This is the first study, to my knowledge, to apply the RBTSI model to traumatic stress experienced by Muslim international students. I believe that this study provides support that traumatic stress symptoms can be experienced by racial and religious minorities in the U.S. The RBTSI model (Carter, 2007), though currently focused on racial-based discrimination, is helpful in conceptualizing the impact of discrimination on multiple levels of marginalized identities (i.e., racial and religious). I believe that the results of this study help provide evidence that the RBTSI model (Carter, 2007) can be used to account for religious discrimination, such as Islamophobia, in understanding traumatic stress. It is my hope that Carter's (2007) model can be used to understand marginalized identities through the lens of intersectionality. Therefore, helping professionals when working with Muslim international students should assess for perceived discrimination experiences related to religious identity, racial identity, and immigration status. Helping professionals can also assess for posttraumatic stress symptoms related to their experiences of perceived discrimination. Additionally, discussing topics surrounding the external influences and effects of a sociopolitical climate of ongoing Islamophobia, anti-immigration policies specific to restrictions on international students in

the United States, and xenophobia may help Muslim international students feel understood and supported. Numerous studies have found that clients appreciate and have higher satisfaction when their counselors show cultural sensitivity and awareness (Chang & Berk, 2009; Jones et al., 2017; Meyer & Zane, 2013; Wade & Bernstein, 1991).

Although we did not find a significant moderation effect of Muslim SC and Mainstream SC, we did find that these variables had significant negative bivariate relationships with perceived discrimination and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Given these results may be important for helping professionals to help Muslim international students find ways to connect to both their own cultural community and the American community. It is important to note that though both Muslim SC and Mainstream SC were not found to be significant moderators in the model hypothesized, Muslim SC was much closer to statistical significance, had a larger effect size or variance explained than Mainstream SC. It may be that both are helpful but connection within one's own ethnic and/or religious community is more valuable during a sociopolitically strained time. Helping professionals can also go further and work with the university level administration to advocate for creating spaces and opportunities for Muslim international students to make these social connections so the burden is not solely on the student. Resources provided by national organizations such as NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) advocate for Muslim American rights, and the Counseling Psychology- International section (ICP) can be shared university-wide to promote, support and advocate for international professionals, scholars, and student rights in the United States.

It is also important for helping professionals to know the basics of immigration policies and policy changes affecting international students in the United States, particularly

those from Muslim majority countries. General understanding of visa types, employment limitations, and recent policy restrictions can help facilitate conversations surrounding fears living in the United States during the Trump era. Individuals working with international students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with immigration terms they may be unfamiliar with and to research, consult, and expand their understanding of current immigration policies. Immigration processes and policies are so erratic lately that it may be confusing for both international students and individuals who work with them. Therefore, openly discussing these issues can help Muslim international students feel more comfortable sharing their traumatic experiences.

In conclusion, this study adds to the literature by emphasizing the importance of considering the effects of specific social and political changes, in both research and clinical practices, on targeted groups such as Muslim international students. This study further emphasizes the need for future research to consider the intersection of multiple identities such as race, religion, and immigration status when examining the Muslim international student experience. It is the hope of this researcher that given the current sociocultural climate, researchers will continue to examine the experience of Muslims in America and international students to better aid in the support and advocacy efforts for this population.

Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
2. What is your current international student status?
    a. F-1
    b. J-1
    c. If not listed, please specify:
3. Do you identify as a Muslim? *Add this as a skip logic/screener question*
    a. Yes
    b. No
4. Do you have any visible Muslim markers (e.g., wearing *hijab*, *burqa* or have a beard, etc.)?
    a. Yes, what markers make you visibly Muslim?
    b. No
5. What's your gender?
    a. Woman
    b. Man
    c. Transwoman
    d. Transman
    e. Non-binary
    f. If not listed, please specify:
6. What's your relationship status?
    a. Single
    b. In a committed relationship (not married)
    c. Married
    d. Widowed
    e. Separated
    f. Divorced
7. Do you have children?
    a. Yes, how many?
    b. No
8. What's your sexual orientation?
    a. Asexual
    b. Bisexual
    c. Pansexual
    d. Lesbian
    e. Heterosexual
    f. Gay
    g. Prefer not to say
9. What country are you from?
10. What is your ethnicity?
11. What is your major?
12. What level of education are you currently in?

a. Bachelor's degree
b. Master's degree
c. Doctoral degree
d. If not listed, please specify: _____

12. Current English Language skill:

☐None

☐Minimal (understand and speak some words, but limited)

☐Fair (some ability to speak full sentences and understand)

☐Proficient (good ability to speak full sentences and understand conversations)

☐Fluent

13. How much do you earn per year?
    a. Less than $15,000 per year
    b. $15,000-20,000 per year
    c. $20,000-25,000 per year
    d. $25,000-30,000 per year
    e. $30,000-35,000 per year
    f. $35,000-40,000 per year
    g. $45,000-50,000 per year
    h. $50,000 + per year
14. How many years have you lived in the United States (in total)?
15. Which state in the United States are you currently in?
16. What size is your college or university?
    a. Small
    b. Medium
    c. Large
17. What is the size of the town or city your campus is in?
    a. Small
    b. Medium
    c. Large

Appendix B

Perceived Stress Scale 4 (PSS-4; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983).

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during THE LAST MONTH. In each case, please indicate your agreement with the following items using the scale below. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be open and honest in your responding.

0	1	2	3	4	5
Never	**Almost Never**	**Never**	**Sometimes**	**Fairly Often**	**Very Often**

1. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
2. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
3. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
4. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Appendix C

Religious Coping: Islamic Positive Religious Coping Subscale of the Psychological Measure of Islamic Religiousness (PRIM; Abu Raiya, 2008).

Please indicate your reaction to each the following statements using the following scale:			
I do not do this at all = 1	**I do this a little = 2**	**I do this a medium amount = 3**	**I do this a lot = 4**
1. When I face a problem in life, I look for a stronger connection with Allah. 2. When I face a problem in life, I consider that a test from Allah to deepen my belief. 3. When I face a problem in life, I seek Allah's love and care. 4. When I face a problem in life, I read the Holy Qura'n to find consolation. 5. When I face a problem in life, I ask for Allah's forgiveness. 6. When I face a problem in life, I remind myself that Allah commanded me to be patient. 7. When I face a problem in life, I do what I can and put the rest in Allah's hands.			

Appendix D

Perceived Discrimination (PD) subscale of the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994)

As a Muslim international student, please indicate your reaction to each of the following statements using the following scale:

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
1. Many opportunities are denied to me. 2. I am treated differently in social situations. 3. Others are biased toward me. 4. I feel that I receive unequal treatment. 5. I am denied what I deserve. 6. I feel that my people are discriminated against. 7. I am treated differently because of my race. 8. I am treated differently because of my color. 9. *I am treated differently because of my religious beliefs.* *				

Note: Question 9 was added to the original measure to reflect religious discrimination.

Appendix E

Social Connectedness in Mainstream Society (SCMN) and Social Connectedness in the Ethnic Community (SCETH) Scales (Yoon et al., 2012)

**Please indicate your agreement with the following items using the 1-7 scale below. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be open and honest in your responding.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Slightly Disagree	4 Neither agree nor disagree	5 Slightly agree	6 Agree	7 Strongly agree

1. I feel a sense of closeness with U.S Americans.
2. I feel a sense of belonging to U.S. society.
3. I feel accepted by U.S. Americans.
4. I feel like I fit into U.S. society.
5. I feel connected with U.S. society

1. I feel a sense of closeness with Muslims in America.
2. I feel a sense of belonging to the Muslim American community.
3. I feel accepted by Muslims in America.
4. I feel like I fit into the Muslims in America.
5. I feel connected with the Muslim American community.

Note. The first five items are for the SCMN and the second five are the modified SCETH (e.g., SCMA). For the modified SCETH (e.g., SCMA), Muslim Americans were inserted to reflect the specific group corresponding with research purposes.

Appendix F

The Post-Traumatic Checklist – 6-item Specific Version (PCL-S-Short Version; Lang & Stein, 2005)

These questions are about problems and complaints that people sometimes have in response to stressful life experiences such as Islamophobia, racism, and microaggressions.

Please indicate how much you have been bothered by that problem in the **past month.**

For these questions, the response options are:

1 Not at all	2 A little bit	3 Moderately	4 Quite a bit	5 Extremely
1. Repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of a stressful experience from the past? 2. Feeling very upset when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past? 3. Avoided activities or situations because they reminded you of a stressful experience from the past? 4. Feeling irritable or having angry outbursts? 5. Difficulty concentrating? 6. Feeling jumpy or easily startled?				

Appendix G

Perceived Climate Scale (Jeevanba, Berkel, and Nilsson, unpublished).

As a Muslim international student, please think of the current campus, city or town your campus is in, and the current political climate of the United States to answer these questions.

Please indicate your agreement with the following items using the 1-5 scale below. Be open and honest in your responding.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree

Campus

1. I feel unsafe in this campus.
2. If I had to do it all over again, I would come to this university.
3. I fit in with other students on campus here.
4. I feel left out of things here at the university.
5. The people in this campus are welcoming.
6. The racial climate on this campus is uncomfortable.
7. In my opinion, this campus environment is racist.
8. In my opinion, this campus environment is Islamophobic.

City (i.e., the town where your campus is in)

1. I feel unsafe in this city.
2. If I had to do it all over again, I would come to this city to pursue my studies.
3. I feel left out of things here in this city.
4. The people in this city are welcoming.
5. The racial climate in this city is uncomfortable.
6. In my opinion, this city is racist.
7. In my opinion, this city is Islamophobic.

National

1. I feel unsafe in this country's current political climate.
2. If I had to do it again in this political climate, I would come to this country.
3. In general, the current political climate negatively affects me.
4. The political climate in this country is welcoming.

5. The racial climate in this country is uncomfortable.
6. In my opinion, this country is racist.
7. In my opinion, this country is Islamophobic.

Appendix H

Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Items

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Range	*N*	Missing (%)
Age	27.70	5.70	18-48	128	3.8
Annual Income	4.55	3.04	1-9	127	4.5
< $15,000 (*n* = 41)					
$15,000-20,000 (*n* = 21)					
$20,000-25,000 (*n*= 22)					
$25,000-30,000 (*n* = 11)					
$30,000-35,000 (*n* = 4)					
$35,000-40,000 (*n* = 10)					
$40,000-45,000 (*n* =1)					
$45,000-50,000 (*n* = 4)					
$50,000 + (*n* = 13)					
Education	2.23	.91	1-3	132	0.8
Bachelor's degree (*n* = 40)					
Master's degree (*n* = 25)					
Doctoral degree (*n* = 64)					
Other (*n* = 3)					
Years in U.S.	5.00	4.57	1-30	130	2.3
English fluency	4.58	.55	1-3	132	0.8
Fair (*n* = 4)					
Proficient (*n* = 47)					
Fluent (*n* = 81)					
Gender	1.56	.66	1-4	133	0
Men (*n*= 66)					
Women (*n* = 65)					
Nonbinary (*n*= 2)					
Sexual orientation					
Heterosexual (*n* = 110)	1.27	.44	1-2	214	0
Prefer not to say (*n* = 6)					
Asexual (*n* = 5)					
Bisexual (*n*= 5)					
Gay (*n*= 3)					
Lesbian (*n* = 1)					
Relationship status					
Single (*n* = 64)					
Married (*n*= 50)					
Committed r'ship (*n* = 15)					
Divorced (*n* = 4)					

Appendix I

Particpants State of Residence

State (*n*=19)	*N*	Percent
Missouri	53	39.8
Oregon	25	18.8
Kansas	15	11.3
Maryland	8	6.0
Florida	4	3.0
Others	28	21.1
Total	133	100

Appendix J

Responses by Major

Major	*n*	Percent
Engineering	35	26.3
Computer Science/IT	18	13.5
Social Science	21	15.8
Health Sciences	12	9.0
Business/Economics	11	8.3
Hard Science	12	9.0
Stats/Math	4	3.0
Other	14	10.5
Total	127	95.5
Missing	6	4.5

Appendix K

Factor Loadings Based on Principal Axis Factoring Analysis with Varimax for Perceived General Climate scale (n=129)

Perceived General Climate (PGC)	Factor loading		
	1	2	3
Factor 1: Campus			
5. The people in this campus are welcoming.	-.144	-.353	**-.455**
6. The racial climate on this campus is uncomfortable.	.269	.202	**.742**
7. In my opinion, this campus environment is racist.	.194	.187	**.890**
8. In my opinion, this campus environment is Islamophobic.	**.**089	.305	**.817**
Factor 2: City			
2. If I had to do it all over again, I would come to this city to pursue my studies.	-.083	**-.445**	-.241
5. The racial climate in this city is uncomfortable.	.324	**.765**	.204
6. In my opinion, this city is racist.	.248	**.904**	.213
7. In my opinion, this city is Islamophobic.	.232	**.861**	.278
Factor 3: National			
3. In general, this current political climate negatively affects me.	**.730**	.133	.139
5. The racial climate in this country is uncomfortable.	**.785**	.114	.225
6. In my opinion, this country is racist.	**.846**	.269	.127
7. In my opinion, this country is Islamophobic.	**.794**	.337	.162
Eigenvalue	5.93	1.79	1.33
% of Total Variance	49.38	14.95	11.05
Total Variance	75.38		

Note: The extraction method was principal axis factoring with Varimax rotation. Factor loadings above .40 are in bold.

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VITA

Sathya Baanu Jeevanba (Baanu) was born on September 12, 1991 in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. She completed her A-Levels and then joined the American Degree Transfer Program (ADTP) in Malaysia before earning her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with a minor in Religious Studies from the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire (UWEC). During her undergraduate career, Baanu was active in student organizations focused on cultural engagement efforts within the campus and the larger Eau Claire community through her role within the Malaysian Abroad Diversified (MAD), organizing the annual Folk Fair and Culture Night events. She was also involved in research projects focused on suicidality and implicit bias under the guidance of Dr. Jennifer Muehlenkamp and Dr. Jeffrey Goodman respectively.

After attending UWEC, Baanu was involved with non-profits as an intern and volunteer on gender equality initiatives. She then joined the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Counseling Psychology at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 2015. While completing her doctoral program, Baanu became involved in Division 17's International Section as a Student Representative focusing on advocacy, programming, and connecting international students and scholars within the field of Counseling Psychology. Baanu will complete her doctoral internship at the Texas Woman's University in summer 2021. She will then be joining Kansas University's Medical Center's Counseling and Educational Support Services as their multicultural emphasis postdoctoral fellow.

On a more personal note, she enjoys spending time with her family, fur babies, close friends and traveling. Baanu also likes to read fantasy and fiction while finding ways to reconnect and rest.