



How Muslim women living in Britain construct their identities in relation to the dominant (British) culture

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ABSTRACT

Building upon past research this study aimed to identify the different cultural factors that play a part in the everyday lives of British Muslim women in Britain, in order to gain an insight into how they maintain their own cultural identity, whilst integrating into the Western society.

In order to collect the data, six semi structured interviews were carried out with British Muslim women living in Britain between the ages of 18-26. Thematic analysis was utilized in order to analyse the data. Three themes emerged from the data set: 1. Cultural expectations (with the subthemes: A. Family honour B. Stereotypes C. Dress D. Mate selection). 2. Gender inequality. 3. Balancing cultures.

From this research and literature review, it can be suggested that Muslim communities embedded in Western societies are entangled in complex multifaceted debates concerning their self construal and culture. Limitations and implications of the research are discussed.

KEY WORDS:	CULTURE	EXPECTATIONS	IDENTITY	ACCULTURATION	CONFLICT

Introduction

Culture alludes to the socially created beliefs, values and symbols that are passed on by individual members of a social group, transmitted from past generations or constructed by individuals themselves (Avruch, 1998). The term culture is used in many different ways as it touches on various factors of life (Matsumoto and Juang, 2004). Barry (1980) described certain aspects of life that culture had something to do with; food and clothing, general characteristics, housing and technology, individual and family activities, community, welfare, sex and the life cycle and religion and science.

The socio-cultural theory stems from the work of psychologist Vygotsky (1978) who highlights the important role that society, culture, peers and family have to an individual's identity. An individual's identity is critically important and integral in determining our thoughts, feelings and actions. It affects how we view the world and ourselves and others in that world including our relationships with other people, places, things and events. In short our sense of self is at the core of our being, unconsciously and automatically influencing our every feeling, thought and action. Each individual carries and uses these internal characteristics to guide his or her thoughts and actions in different social situations (Matsumoto and Juang, 2004).

Muslims are now the largest religious minority in Western Europe (European Union Monitoring Centre, 2003). The construction of their identity in Britain could prove to be difficult due to differing social and cultural practices. Young Muslims in particular could experience clashes of culture between the Western and Muslim civilizations and identities (Dwyer, 2000). In addition one may experience a general assimilation expectation in the Western World. Cross cultural research on the self and identity suggests that different cultures have different construals of the self. The self in Western cultures emphasise independence, internal attributes of the self, separateness and uniqueness (an independent self construal). The self in Eastern culture (Muslim culture), adversely evaluates life in association with collective needs and expectations (an interdependent self construal). This in turn affects social roles and relations (Kitayama et al., 1997).

British Muslim identities are usually seen as constructed in relation to culture and the way culture dictates a way of life for Muslims links to religion. Islam is the religion Muslims follow. Islam transforms from being just a cultural connection, or a family tradition to becoming a faith of personal devotion in many cases, and a social norm for Muslims (Ramji, 2005). The teachings of Islam encompass all aspects of life and ethics. For example times that one has to pray, clothes worn, socializing, responsibilities to parents, diet, marriage- the list goes on. The consciousness of God is encouraged in all human affairs. Such qualities as sincerity, humility, patience and charity are strongly encouraged (Honig, 1999).

Acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place due to the contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. Through acculturation individuals learn behavioural repertoires suitable to the new cultural context such as adopting forms of dress, social etiquette and

sharing each other's food preferences. Sometimes these mutual adaptations and bicultural identities (assimilating to both cultures or finding a balance between them Cabassa, 2003) take place rather smoothly, although they can also create cultural conflict during intercultural interactions (Berry, 2005). Furnham and Sheikhs' (1993) found that Muslims adjust well in the host country even when they do not completely integrate. They tend to adopt new beliefs and attitudes and renew their social and cultural values.

A qualitative study by Ozyurt (2013) focuses on the ways in which Muslim women, who are situated in both Islamic and Western cultures, negotiate their Muslim and Western identities. This is a largely overlooked area. This study was carried out in the United States and Netherlands and consisted of semi structured in depth interviews with 85 first and second generation Muslim women. The findings of this research revealed through narrative analysis of the interview transcripts, that a Muslim women in a Western society who subjectively evaluates her two cultural systems as compatible, was more likely to successfully balance their bicultural identities. This helps them to alleviate any conflict between the two cultures and communities. On the other hand individuals who evaluate their two cultures as contradictory or oppositional, may face various challenges which could further complicate the adaptation process (Benet- Martinez and Haritatos, 2005).

The most significant contexts for a young person's development (specifically the family, peers, ethnic community and wider society) are often incongruent and may act as sources of strength, as well as creating complications getting in the way of positive outcomes (Stuart and Ward, 2011). Family for example were detrimental to positive adjustment when parents were more traditional than the youth, or had very high expectations about how they wanted their child to succeed, effectively leading youth to feel pressured and misunderstood as found in the study by Stuart and Ward (2011).

Asian culture has been described as being 'face' orientated. Family status and appearance are very important, and the group's requirements or wishes take precedence over those of the individual. Asian families tend to be hierarchical with parents having status prior to that of the children and men to that of women (Huang and Ying 1989). Young Muslim women who are Western born in particular are most likely to find themselves in conflict with their family and community over issues regarding their cultural values and expectations. The honour and reputation of the family is reliant upon the women in Muslim societies (Cainkar, 1991).

A study by Edross (1997) highlights some cultural influences on identity that can arise. This research explores how ten South African Muslim women between 18-22 years old, as members of an ethnic minority constructed their identities in relation to the dominant (Western) culture. The methodology of this study consisted of interviews and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that to be called a 'modern/westernised' women creates offence and puts the individuals morals and values into question. Specifically with elders and conservative Muslim leaders it is seen as a loss of cultural and religious values. From the participants interview responses it was revealed that their constructions of a modern Muslim woman was one with

restrictions in relation to behaviour and clothing style. If they did not meet these requirements they would be treated unfavourably by members of their community and gender value judgements were passed about them. Cultural conflict occurs when expectations of behaviours and values for the Muslim culture are not met, due to differing cultural ideals that are expected from the Western culture. This view was expressed by participants who stated that living in a western society was not as simple as it could be, and it was challenging to their identities as Muslim women. One interviewee in the study illustrates this point well;

“living in a western country is difficult now. According to the religion a woman must be humble and pious, but in a western society it is more... for a woman to be powerful and dynamic...”

Morality, religiosity and ethnic pride were often said to be the framework within which 'modern' Muslim women should use as a guide in their life. It also came across that families were less inclined to gossip about male indiscretions, and participants felt these double standards were unfair. Overall, the interviewees described themselves as being neither completely traditional nor completely modern. Instead, they identified themselves as being positioned somewhere in the middle of the traditional and modern Muslim woman. The findings of this study are limited to the specific local area of the University of Cape town in Africa. The sample size is also small consisting of ten participants. If a quantitative approach was taken then a larger scale of data could have been accumulated.

Rozario (1998) utilised discourse analysis and analysed texts such as a section of the Australian Arabic community newspaper; 'The Arab World.' Almost every problem that was discussed linked back to complications faced by Muslim girls trying to maintain harmony with their parents on one hand, and living a 'regular' life in accordance to social and educational institutions in Australia. This investigation also highlights the fact feminism has brought with it a rise in drug use, divorce and sexual promiscuity. From this viewpoint this is simply seen as another aspect of corrupting influences of Western ideas which rejects the cultural values of the Muslim community. If followed by a young Muslim woman in particular, the personal price can be high, creating friction and being disowned by the Muslim community. A limitation of this study is that it does not take into account the whole truth, by carrying out interviews for example, with the women of the given cultural group. Instead it relies on interpreting various texts. Interviews with the target audience (young Muslim women) in combination with discourse analysis may have been more effective in gaining an insight into their experiences. This study also only focuses on Australian women.

As discussed being a Muslim in a Western society can be challenging at times. Young British Muslims tend to be more assimilated into the westernized way of life (Siddique, 1983). Despite this the parents seem to have some influences regarding the mate selection process for example, as they are more likely to be resistant to cultural change. A study done by Shurayadi and Zaidi (2002) explored the attitudes of Muslim women, residing in the United States or Canada, towards arranged marriage through an unstructured interview schedule. In Western societies as it is

regarded as an individualistic society, the mate selection process is decided and controlled by the two individual's involved, based on love with or without parental consent. On the other hand in many traditional societies such as the Muslim culture the interdependent family system is the norm. The individuals self gratification, happiness and self expression are considered after the interests of the family and wider community (Dion and Dion, 1996).

Whilst I acknowledge that the issues presented in the literature review might also affect men, as well as people from different cultural backgrounds, there is not capacity to review these issues here. By studying this subgroup of young Muslim women as Markus and Kitayama (1994) point out this would not presume that all individuals in this given cultural group are the alike. It suggests that members of this given group are more likely to be exposed to and operate within a given cultural frame, thus sharing similar tendencies and behaviour.

Building upon previous literature this research hopes to identify the cultural factors that play a part in the everyday lives of British Muslim women in Britain, in order to shed light on how they manage and maintain their own cultural identity, whilst integrating into the Western society. This is an area that has been neglected in academic research. Although there has been research touching upon these topics there is little known about these experiences in Britain.

Methodology

Design

The use of a qualitative research design was decided to be the most appropriate for the purpose of this research. Although quantitative methods are designed to produce statistically reliable data and tell us how many people do or think something, it can be removed from real life as it lacks a depth and richness of data and individuality is lost. On occasions, quantitative methods can produce misleading results that don't reflect the participant's feelings (Punch, 2005). By employing a qualitative approach, it allows freedom to explore unexpected issues that may arise from personal experiences and how the social world is understood and experienced by individuals. It aims to collect an in depth understanding of human behaviour and the factors that contribute to such behaviours (Mason, 1996). These benefits of using a qualitative method are paramount to research involving how an individual's identity can be influenced by their predominant culture.

Participants

Six participants were interviewed. The researcher identified participants through the use of the 'snowballing technique' (Kalton, 1983). This method can be used by researchers if it is limited to a subgroup. In this instance it is a cultural group within a larger culture who have beliefs and interests which can differ with those of a larger culture (Clarke, 2008). A participant who fits the criteria was asked to tell their friends about the study and to get in touch if they wished to participate. Subjects

were young British Muslim women living in Britain between the ages of 18-26 as they would need to talk about cultural influences that they may encounter by being a part of this ethnic group. Participants were all born and raised in the UK.

Figure 1: Participants who took part in the study.

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Background</u>
Sarah	20	British Muslim Undergraduate student
Josie	21	British Muslim Undergraduate student
Mary	22	British Muslim Undergraduate student
Maxine	20	British Muslim Undergraduate student
Louise	26	British Muslim Undergraduate student
Evie	18	British Muslim Undergraduate student

Quantitative research would have enabled a greater number of participants; however the recruitment of six participants was seen as fitting, given the time constraints and the use of thematic analysis.

Data Collection

Six semi structured interviews were used for collecting the data which lasted 20-45 minutes each. Each interview was recorded using a voice recorder individually and privately in a room with only the researcher and participant to avoid distractions. Once an interview was completed it was transcribed within twenty four hours. Although specific areas were addressed informed by previous literature, that have been discussed in the introduction, this approach allows flexibility so that new questions can be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee is saying (see appendix 5 for the interview schedule). This allows an informal conversational interaction, to build a rapport with the interviewee whilst still guiding and focusing the study (May, 2002). It intends to focus on people's actual experiences more than general beliefs and opinions (King and Horrocks, 2010).

Data Analysis

The qualitative technique of thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcripts. This is a method for identifying, coding, analyzing and reporting patterns and themes emerging within the data which respond to the research questions (Braun and Clark, 2006). In order to analyse the transcript and produce themes the data will be coded in two stages (see appendix 6 and 7 for coded transcripts). First level coding involves using specific words and phrases which illustrate what is being said in the text. Second level codes help to understand and interpret these descriptions

(Coleman and Unrau, 2005). After all the data had been coded and listed the next step was to search for themes and ensure the themes work in relation to the codes chosen. During this phase weaker themes with not much data to support them were taken out. Three themes were found overall. Within the theme 'cultural expectations' four subthemes emerged.

Once a set of themes were decided there was a final opportunity for analysis, by selecting supporting examples from the transcripts to provide evidence for the points being made, and relating it back to the research aims.

Ethics

This research involves enquiring into people's personal lives with the purpose of disseminating their accounts in the public field (Kvale and Brinkman, 1996). Before the data was collated, any ethical concerns and issues were addressed and the participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any time up to the date of the researcher's submission. Explanation to the participants as to the purpose of the interview and how it will be used was made clear. Following the university's good research practice participants will be provided with appropriate information sheets, consent forms and debrief sheets ensuring anonymity and confidentiality in the storage and use of data (See Appendix 1, 2, 3 and 4).

The Researcher

The researcher was a female final year undergraduate student studying Psychology, aged twenty one. The author had a similar background to the participants as she was also a Muslim women brought up in the UK. Interviewer bias is more likely to occur when the interviewer is familiar with the area of interest (Davis et al, 2009). However, by conducting the interviews whilst maintaining total objectivity, so that the respondents were not influenced by outside sources, a non judgmental analysis could be formed.

Analysis and discussion

Figure 2: Table showing overview of the main themes and subthemes.

Theme	Sub-theme
1.Cultural expectations	A. Family honour B. Stereotypes C. Dress D. Mate selection
2.Balancing cultures	
3. Gender inequalities	

1. Cultural expectations

A. Family honour

I found that in the conversations with these women that their constructions of being a young Muslim women living in a Western society was one with certain boundaries in terms of preserving their reputation, which affected their behaviour and shaped their identities. The preoccupation of preserving the integrity and purity of Muslim culture and religion means that Muslim girls are brought up in a far more controlled, protected and sheltered home settings in comparison to the majority of their peers in a Western society (Naidoo, 1984). This was seen throughout all of the transcripts. Mary and Evie point this out well;

“I’m not allowed anywhere and everywhere like I have boundaries” (Evie, line 26).

Mary also shares similar experiences regarding certain restrictions a Muslim women faces; “Because I have been brought up with such high standards... I wouldn’t go certain places I wouldn’t stay out late” (Evie, lines 36-37).

If one deviates from the way they should behave then as found in a study by Edross, 1997 they are viewed as immoral and corrupt, rejecting their ethnicity, culture and religion and tarnishing their families status, especially by the older generation.

All participants state they experienced such judgements regarding certain behaviour. Here are several quotes that illustrate this point;

“if they saw me out... being really stupid... and went back and told my dad he wouldn’t be very happy because that’s the reputation he expects me to uphold... good and civilised” (Mary, lines 135-137).

“If I come back late... they will be like oh look she is... always out” (Josie, lines 71-73).

“If I do make a joke that.... that is a bit far-fetched then it seems inappropriate” (Sarah, line 13).

“They’d just stare at me and think bad of me and be judgmental (Louise, lines 9-10).

B. Stereotypes

All of the participants were wary of the stereotypes and the ways in which they worked in their everyday lives. Respondents complained that they were regularly preconceived by others such as colleagues, peers or teachers, as being part of a group rather than as unique individuals. Such misconceptions worked to hinder the expression of an identity of being a British Muslim women. Instead young women found themselves constantly judged or labelled as ‘a typical Muslim girl’ (Dwyer, 2000).

Mary and Sarah highlight this issue well; “people look at me as if to say she’s wearing a headscarf why is she shouting... people think you are a lot more religious

than you are... might expect more out of you and I think that can put pressure on you' (Mary, lines 92-97).

"people would expect me to behave... more religiously... I have to make sure I am not too loud so I am not attracting too much attention... I am a role model" (Sarah, line 12-16).

These responses from participants are in line with the findings of Wagner et al.'s 2012 study, where it was found especially when women wear the hijab (headscarf) people have preconceived notions. Here you are not a judged taking into consideration your own identity but the identity of your community as a whole.

C. Dress

It also emerged in these interviews that these women had specific expectations regarding their style of dress. Participants in these interviews show concerns about using clothes that reveal or expose their body too much, as this behavior contradicts their religious Islamic beliefs and cultural norms. Modesty revolves around the thought that certain body parts are meant to be covered (Barnard, 1996). Westernized clothing was linked with rebelliousness, disobedience and active sexuality, therefore a threat to religious identity or ethnic 'purity' (Dwyer, 2000). All six participants recognized this;

"... to wear a headscarf I believe it preserves my modesty... it gives that message as well to other people to other boys that you're not interested..." (Evie line 14-17)

"its abnormal to them because normality to them is modest clothing" (Louise, line 10).

"Showing your skin would be looked down upon" (Sarah, line 86).

"you have to be fully covered so people don't look at you in a way and be like look she's showing her skin she's so tacky... you'll get looks from other Asian girls" (Josie, line 122-125).

"...they will say something like can you go put a cardigan on and cover up" (Mary, line 124).

"I wear a headscarf... because my dad wanted me to wear it" (Maxine, line 33).

Similar expectations and attitudes towards clothing style was found in a study by Edross, 1997. She found that harsh judgments were passed against women who did not conform to the appropriate dress code. Often 'policing' would take place in the form of unfavourable comments and disapproving looks passed through the community. A blending of westernized and Islamic dress was acceptable as long as the women were fully covered.

D. Mate selection

Cultural influences also seemed to be apparent for all of the participants regarding the concept of mate selection and marriage. Parents seem to be understanding and grant freedom to a certain extent with respect to choosing a partner. However, they were still not leaving the decision to be made entirely by their children. Parents who did allow this were few (Siddique, 1983). A joint venture type of arranged marriage was most common across the transcripts. Here both the parents and children actively contribute in choosing the potential partner. This is the method that seems similar to the western model of mate selection (i.e. dating). Family background and reputation, general character, religious status, economic factors, education and social class are all factors that are taken into consideration before making a decision (Shah, 1961). It seemed a majority of the participants accepted this contribution to the final decision;

“I’d be fine with an arranged marriage because that’s what makes my parents happy and I think I trust my parents enough for them to know what I want in a guy” (Mary, line 68- 69).

“If my parents are like this is a nice guy... if they give me an option... I would consider it... an arranged marriage” (Sarah, line 73-74).

“It depends I think I would consider an arranged marriage I don’t know” (Josie, line 78).

Love between husband and wife is supposed to be the result of marriage (Chaudhary, 1986). This notion enables one to fulfil religious as well as social duties, particularly for females, towards the family, Muslim community and society (Kapadia, 1966). Because a love marriage may be perceived as evidence of previous contact between the spouses it can damage the family’s reputation. In short it may be valued less or dishonourable in comparison to an arranged marriage (Dion and Dion, 1996). The separation of the sexes is urged as it is seen to help them avoid ‘sexual thoughts and feelings,’ that ultimately will uphold the importance of purity and chastity (Larsson, 2011). Through analysis of the transcripts it can be seen that although the interviewees expressed a desire to have freedom of choice to choose a partner, they were cautious and careful at the same time.

“Because of my culture and religion if I was ever to have a boyfriend it would be frowned upon a lot” (Josie, line 36-37).

“If I ever did get a boyfriend I know that it would really upset my parents” (Mary, line 63-64).

“Islamically you are allowed to go out but there has to be a third person there” (Sarah, line 79).

“if I was to have a boyfriend it would be frowned upon...” (Josie, line 37).

Inter-racial or interfaith marriages are commonly viewed as a threat to the group harmony (Schaefer, 1980). A structural aspect of interethnic marriages is that it weakens ethnic ties. In contrast, the social function of the arranged marriage is to

maintain group solidarity and sustain and enhance family relationships (Broude,1994). From an early age, children are urged to socialize and to marry within the religiosocial group. This expectation is more significant for girls, as the idea of marriage is viewed as an important goal in their lives (Broude, 1994). All six participants acknowledged that their potential partner has to have similar values and traditions in order to be accepted by their cultural society. Here are some examples which sum this up clearly;

“you can’t put your religion on hold for some guy” (Mary, line 41).

“If you know someone didn’t share our values and traditions... it would be so complicated on different levels” (Josie, line 42-44).

“I don’t think it would be wise for me to bring anyone who wasn’t from my religion or culture home plus they wouldn’t really understand many things” (Louise, line 38-40).

“...if he is really deviant my family wouldn’t accept him” (Sarah, line 33).

It can be suggested from the analysis that the institution of marriage is an important aspect of a Muslim women’s life, with certain expectations as discussed, that would preferably be adhered to.

2. Gender inequality

A plethora of studies in psychological literature, have found in spite of recent efforts to challenge the stereotypes of gender specific social roles to the sexes, people still continue to acquire a set of beliefs regarding male and female roles in society (Diane, 2000). It is argued that this is increasingly significant in the Muslim culture especially for Muslim women. It has become apparent that the experience of Muslim women is distinct from that of Muslim men on many different and complex levels. As it applies to Muslim cultures the honour of the family lies in the hands of the reputed chastity and purity of the women (Dodd, 1973). All six participants felt like they were under more pressure than boys to adhere to rules and expectations. They recognized that men presently enjoy greater status within the British Asian Muslim community (Ramji, 2005). Participants found these double standards unfair.

“culturally guys can do practically anything they like and it’s fine because they are a guy... whereas if it’s a girl she’s like turned into a slag and she’s losing... her religious status everything’s gone” (Maxine, lines 63-66).

“boys my age... mess about a lot... but then they also expect and their families expect their wives to be pure and innocent” (Josie, lines 60-62)

“if a girl does something it is definitely a hundred times worse than if a boy does something” (Louise, lines 49-50).

The participant’s responses suggest any deviation from these expectations by males is most often tolerated since a ‘double standard’ regarding male and female power differentiation exists. Families were less inclined to gossip and pass judgment about

boys in comparison to girls (Saldanha, 1981). They felt that their gender restricted them from doing certain things and the 'boys will be boys' attitude enabled men to create a religious and cultural identity which placed less restrictions on them (Talbani and Hasanali, 2000).

Kurian, 1996 found that parent and children conflicts were most often with regard to individual freedom and double standards (i.e. giving greater freedom to sons). All the participants felt this was unfair as boys were treated differently with regards to social freedom and were hardly ever questioned. Going out and the double standards were the usual conflicts in the home.

"boys have a bit more leeway... girls have to ask permission get the permission and then they are allowed" (Mary, lines 56-57).

"guys can go out without having to tell their parents... whereas if I... were to they would be really annoyed... they would suspect something is wrong" (Sarah line 38-44).

Overall it can be suggested from these findings that the experience of Muslim women differs from that of Muslim men on many different and complex levels. The respect and reputation of the Muslim families seem to be reliant upon a women's actions more so, consequently increasing the pressure and restrictions placed upon them.

3. Balancing cultures

A division of socialisation patterns between the British and Muslim culture can create contradictions (Heiss, 1981) and result in a situation of an individual having 'conflicting selves.' Individuals become trapped between their own cultural values and the conflicting demands presented by the Western society (Benet- Martinez et al., 2002).

This can lead to a double identity- for example Mary and Evie indicate they act one way around family and another way around friends;

'It depends who you are with... with your friends it makes it a lot easier to be yourself... your religion and culture doesn't have that much of an influence' (Mary, lines 20-23).

"...especially with my family I feel I have to act a certain way... quiet, demure... reserved" (Evie, lines 17-19).

An imbalance was felt by some of the women more than others. Ozyurt, 2013 states those who describe their two cultures as contradictory may face various challenges that could further complicate the adaptation process.

For example Mary states "...they'll invite me and I think I want to go but I can't necessarily go because it is against my religion so I will have to say no as I can't drink alcohol..." (Mary, lines 31-33).

This is also voiced by Evie; “When you see fellow Muslims acting how they shouldn’t be.... Then that does get a bit difficult” (Evie, lines 4-5).

“There’s always going to be people doing things that you would want to do but obviously religiously you can’t do” (Maxine, lines 5-6).

However by successfully managing to balance and negotiate multiple identities, retaining religious and cultural elements in the definition of the self, whilst endeavouring to assimilate into the dominant environment, the youth were consciously engaging in and actively directing their acculturation. By acknowledging and accepting differences and potential conflicts between one’s bi-cultural identities, is a critical coping strategy in order to adjust effectively (Stuart and Ward, 2011). By changing their behavioural repertoire depending on the social context they are in, these women were able to dynamically meet a variety of different expectations and fulfil a range of social norms to successfully negotiate their dual identities (Dwyer, 2000).

Ozyurt, 2013 focuses on the ways in which Muslim women who are situated in both Eastern and Western cultures balance their traditional (collectivist) and modern (individualistic) identities, and found those who evaluate their two cultures as compatible were more likely to balance their bicultural identities.

The participants all view the two cultures as compatible;

“I think it does change my views in a way but not to an extent where I would go out and do what other people are doing for example having sex” (Mary, lines 81-82).

“...a girl who lives in England I bet she has forgot all her religion and values but no I haven’t so yeah they can be mixed together” (Maxine, lines 115-116).

“I think being a young Muslim women is quite easy” (Sarah, line 7).

“I always have a lot of fun... but also know when enough is enough” (Josie, lines 32-33)

“Because I was born here I am quite happy... I feel quite comfortable” (Maxine, lines 12-13)

“I have my own personality and I am pretty British” (Evie, line 13).

Overall, there was no indication that the interviewee’s identities were constructed as fixed. Instead, they identified themselves as being placed somewhere in the centre of the traditional and modern Muslim woman dichotomy. They saw no major complications in merging their dual identities.

Summary

As culture plays such a major role in shaping our sense of self and identity, it has a significant influence on all of our behaviours across all contexts. Therefore, it is

imperative to examine how culture comes to play such a dominant role in shaping our core sense of self. As seen in the literature review and through the analysis, the findings from this research suggest Muslim communities in Western societies are entangled in complex multifaceted debates concerning the very nature and boundaries of their culture, faith and identity (Ahmad and Sardar, 2012).

It is stressed the need for Muslim women to integrate into Western society which promotes an independent self construal, whilst upholding their own Muslim culture and tradition which is defined by an interdependent self construal (Kitayama et al, 1997). It is indicated that if a young Muslim women was to shift from the traditions they have been brought up with in the Muslim community, this could cause friction and upset as their families in particular hold them with high regard.

Limitations and implications

If this research was to be built upon, the participants should have more variance in class, background, gender and age. This research was gynocentric and only concerned itself with women. Therefore the male's point of view was ignored. There was not scope to address this issue here; however future research should take this into account.

The use of the qualitative approach of thematic analysis can limit the reliability due to the wide array of interpretations that can be acquired from multiple researchers, as well as the subjective experiences of the individuals. This does not freely lend the research to be generalised to other areas (Gregg, 2012). The likelihood of producing socially desirable answers was increased by using semi structured interviews. Due to the familiarity between the participants recruited and the researcher, the interviewee's may have managed their responses to adhere to social norms by answering in a socially desirable way. However this response is often a misrepresentation of the individual as it manipulates how others perceive them to avoid embarrassment (Kang, 2013). Using a quantitative approach, so the data can be measured in an objective and empirical way, in addition to qualitative research, would perhaps yield a lot more information. This would also increase the validity and reliability of the research (Punch, 2005).

There is an abundance of literature, theories and model guidelines available on the identity and development of the self in relation to culture but very little of this literature focuses on Muslim women, and the cultural influences they face that construct their identity especially in relation to the British culture. As human behaviour is far too rich and complex to be captured by understanding the world through the eyes of a single culture, knowledge of various cultures helps to gain a better understanding of individuals helping to eliminate ignorance. This research is perhaps best considered as a useful starting point for future research, rather than the answer to all questions.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is important in qualitative research as it ensures the researchers contributions throughout the research process are scrutinized, so the researcher frequently reviews their role within the research, resisting any biases that can arise by imposing their own views on the findings of the study (Chenail, 2011). Due to the fact reflexivity is a variable for the quality control in qualitative research, understanding the researcher's social position and personal experiences is of paramount importance (Berger, 2013).

Initially for my research project I wanted to investigate whether dual language resources provide appropriate scaffolds for learning for, second language learners learning English as an additional language. However after discussing this idea with my supervisor, although I was very attached to this idea and had envisioned it to be potentially a worthwhile and detailed piece of research, it was realised that there were quite a few complications regarding ethics and other factors. I then decided that it was a better decision to go down another area of interest which was how cultural practices influence the construction of Muslim women's identity.

I chose this area as I am myself a Muslim women embedded in the British and Muslim culture and I feel that there are certain cultural issues that influence my everyday life and identity. I noticed the subtle and sometimes more obvious differences between the two cultures and I became aware that I unconsciously and automatically act differently in certain social situations due to cultural norms and expectations. Therefore I was interested to address these issues further.

I feel like the participant's responses support the literature. However I was expecting more conflict and a greater clash between the cultures. It seemed that this was to a lesser extent than I had anticipated.

I acknowledge my personal experiences may have influenced my role as a researcher. I found making participants feel at ease quite simple. This may have been due to the fact as an insider researcher I had a direct connection with the research area and the participants were a part of the same community as I, therefore there was a mutual understanding (Robson, 2002). Inevitably I had preconceived notions about this area of research. Nevertheless I carried out the interviews and thematic analysis with an open mind. I feel like I have constructed a non judgmental analysis allowing themes to emerge unaffected. I made sure the participants in the study were not close personal contacts of mine to try and reduce any further bias— they were contacted by friends therefore they were recruited via a snowball sample technique. I feel that a number of themes could have been developed to broaden understanding of the issues presented further, however due to the word limit this was not possible.

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