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Colorism and Empoyment Opportunities for Middle Easter Women

Ahzin Bahraini
University of Miami, ahzin.bahraini@gmail.com

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COLORISM AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR MIDDLE EASTERN
WOMEN

By

Ahzin Bahraini

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COLORISM AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR MIDDLE EASTERN
WOMEN

Ahzin Bahraini

Approved:

_____
John W. Murphy, Ph.D.
Professor of Sociology

_____
Linda Liska Belgrave, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Sociology

_____
Karen A. Callaghan, Ph.D.
Professor of Sociology
Barry University

_____
Guillermo Prado, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

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Colorism is the intra- and interracial discrimination an individual experiences based on one's phenotype (Hunter 2005, Hunter 2007, Hill 2002). Current research focused on colorism among black Americans has found that "dark-skinned blacks have lower levels of education, income, and job status" in the United States (Hochschild and Weaver 2007). As bias against Middle Easterners rises in the United States, current research regarding this population is scarce. In the context of today's political climate, the term Muslim has become a misnomer to refer to the Middle Eastern population, with the term Islamophobia specifically referring to Middle Easterners regardless of their religion rather than individuals from regions of the world who practice Islam. Participants ordered job applicants in terms of who they would hire, followed by interviews. Through sixteen semi-structured interviews, this thesis identifies what participants believe are phenotypically Middle Eastern and Muslim facial features. Throughout the study, participants preferred to hire lighter Middle Eastern women.

Dedication:

I dedicate this Master's Thesis to Afsoon Joon, Ardavan Bahraini, and Anoosh. Thank you for your love and support.

I dedicate this thesis to all the Middle Eastern women who are wrongfully profiled and mistreated for their appearances, and all the Middle Eastern women who have felt shame for their ethnic appearances.

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<u>Introduction</u>

Since 9/11 there has been increased racial profiling of and bias against people who appear stereotypically Middle Eastern (Zogby, 2001). Frequent portrayals as instigators of war and violence on television have led to stereotypes of Middle Easterners as radicals who are a threat to American society as well as their own people (Salari, 2002). When Middle Easterners appear in the media, they are often very stereotypically Middle Eastern with thick black eyebrows, a large nose, and curly hair—if it is not tucked away under a turban or hijab (Kamalipour, 2000; Shaheen, 2003). These representations are misrepresentations of Middle Eastern people who occupy this vast region, which spills into Europe, Asia, and Africa. Middle Easterners can range from phenotypically European to African depending on the country and region. The negative and typical representation of Middle Easterners in the media has contributed to a phobia against individuals who fit the stereotypical Middle Eastern phenotype, known as Islamophobia (Allen, 2010; Salari, 2002).

In the recent years, Islamophobia in the United States has resulted in racial profiling that has marginalized Middle Easterners in the United States (Zogby, 2001; Salari, 2002). The point of this study, accordingly, is to better understand how a woman's opportunities are influenced based on how stereotypically *Middle Eastern* she appears. In doing so, the aim is to unveil Islamophobia, specifically the assumptions associated with phenotypically Middle Eastern women.

A current example of Islamophobia was the 2016 presidential election. Referring to Middle Easterners as terrorists and radicals has created a negative identity for anyone who appears Middle Eastern, or is overtly Muslim through the display of a hijab. The result

is suspicion surrounding Middle Easterners in the United States. However, this misrepresentation also affects the lives of Americans of Middle Eastern decent. The problem with these crude remarks regarding Middle Easterners and Americans of Middle Eastern decent is that they are not only fundamentally flawed for political reasons, but they are also inaccurate (Kamalipour, 2000). The Middle East is a vast region which consists of approximately 24 countries, 22 of which are Arab speaking. The countries that comprise the Middle East range from North Africa to South Eastern Europe and over to West Asia. Therefore, the individuals who identify as Middle Eastern also vary in appearance and phenotype. A person from the Middle East may have blue eyes and dirty blonde hair or an afro and thick, bushy eyebrows. These differences become crucial when trying to understand how Middle Easterners are perceived and what constitutes a stereotypical Middle Eastern look.

The number of people identifying as Middle Eastern on the U.S census has risen 72% from 2000 to 2010 in the United States. As the number of people of Middle Eastern decent continues to rise, the stigma surrounding Middle Easterners must be examined in order to better understand how these persons are perceived, as well as how they are likely be treated. Physical appearance may play a key role in their acceptance and assimilation into the United States.

In this context, Rosaldo (1989) explains *imperialist nostalgia*. This phrase is used to explain when imperialists make a change for the worse and later on feel remorse regarding the problems that arise. An example is the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003. The United States may feel remorse for the conditions that were created in these countries; never the less the United States is continuing to occupy both countries.

This condition creates a paradox in which the perpetrator continues the maltreatment while feeling remorse for his actions. Continuing to portray Middle Easterners in a negative way only makes sense in regard to this phenomenon.

This imperialist nostalgia may spill over into the United States, if the biases in the perception and treatment of Middle Easterners are not addressed. If Middle Easterners are plagued constantly by this maltreatment and marginalization, surely their attempts to acclimate will be squandered. In an attempt to confront this imperialist nostalgia, how Middle Easterners are viewed and likely to be treated should be given close scrutiny.

A factor that may influence how well Middle Easterners assimilate in the United States is their physical appearance, and how any bias associated with their physical features plays out in their workforce participation. With Islamophobia on the rise, the need becomes more obvious to understand how stigma operates in the case of Middle Eastern women. In particular, the point is to grasp the impact of being stereotypically Middle Eastern with regard to their occupational opportunities.

This thesis will focus on the occupational attainment of Middle Eastern women. The idea is to explore the hiring bias that they may experience. This topic is central to understanding how Middle Eastern women will fare in American society and how differences in appearances may influence their job attainment opportunities. In furthering knowledge on the perceptions of Middle Easterners, this study will examine how a Middle Eastern woman's appearance may influence her employability. The following research question will be addressed throughout this study: How does a Middle Eastern woman's appearance influence student perceptions of her employability? This research question

includes, but is not limited to, examining implicit as well as explicit bias with regard to Middle Eastern racial identity.

Discrimination and Minority Status

Researchers have found that race-based discrimination is present in the workplace and controls the opportunities of minority groups, particularly in job attainment opportunities (Gaddis et al, 2015). For example, Gaddis et. al (2015) explains that Black graduates from elite universities have significantly lower response rates (12.9%) from employers than white students from the same schools (17.5%). This employment discrimination is crucial in showing how a people's race may influence their work opportunities and economic mobility; however, Gaddis et al. did not take into account persons' color or facial features, although skin color and facial traits are significant when explaining racial discrimination.

In order to combat the negative effects of race-based discrimination in the employment sector, applicants often resort to measures of *whitening* (Kang et. al, 2016). Kang et. al (2016) explain the types of *whitening* that applicants engage in as *passing* and *covering*, which allow applicants to downplay their racial identity through physical measures such as hair straightening, as well as framing the content on their resumes. This *whitening* is designed to place a minority applicant at a better position when competing with white people in the job market. Research looking at colorism among Latins has found that whiter Hispanics, such as Cubans, often have a higher occupational attainment when compared to darker people such as Mexicans and Puerto Ricans (Espino and Franz, 2002). While their results were significant in contributing to the literature, these researchers did not take into

account the color variation within Cuban culture; therefore, this study will examine differences between color and facial features in accounting for discrimination.

In addition to *whitening*, research regarding individuals of color has shown that those who have more stereotypical phenotypes have lower socioeconomic status, lower job attainment, and experience more discrimination than individuals of the same group who display more Eurocentric features. Scholars have coined the term *colorism* to explain this phenomenon (Hunter 2005, Hunter 2007, Hill 2002). Current research focused on colorism among Black Americans has found that "dark-skinned [B]lack [people] have lower levels of education, income, and job status" when compared with lighter skinned Black people (Hochschild and Weaver 2007). However, little research on colorism pertaining to individuals of Middle Eastern decent has been conducted; therefore, this study will explore the relationship between colorism and job attainment regarding women of Middle Eastern decent.

Widner and Chicoine (2011) take a close look at the employment opportunities for Arab Americans, as well as the negative stigma associated with them post 9/11. Throughout their study, Widner and Chicoine find that there is significant hiring bias against Arab Americans, particularly when an applicant has an obvious Arab name. While an individual's name is an indicator of her ethnicity, an applicant's physical appearance is also a focus of attention of employers throughout the hiring process. Often times, Middle Easterners may have ethnic names that represent their origins; however, they may appear more white than what

employers perceive as stereotypically Middle Eastern. Therefore, in this study skin color and facial features will be prominent.

While race influences an individual's likelihood of social and economic mobility, researchers have found that lighter skinned Black people complete more years of schooling, marry individuals of higher status, and live in neighborhoods with lower crime rates compared to darker-skinned individuals of the same race; therefore, in addition to race, an individual's color and facial features must be taken into account when investigating discriminatory behavior (Hill 2000; Hughes and Hertel 1990; Hunter 1998, 2005; Keith and Herring 1991). Given the social and economic implications of colorism, looking further into how colorism affects Middle Eastern Americans is important.

The rise in Islamophobia, and current political climate greatly influence the marginalization and discrimination this group experiences when applying for jobs (Zogby, 2001). The covert implications of colorism, which are found in job opportunity and how individuals of color are perceived in social situations, requires a particular research strategy that extends beyond data, for example, on economic disparities. Colorism, as a form of discrimination in employment, is covert and often a subconscious bias of the employer. Therefore, this study must adapt a methodology that is sensitive to how potential employers construct their biases.

An Appropriate Methodology

The purpose of using a qualitative approach for this thesis facilitates delving into a fairly new topic (Charmaz, 2014; Glasser &Strauss, 1967). Research exploring colorism is fairly new, especially regarding Middle Easterners. Using a qualitative approach permits a better understanding of how this population is influenced by colorism, especially when applying for jobs. In particular narrative analysis will be used in order to account for participant perception in context of their surroundings and experiences. Additionally, using narrative analysis allows for more probing and explanation, which are necessary in understanding how employers reach their conclusions. In addition to their decisions, the aim is to appreciate how photographs may trigger their responses, particularly the meaning that participants assign to certain photographs and the conclusions they draw from these photos.

The participants for this study will be University of Miami students who are potential future employers. IRB approval was gained for conducting this research and recruitment of interviewees at the University of Miami. Since many students from the University of Miami may be future employers, understanding their decision making in regards to the hiring process is an important issue, in particular the influence of minority stereotypes on employers' decisions. Therefore, professors at University of Miami have been contacted to gain access to potential participants. After gaining access to their classes, students will be asked if they are interested in participating in an interview. For this thesis approximately twenty (20) students will be interviewed.

Once the participants have been identified, they will be informed that their responses are confidential and they can withdraw from the study at any time. In order to participate

in the study, each participant read and signed a consent form. After getting participant consent, interviews will be conducted using guidance from Charmaz (2014) that will take up to twenty minutes. Participants will be shown a series of photos and asked to place them in order of who they would likely hire. The interviews will be initiated with a few standard questions that ask the participants to explain their decision-making and what led them to their decision, followed by questions regarding the order in which they place the photos, with regard to employability, and specifically why they placed the photographs in a particular order. At the end of the interview, participants will be asked about their beliefs about Middle Eastern relations and Middle Easterners in the United States.

In order to interpret what people say, their responses should be read verbatim. Therefore, the participants will be asked if the interviews may be taped. If a participant does not wish for his/her interview to be taped, notes will be taken to record information. After the interviews are conducted and collected, the responses will be transcribed and coded. The transcriptions will then be organized and analyzed to better understand the relationship between colorism and job employment.

Due to the nature of the study, an interview guide will be used; however, the researcher will be permitted to ask additional questions based on participant responses (Charmaz, 2014). A few probe questions will be asked to begin the interview process and allow participants to feel comfortable. After ordering the photos, more questions will be asked regarding their decision making and how they view the people in the photos. Based on their answers, further questions will be raised to understand the meanings the participants' assign to the photographs.

Throughout this thesis, interpretive social science will be used to address the topic of interest. Due to the different experiences people have based on their identities, using interpretative social science allows for better understanding of participants' decisions and their perceived reality (Bauman, 1978). Because social encounters and perceptions are subjective interpretations, how interviewees construct these elements are vital to understanding employment decisions. Using this theory will promote better understanding of the meaning assigned to the photographs, thus taking into account the subjective nature of the participants' perceptions.

Due to constantly changing nature of cultures and norms, participants' perceptions are also changing through time and space; therefore, interpretive social science will allow for a better understanding of how the participants perceive the photos, taking into account the current context of politics, media, and participants' identities (Rosaldo, 1989). By understanding the interpretive nature of perception, interpretive social science allows for the on going construction of the interviewee's perceptions to be grasped.

<u>Contribution to the Literature</u>

The purpose of this thesis is to better understand the discrimination that Middle Easterners may face when applying for jobs based on their skin color and facial features. In addition to exploring the discrimination that Middle Easterners face, this study will contribute to the current literature in understanding the participants' perceptions of Middle Eastern women and the characteristics that influence their judgment. Using interpretative social science and participant interviews, this thesis will go in-depth to explore a person's interpretation of minority photographs, thereby revealing the logic of their decision-making about the employability of these women.

Literature regarding Middle Easterners is scarce because rise in the Middle Eastern population is fairly recent—dating back only a few decades. Until now, research on colorism is narrow, focusing mainly on Black and white Americans, occasionally looking at Hispanics; therefore, this thesis will present a new perspective by investigating how Middle Easterners in the United States are perceived based on their phenotypes (Espino and Franz, 2002; Keith and Thompson, 2001; Keith and Herring, 2001; Hunter, 1998). Thus far, Middle Easterners are an understudied population in research. This thesis will provide a better understanding of the perception and interpretation of Middle Eastern women in the United States.

Based on previous research on colorism regarding Black people, there is an expectation that biases will be expressed against Middle Eastern women with darker phenotypes. Such a finding would be clearly problematic, since job opportunities are important to social mobility and assimilation. Until recent events unfolded, Middle Easterners have been among the *model minorities* who acclimate well and thrive in the United States (Chua & Rubenfeld, 2014). Given the great variation between Middle Easterners' appearances, this thesis study will shed some light on the changing times. Particularly important is that skin color and facial traits are not treated as objective features, but rather constructions that participants interpret and act on accordingly. Because people act on their interpretations, it is crucial to take understand their perceptions in a greater context (Merton, 1968; Lombardo and Sabetta, 2018). By doing so, this study will reveal not only how participants perceive the photographed women, but also how their perceptions may influence this population.

Structure of the Thesis

Following this chapter is the literature review that presents and assesses the relevant literature on this topic to provide a good understanding of colorism, as well as the importance of job attainment opportunities and hiring bias against minorities. The literature will focus on the perception of Middle Easterners, particularly Middle Eastern women, in the United States and the rising stigma associated with this group. In general, the literature review will serve to provide a solid foundation for explaining the problem, as well its relevance, on which the rest of the thesis will build on and explore.

After the literature review, there will be an in-depth discussion of the methods. Through the methods chapter, there will be an explanation of qualitative methods, as well as the theory of interpretive social science. The methods section will illustrate why these specific methods are necessary in better understanding colorism in this case Middle Eastern women seeking employment. Throughout the methods chapter, why the focus on meaning is important will be explained.

But there is also a technical side to this methodology. Seventeen interviews will be conducted. After conducting the interviews, the results will be recorded and discussed in Chapter 4. Throughout this section, the nature of the interviews will be discussed. Central to the findings, however, are any patterns that emerge with regard to perceived employability of Middle Eastern women, based on their skin color and facial features.

Following a presentation of the findings, a discussion will be initiated with respect to their relevance to colorism. In addition to expanding on the findings, the discussion will examine the relevance and importance of the findings to the future employability of Middle Eastern women. The thesis will end with a conclusion. Throughout the conclusion, future

steps of research will be discussed, as well as potential policy changes that may be suggested by the information that is gathered.

The next chapter will provide a deeper understanding of the gravity of this topic through a literature review. This review will expand on the research topic by drawing from a number of areas including history and politics to thoroughly explain the relevance of this issue in current day society.

Chapter 2: Colorism, Context and Research, A Literature Review

<u>A Brief Explanation and Historical Context</u>

Across cultures, lighter skin within a group of people is often associated with beauty, wealth, and elevated social standing (Hunter 2005, Hunter 2007, Hill 2002). The benefits associated with lighter skin have been present throughout history, particularly in societies that experienced European colonization (Norwood & Foreman, 2014). Lighter skin is seen to benefit the person both in inter- and intra- racial contexts. This trend is likely due to the Eurocentric ideals that Europeans instilled around the world, as well as the privileges that people with lighter complexions had under colonization.

On the contrary, darker skin has been associated with primitiveness and savagery, and thus has had negative impact on people with dark complexions (Hill 2000; Hunter 2007). The affects of colorism are seen worldwide, from East Asian to the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas. Many civilizations overtly praise people with lighter complexion. For example, in Indian society lightness of skin is associated with caste and accompanying rights (Phillips and Norwood, 2014). In other societies, lighter skin people are privileged in more covert ways. In Brazil, for example, families of darker skin earn about 60 percent less than whiter Brazilians (Telles, 2004; Norwood, 2014). In this regard, lightness and Eurocentric features are linked to class, social status, and even capabilities. In today's modern society, people with lighter skin and softer facial features of any race continue to be perceived as more capable, trustworthy, and civil when compared to darker people of the same race (Kleider et al., 2012; Norwood, 2014; Hunter, 2007) .

In addition to skin color, facial features play a key role in how persons are perceived and treated. Researchers found that the stronger and more ethnic a persons' facial features

are, the more sinister they are perceived to be, regardless of race (Kleider et. al, 2012). A white person with strong, ethnic facial features is perceived to be more dangerous than a white person with softer facial features. Therefore, the discrimination associated with colorism includes skin color, along with ethnic facial features and hair texture (Hunter, 2007; Blair et. al, 2002; Kleider et. al, 2012). This combination results in people with stereotypical appearances from minority group being especially disadvantaged, for being not only a person of color but a dark person of color (Keith and Herring 1991; Thompson and Keith, 2001).

While the United States is comprised of different groups of people, this country is not exempt from disproportionately advantaging lighter skin people within a race. In particular, lighter skin black people have higher education, economic, and social attainment compared to darker skin black people (Espino and Franz, 2002; Hill, 2002; Hill 2000; Hughes and Herter, 1990; Hunter, 2007). This distinction originated in history through slavery. Lighter skin slaves who had European ancestry, were often held in higher regard compared to slaves who did not have this background (Finkelman, 2014). Those with lighter skin, not only the lighter skin slaves, were given more privileges and skilled tasks. But also, white slave owners made distinctions between lighter and darker skinned slaves to deter uprisings. In effect darker skin slaves were perceived to be more primitive and often given menial tasks and field work (Finkelman, 2014). The stereotypes surrounding differences in skin color continue today, and have expanded to include more minority groups in the United States such as Mexicans and Asians (Espino and Franz, 2002). Even though colorism affects many groups in the United States, thus far studies have focused on

black people. Therefore, this study will examine the advantages of lighter skin as they pertain to Middle Eastern women.

Colorism in Context

During the early stages of slavery, lighter skin black people were able to fight for and win their freedom if they appeared to have white ancestry (Norwood & Foreman, 2014). The law read that a baby is only a slave if she is born to a slave mother, and thus biracial babies with white mothers were free, if others with European ancestry could testify that they had a white or Native American maternal ancestry. The more European persons appeared the more likely they were to win their freedom in court. This example highlights the privileges associated with lightness of skin and European ancestry in the United States.

In the mid 1600s people who appeared black were marked as slaves, and since the status of those who appeared biracial was unclear they could either be slaves or free. Therefore, biracial and multiracial people served as a buffer between free white and enslaved black people. The benefits of lighter skin were not limited to children born to non-black mothers. During this time period, enslaved children born to white fathers and enslaved mothers were also given more resources and better education over enslaved children of pure African ancestry (Norwood, 2014). This distinction created a hierarchy associated with shades of skin color, whereby a person's freedom, education, and access to resources was enhanced by biracial ancestry (Norwood & Foreman, 2014).

In the 1830s, slave owners and Southern politicians introduced the one drop rule, which was fully implemented in the deep South by the early 1900s (Brown & Norwood, 2014). This rule stated that even a drop of black ancestry marks persons as black, thereby stripping them of their privileges and categorize them as colored. Other states further north

and west, such as Maryland, Kentucky, Nebraska, and Utah, did not adopt the one drop rule exactly, but amended their blood fraction so that people who were one-sixteenth or one-thirty-second black were labeled as black (Brown & Norwood, 2014). This blood based classification created an order where a person's race and accompanying privileges could change when he or she crossed into another state. For example, persons may be considered black in Georgia if they are one-sixty-fourth black; however, when they travel further north they are considered white and have access to resources reserved for whites. With the one drop rule, skin color in the United States continued to determine a person's rights and worth as a human being. Mixed ancestry, simply put, is still considered to be problematic.

Even after slavery, skin color bias continued to be present in the black community. In order to join certain organizations and gain entry into specific events, black people had to pass a "paper bag test" (Okazawa Rey, Robinson, and Ward, 1987). In this test a person's skin color is compared to a brown paper bag, and if the color is darker entry is denied. This method was used to restrict access to sororities and fraternities, as well as other social clubs and organizations. Seemingly, color matters because skin color and facial features are used to judge a person's race and the traits associated stereotypically with that group (King and Johnson, 2016).

While the one drop rule is not the law anymore, and organizations do not openly use the paper bag test, these procedures have changed perceptions of skin color across the nation (Kerr, 2005). The effects continue today through various means, such as the media and advertisements. Actors and politicians who are labeled as people of color or minorities are frequently biracial or very light representations of their group. For example, Hannah

Simone plays an Indian character, Cece Parekh on the popular television show New Girl, even though the actor is of biracial European and Indian ancestry. Clearly displaying Eurocentric phenotypes, as well as exceptionally light skin, even though she is representing Indians. Another example of ethnic whitening in the media is Kat Graham, an actress who is often assigned the token black character on TV shows; however, she is biracial and has Eurocentric facial features and hazel colored eyes. Rarely does an actress or actor who has stereotypical facial features play the ethnic or racial group they represent, particularly in a leading role (Shaheen, 2003; Jha, 2015). Darker skin celebrities with stereotypical features are often limited to playing stereotypical roles and lower ranked characters. For example, when stereotypical looking black lead characters are in movies where they are portrayed mostly as slaves or athletes. Similarly, stereotypical looking Latin people are also restricted to stereotypical roles. For example, Sofia Vergara, a Colombian actress, is the exotic Colombian wife of a white man who is thirty years older than her, thereby perpetuating the stereotype of the loud and bodacious Latina as a trophy wife. Specifically, for Middle Eastern people, Arabs and Persians are often vilified in the media (Shaheen, 2003).

Often times celebrities and politicians are downgraded by colorism and dismissed as unimportant (Jha, 2016; Kerr, 2006). Indeed, Barack Obama is often labeled as black instead of biracial, in an attempt to obscure his white heritage and call into question his legitimacy (Banks, 2010). Weaver (2012) examined the influence of skin color on politicians. She found that voters, in particular men and conservatives, were significantly less likely to vote for darker skin black candidates. She finds that while being a black political candidate may influence voter opinion, skin color is a large factor in determining trustworthiness, experience, and workmanship (Weaver, 2012).

In attempts to portray people as dangerous or less qualified, the media will darken a celebrity or politician's skin color to make him appear more menacing. A specific example of this practice is the 2008 presidential election, when the GOP darkened Barack Obama's skin color, to make him appear hostile and aggressive to voters. To test this theory, Iyengar et. al (2010) manipulated the pigmentation of a photo of Barack Obama and found that when made a bit darker, participants with implicit racial bias were significantly less likely to support Barack Obama than they would have when he had lighter skin. Eberhardt (2004) found that this bias may be a result of the positive correlation between skin color and expectations of stereotypes. Viewers, in particular white people, assign more stereotypes to people with darker complexions. One of the stereotypes assigned to darker skin is criminality; therefore, people often associate more aggressive behavior and criminality with people of darker skin color (Eberhardt, 2004).

Intersecting Research and Colorism

Scholars found that lighter immigrants are often able to acquire better jobs and have greater social mobility. For example, Borjas (1985) tracked the earnings of white, black, and Asian immigrants as they came to the Untied States. He found that regardless of what decade these immigrants arrived, White immigrants always earned more on average when compared to Asian and Black immigrants. In his study, he also compares the wages of immigrants from different countries to native people from those groups in the United States. While comparing Mexicans coming to the United States to white immigrants, Borjas (1985) finds that white immigrants often assimilate within 10-15 years; however, non white immigrants take a longer time to earn comparable wages. Therefore, there are discrepancies between races, but also within races depending on a person's ethnicity.

These differences in treatment are not limited to black people nor to Hollywood and politicians. The consequences of colorism are present at all levels in society and among various immigrant groups. Researchers report that lighter Mexicans with more Eurocentric facial features are often presented with better opportunities in the United States, when compared to those who are more indigenous looking. Across many groups, lighter people with Eurocentric facial features often fare better than darker individuals of that group with more ethnic facial features (Espino and Franz, 2002). When comparing Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans, Espino and Franz (2002) found that Cubans on average ranked higher both in income and occupational prestige when compared to Puerto Ricans and Mexicans who tend to have more ethnic appearances. These findings show that color in fact does matter and that this society is not colorblind (Espino and Franz, 2002; Levinson, 2007).

To test the influence of color on a person's job attainment opportunities, Harrison and Thomas (2009) tested the influence of skin color on applicants by showing a resume with an accompanying photo to participants. The participants were assigned a photo at random. There were six potential photos that participants could have received. In the photos there is either a black man or a black woman, and the picture has been altered so that the person in the photograph is either light, medium, or dark. After asking participants to fill out a questionnaire regarding the person's marketability and likelihood or hirability, the researchers found that the photos where the person's photograph had been altered to show darker skin received significantly lower ratings. In particular, in terms of hiring decisions, participants were far less likely to hire darker skin applicants. (Harrison & Thomas, 2009). Nonetheless, there has been no study on if this finding applies to Middle Eastern women when applying for jobs.

Due to the differences in "life chance" opportunities based on skin color and facial features, taking a closer look at the opportunities for Middle Eastern women in the United States is crucial (Weber, 1978). Hunter (1998) found significant differences in income between that lighter skin and darker skin black women. Hunter (1998) discovered that over two-thirds of dark skin women in her study make less than $5,000 a year, and only six percent make between $10,000 and $20,000 a year; however, approximately forty percent of lighter skin women make less than $5,000 and approximately 40 percent also make between $10,000 to $20,000 thousand a year (Hunter, 1998, pg. 528). This drastic difference in annual income shows that light skin women on average have economic advantages over those with darker skin. The impact of colorism holds true for black men as well. In their study, Keith and Herring (2001) aimed to understand the impact that skin color has on the income for black people in the United States. They found that darker skin black people continue to hold more menial and labor intense jobs compared to black people with lighter skin. Upon examining their data, the researchers found that the participants with lighter skin tones earn abut 65% more than people with darker skin (Keith and Herring, 2001).

These studies show that employers show implicit bias in favor of lighter applicants. Currently, the law prohibits racial discrimination, although there are no penalties for continued exclusion of darker people from the workplace (Banks, 2006). This maneuver may continue to expand the already prominent gap between people of different skin shades within a race. Through this study, this difference in economic advantage will be examined relative to Middle Eastern women, including the implications for this group in the United States.

Thompson and Keith (2001) published a study that examined the intersectional impact of gender, race, and color on black women. Using data from the 1987 National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA), they conducted interviews with regard to participants' self-esteem and self-efficacy. Each participant was ranked on a five-point scale ranging from "very dark brown" to "very light brown" (Thompson and Keith 2001). This research revealed that differences in skin color were correlated with parallel differences in self perception. Specifically, Keith and Thompson found that changes in skin color show a .33 and .18 decrease in self worth for men and women respectively. Therefore, participant's self perception is significantly correlated to her skin color.

These scholars also find that, in particular, dark black women are likely to experience the most disadvantages due to the beauty usually associated with lighter skin. When examining the data for self-efficacy, Thompson and Keith (2001) found that darker women reported lower levels of self-efficacy and worth; however, this low self rating was due, in part, to the economic and social disadvantages associated with darker skin. Therefore, in addition to experiencing impediments due to one's race and gender, a dark black woman also experiences color dysphoria due to the negative stigma surrounding darker colored skin, as well as the external limitations imposed on people with darker complexions.

Colorism and Middle Easterners

This thesis examines the influence of color on Middle Eastern women to discover if the disadvantages that plague darker black women hold for darker Middle Eastern women. While colorism has penetrated deep into the United States, this phenomenon has also permeated Middle Eastern civilizations and affects present day Middle Easterners,

particularly women. Historically, skin color in the Middle East has been an indicator of beauty and status. Darker skin has often been associated with low status, frequently indicating outdoor professions such as working in fields or marching in the army (Norwood, 2014). With time, people working these jobs in the sun would have dark skin. Therefore, such skin came to resemble less respected positions when compared to priests or clergymen who often worked indoors. (pg. 11). These negative connotations are still present today as people of darker skin are often regarded as having lower standing compared to lighter skin people within the same group. These effects are particularly prominent among groups of people with high phenotypic variations.

The Middle East is a vast region comprised of Afghans, Arabs, Iranians, Kurds, and Turks, just to name a few groups. Phenotypically, a Middle Eastern may appear European, with light eyes and hair; African with thicker hair and darker skin; or Asian with almond shaped eyes, pale skin, and black hair. There is no one appearance of the Middle Easterner. This reality is not only because of the vastness of the region, but also due to war, rape, slavery, assimilation, and immigration that have been on-going for thousands of years (Lewis, 1992). Due to their history, Middle Eastern persons may have Turkish, Persian, Mongolia, Saudi Arabian, European, or African ancestry, thus creating a blend of phenotypes and appearances.

Even though Middle Easterners vary greatly in appearance, there are stereotypical facial features that have been associated with persons of this region. Currently, the stereotypical appearance of a Middle Eastern person has come to be marked by thick eyebrows, a prominent nose bridge, olive skin, and thick curly black hair, which are reinforced through the media and anti-Middle East propaganda (Saeed, 2007). Even though

the Middle East is a region with religious diversity, Middle Eastern men are often portrayed in the media with beards and turbans, while Middle Eastern women are presented wearing hijabs that mark them as Muslims.

As instability in the Middle East continues to rise, mass migrations of people who seek refuge and opportunity come to the United States. The larger waves of Middle Eastern migration to the United States occurred during World War II, although smaller numbers continue to come due to the complicit and economic instability in the region (Suleiman, 1999). The initial waves of Middle Easterners migrating to the United States were of high social and economic standing (Hill, 1997). They were followed by Middle Easterners who had lower economic status, and thus had a harder time acclimating to life in the United States (Zogby, 1990). As Middle Eastern migration continues in the United States, how this group assimilates is especially important. The current literature suggests Middle Easterners of lighter complexion will assimilate easier as their identity can be more readily concealed. This group often experiences passing privilege, since they may initially be perceived as white unless they choose to disclose their ethnic identity. As for darker Middle Easterners, they are perceived as non-white and assigned an identity of the "other", thereby contributing to their disadvantages.

From the 2000 census, the population of Arab Americans is estimated to be 1.2 million; however, researchers estimate the true number to be closer to 4 million (including Arabs as well as Iranians and Afghans) (Samhan, 1999; Zogby, 2001). The low reported levels may be due to the question wording and placement on the 2000 Census, as well as a refusal to identify as Middle Eastern. Many people of Middle Eastern decent, as well as Middle Eastern immigrants, identify as white in order to earn advantages as well as avoid

any negative repercussions. (Salari, 2002; Maghbouleh, 2017). Another reason for the misrepresentation in numbers may be due to the misclassification of Middle Easterners in the United States. Currently, the United States government ignores their racial and ethnic identities and classifies Middle Easterners as white (Maghbouleh, 2017). While classified as white on government forms, Middle Easterners often experience covert and overt discrimination and do not have the privileges associated with European whiteness (Maghbouleh, 2017). This misclassification means that the discrimination Middle Eastern people experience cannot be classified as racial because they are technically classified as white. This anomaly results in hate crimes, as well as discriminatory acts, going on without proper policies to address the marginalization of this group. How these people have been classifies, in other words, has had policy implications.

In the current political climate, Islamaphobia, a fear of Muslims, is on the rise (Salari, 2002). This phenomenon negatively impacts Middle Eastern people of all religions, due to the overlap of stereotypical features among Muslims and Middle Easterners. Therefore, Islamaphobia is not solely fear of Muslims, but also fear of people who exhibit Middle Eastern traits (Salari, 2001). Islamaphobia peaked after 9/11 and resulted in high levels of racial profiling against Middle Easterners. This profiling has lead to unequal treatment and marginalization, similar to other minority groups, particularly of those who display strong facial features (Zogby, 2001). Strong facial features are often tied to the stereotype threat; that is, people who most resemble their group are expected to act in alignment with the stereotypical behavior expected of that group (Eberhardt 2004).

For Middle Easterners, characteristics such as violence and barbarianism, not to mention terrorist inclinations, are cited in the media and the polity as inherent for this group

(Salari, 2002). This stereotype trickles into different aspects of life, in particular social interactions. Bystanders and others engaging in social interactions with Middle Easterners are aware of these stereotypes, and are wary of the persons with whom they are interacting. In her book, Maghbouleh (2017) reports that people are physically and verbally attacked for looking Iranian. One man in her book reported being harassed for appearing Middle Eastern. The victim, who was not Iranian but Hispanic, stated that his beard was an indicator of a Middle Eastern identity and lead to his assault. In point of fact, the discrimination against people who look stereotypically Middle Eastern may be overt or covert. For example, this distrust and dislike follow Middle Easterners into the employment sector, as employers are less likely to hire applicants that raise suspicion.

Regarding discrimination in the application process, researchers have found that Arab surnames received less call backs from potential employers when compared to English surnames (Widner & Chicoine, 2011). When controlling for resume content, these researchers found discrimination in higher ranking job position. For managerial positions, resumes with Arab names received 0.66% callbacks; however, similar resumes with white surnames received 5.26% callbacks for managerial positions (Widner & Chicoine, 2011). Widner and Chicoine (2011) find that people with Arab names must send out 2.79 more resumes to get callback rates comparable to white applicants. These studies illustrate that employers have a bias against Arab sounding names; however, there has been little research examining how a stereotypically Arab appearance may influence an employers' perceptions of applicants.

Currently, there are political, social, and economic disadvantages to being darker and more ethnic looking. To combat this discrimination in the employment sector,

applicants of color engage in whitening, stripping themselves of their identities to appeal to employers (Kang et al., 2016). This change is accompanied by adopting an English friendly nickname or through more drastic measures such as hair straightening, bleaching the skin, or other ways to appear more Eurocentric. Unfortunately, whitening is not limited to job applications. A common form of whitening present among Middle Easterners, both men and women, is a nose job. The Middle Eastern nose is a prominent marker of the ethnic identity. The typical Middle Eastern nose is marked by a bump in the ridge. This trait set many Middle Easterners apart from Europeans. It is not surprising that the Middle East has some of the world's highest rates of nose jobs, per capita (Robinson, 2016).

Many Middle Easterners have a distinct bump in the bridge of their nose and sometimes a hooked nose. As the Middle East is the capital of the world for nose jobs, Middle Eastern men and women in Iran get nose jobs at four times the rate of people in the United States per capita (Robinson, 2016). Taking measures to trade in their striking nose for a small, daintier looking one allows many Middle Easterners to pass as European. This transformation is done for appearance as well as social status. This high rate of nose jobs shows how deeply the ideals of European beauty standards, and accompanying facial features, are rooted in Middle Eastern societies.

A new nose benefits both Middle Eastern men and women in social and economic standing. Appearing more European allows Middle Easterners to blend in a bit easier and appear as more beautiful. Research shows a positive correlation between perceived beauty and income (Judge et al., 2009; Udry and Eckland, 1984). Employers are more likely to hire beautiful people, and a woman's beauty is strongly correlated with her economic standing. Because employers are more likely to hire a person they find attractive,

appearance matters, particularly for women (Morrow, 1990). Accordingly, ethnic women engage in different forms of whitening to mask their ethnic identity, appear more phenotypically white, and improve their employment prospects.

Greater Context of Colorism

In an era where dual income is often necessary to make ends meet, and there are more women in the workforce, physical appearance and presentation have become increasingly important. Especially for women who cannot mask their ethnic identities, understanding employment biases is important. This study is necessary to understand the trajectories and opportunities available to this group of people, and how they are expected to assimilate in the United States. Sometimes, Middle Easterners are regarded among the model minorities in terms of work ethics; however, if darker representatives with stereotypical facial features are discriminated against in the job market, they will be marginalized and create an underclass in the United States. Employers' biases, in other words, may have far reaching effects.

Currently, there are laws in place which prohibit employer discrimination based on race; however, acts of color based discrimination still occur. In other words, it is illegal for employers not to hire black, Middle Eastern, or Hispanic people due to their race, although many employers have implicit biases to hire lighter members of these groups. The result is that employers hire lighter applicants of a minority group, thereby producing strata within a race, where darker people may be doubly marginalized—first for being a minority and second for being dark skinned.

Due to the government classification of Middle Easterners as white, there are no quotas or preference for the hiring these people in the United States. Even though Title VII

addresses color based discrimination, it continues to be difficult for Middle Easterners to voice color based discrimination. Therefore, this study will serve to better understand how stereotypical Middle Easterners are perceived when applying for jobs. This economic facet is crucial when examining a group, because research shows that economic status is linked to perceptions of self-efficacy and worth. This study has the potential to unveil how Middle Eastern women are affected by their facial features and skin color when applying for jobs, with implications for the real-life consequences any discrimination may have on this group as they try to assimilate to the Untied States.

The current literature points out that skin color differences within a race may lead to class differences between a seemingly homogenous group of people. These differences, if true, create tension and divergence that undermines the advancement of that group as a whole. Currently, under Title VII and Section 1981 of the Civil Rights Act, employers are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race and color; however, skin color continues to impact an employees' rights, privileges, and advancement in the workforce (Hall and Johnson, 2014). Therefore, a person's phenotype must be taken into account when investigating how people of various groups are affected by employment discrimination. In the next chapter, the research methods will be outlined to give a better understanding of how this study will be conducted and what data will be collected to gauge the biases against Middle Eastern women.

Chapter 3: An Appropriate Methodology

<u>Interpretive Social Science</u>

In conducting this study, the correct methods must be used to investigate the topic of interest, that is perceived identity. Therefore, in examining potential employers' perceptions of Middle Eastern women, a qualitative approach was the only appropriate way in which the participants were allowed to elaborate on their decisions, and thus explain the meanings they assign to the photographs. The objective of this study is to understand how participants perceive the women in the photographs and what influences their preferences to hire certain candidates over others with comparable credentials.

A person's experience and interpreted identity influence her perceptions and cognitive processing (Rosaldo, 1989). In order to account for the subjective nature of this study, a qualitative approach will be used to answer the research question. The reality is that persons cannot be isolated from their surroundings, because through interactions with others and their environment they begin to understand themselves and form a sense of self (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979). Therefore, using a qualitative approach accounts for the current cultural and political climates, as well as the unique participant experience, all of which influence how participants create their identities and experiential worlds (Rosaldo, 1989). Thus, these subjective experiences will likely shape how participants perceive the photographed women.

Throughout his article, Taylor (1980) explains the different approaches to scientific research, specifically the divide between the natural and human sciences. When examining the meaning of the participants' responses, he argues that their contexts and shared experiences should be taken into account (Taylor, 1971). In this regard, Taylor contends

that the natural sciences supported by empiricists do not apply to research on humans. Due to the importance of interpretation and context, human sciences cannot isolate the object of interest, but instead must consider the total experience of a phenomenon. In doing so, Taylor (1980) depicts the different types of understanding and explains that persons can only be understood properly in terms of the meaning they intend to disclose. Therefore, the words used are not the key, nor the order of the photos, but why they were placed in a particular order and the meanings assigned to the women in the pictures (Clarke, 2005). And only by probing participants can a deeper understanding of their perceptions be obtained.

To understand the meaning that participants assign to the photographed persons, the researcher must look beyond the participant to the culture, language use, and other notions that shape the interviewee's world (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Taylor, 1980). In this case, culture is defined through shared meanings and practices in a society; the shared meanings are not understood in isolation but rather through the interaction and experiences shared by people (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979). Therefore, the researcher must attempt to understand the complexity of the participants' perspectives, which defies quantification. In doing so, the responses cannot be isolated, but instead must consider the interpretive framework of these reactions.

Understanding a person's world permits a better understanding of the meaning the participant intends to convey. Gaining access to the participants' world, or *lebenswelt,* is known as *world entry,* whereby the researcher is able to appreciate local knowledge (Schütz, 1971). In order to understand this world, the researcher must strive to be holistic and recognize that everyday life is intersubjectively constructed. This insight includes

understanding the specific situations and experiences which shape a person's life (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979). As might be suspected, achieving world entry is a process that requires more time with a participant than a fifteen to twenty-minute interview. However, having the ability to examine participants' decisions in-depth allows for a longer glimpse into the meanings behind their perceptions than would a standardized approach.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) depict the symbolic universe as a medium that extends the subjective reality into the overarching universe and everyday life. The "symbolic universe" is particularly important in uniting a person with their reality, especially when this outlook is challenged (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). In conducting this study, the goal is to understand the symbolic universe of the participants, particularly their views of how Middle Eastern women might fit into the workplace. Why they hold these views might promote some insight into the changing character of work. As the Berger and Luckmann (1966) explain, the problem of legitimation occurs when the knowledge must be transferred to the new generation. This claim is the reason for interviewing undergraduate students who have not yet entered the workforce, as they are the upcoming generation in the work force.

Colorism regarding Middle Easterners is a fairly unexplored area of research; therefore, qualitative methods, specifically interpretive social science, allow for a more detailed examination of the research question (Charmaz, 2014; Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Due to the subjectivity of participants' perceptions and interpretations of the photographs, interpretive social science through narrative analysis allows knowledge to be produced in a relevant way (Rosaldo, 1989). Nonetheless, participants may not disclose reasons for ranking to photographs due to the negative repercussions linked to exhibiting bias.

Therefore, especially important when using this method is to avoid social desirability bias, since some rapport, in theory, can be developed with the respondents (Tickle-Degnen, 1990).

Rosaldo (1989) explains how through time and space, societal norms are constantly changing. As norms change, perceptions and interpretations change as well. How societal norms operate should not be ignored. Due to the pervasiveness of interpretation, these factors may vary from person to person and in different communities. All of these considerations influence the information that the participants feel comfortable disclosing.

In accounting for the subjective perceptions of participants, those who use qualitative methods are sensitive to these issues (Elis and Flaherty, 1992; Weber, 1947). For instance, the researcher must take into account the difference between what the participant may think compared to what he or she feels comfortable disclosing to the researcher. In his 1956 book, Goffman portrays the different regions a person occupies. Through average social interaction, people are often only exposed to the front region of others. In this region there is a type of performance taking place that is disguised to placate an audience. In this scenario, the researcher is the audience (Goffman, 1956).

Goffman (1956) explains the opposing back region as a space where performers believe the audience is excluded and, therefore, act without trying to impress anyone or manage their performances. Acts of exclusion often take place in the backstage, where the performers are either comfortable with themselves or their team (Goffman, 1956). The point of a qualitative interview, accordingly, is to penetrate this back region, and obtain an honest glimpse at the world that is operative.

In regard to job applicants and employer bias, hiring decisions are often made in this back region (Goffman, 1956). This region is where an employer feels comfortable and secure in knowing that no audience member will intrude and employment decisions can be made freely. Through a short interview, building the rapport required to expose the so-called back region is difficult. This juncture is where interpretive social science and narrative analysis is needed. Specifically, a qualitative and semi-structured interview allows the participants to explain why they would make particular employment decisions.

By probing participants in this way, a researcher can better understand the shared meaning that otherwise may be misconstrued due to differences in experiences, identities, or languages. For example, Garfinkel (1967) finds that often times meanings are misinterpreted through language; however, when participants are probed to further answer a question and explain their decisions, a clearer understanding can be obtained of the participants' decisions and the shared meanings involved. Having the opportunity to ask participants to clarify a potentially vague response is imperative in understanding the scenarios that pervade the photographs of Middle Eastern women.

Specifically, semi-structured interviews will be used (Denzin, 1978). Conducting semi-structured interviews allow for a sense of direction without excessive restriction. In other words, there will be more opportunities to probe and grasp the participants' claims and justifications (Denzin, 1978). In this sense, semi-structured interviews allow for an exploratory study to gain a deep understanding of the world in which the photographs exist (Maccoby and Maccoby, 1954). The participants will be shown the same photographs, followed by an interview; however, further questions will be guided by participants'

answers, similar to a conversation (Charmaz, 2014). The conversation that is engendered, accordingly, can move in any number of directions.

<u>Procedure</u>

For this study, 17 interviews were conducted. The participants will be University of Miami students. In order to recruit participants, access has been gained to undergraduate sociology classes being taught in the Fall of 2018. A short speech was given at the end of class regarding the study and the importance of participant interviews. Subsequently, a paper was passed around for students to sign up who wanted to participate. Students then wrote down their contact information. After contacting participants through email, an interview was scheduled. The interviews took place on campus or in a nearby public setting that was convenient for the participant. The interview location was dependent on the participant, so that the student felt comfortable.

Before beginning the interview, participants were asked to read and sign a consent form. This form, which was approved by the University of Miami IRB, outlines the study broadly and informs participants of their rights to participate and leave the study at any point in time. Additionally, any questions participants may have will be answered throughout the interview by the researcher. Once an interview began, participants were shown photographs of Middle Eastern women who vary in phenotypes. The participants were asked to order the photographs in order of who they would most likely hire for a job opening at a marketing firm. There are no resumes or names associated with the photographs to avoid implicit bias (Widner and Chicoine, 2011).

The photographs are of five different Middle Eastern women that range in phenotypes and skin color. Each person in these photographs gave written consent via text

message. The photographs are headshots that were cropped to be the same size and balanced for lighting and shadows, so that any difference between the photographs is the person photographed and not the background. All the women are Middle Eastern. In order to avoid name bias, each photograph is assigned a letter. When participants referred to a photograph, they addressed the letter of the photograph, thereby allowing the researcher to refer back to the photograph during the transcribing and coding processes.

Two of the women in the photographs will have darker skin and more ethnic phenotypes, two will be of moderate skin color and softer features, followed by two photographs of light skin women with very soft facial features. This strategy was taken to better gauge which photographs are more likely to have better employment opportunities based on their appearances. Giving participants a range of women with different skin colors and facial features provides a gradient of selections to examine the influence of colorism.

The photographs were scattered in no particular order, and participants ordered the photographs in the order of whom they would rather hire. After ordering the photographs, participants were asked to explain their decision-making process, during an interview that took approximately fifteen to twenty-five minutes. The interview consisted mainly of probe questions that ask participants to elaborate on their decision and explain how they reached a conclusion. The interview was semi-structured with an initial interview guide of four questions. Additionally, depending on participant responses, various follow-up questions were asked. For example, participants were asked to elaborate on the differences they noted between the photographs that influenced their decision making. These clarifying questions were raised to ensure that a participants' comments are properly understood. Remember that the purpose of this study, in the framework of interpretive social science, is world

entry. Constant feedback, or cross-checks, are necessary to facilitate this process. And once they are completed, the typed interviews were transcribed and closely scrutinized.

The IRB has approved this study. Due to the potential effects of social desirability, participants were not informed the study was examining colorism but instead employment marketability among potential job applicants. Midway through the interview, the participants were debriefed and informed about colorism and the true nature of this study. The IRB has approved the debriefing script.

Unless otherwise noted, the interviews were recorded in addition to short hand notes taken throughout the interview. After collecting the interviews, each one was analyzed and interpreted to better understand the participants' decisions and how they perceived each photograph. To understand how the participants perceived the photographs, the researcher analyzed the interviews for shared meanings and the interpretations that shaped the decisions regarding hiring the women in the photographs.

As noted earlier, the interviews ranged from fifteen to twenty-five minutes and included questions regarding participant perceptions of the photographed women, as well as their views on the Middle East. There are three separate stages of participant questions. The first stage focused solely on the photographs where participants ranked and elaborated on the photographs. The second stage addressed the issue of professionality, and the third stage occurred post debriefing. In the third stage of questions participants answered questions about Middle Easterners and their perceptions and experiences with this group. The three various stages collectively addressed the different dimensions of the research question, thus permitting a holistic understanding of how a Middle Eastern woman's appearance influences her employment opportunities.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted using the guidance of Carl Auerbach and Louise Silberstein's book, *Qualitative Data*. Each interview was transcribed to be clearly compared with the other interviews. After reading the transcriptions, overlapping segments were placed in groups (Auerback and Silverstein, 2003). After a specific segment was selected, this piece was examined for ideas that multiple participants voiced. Next the repeating ideas were grouped together to form various themes that portray participant perceptions of Middle Eastern women. Once similarities were found between participant responses, several excerpts were used to portray an emerging theme. Most themes were labeled using the participants' words, known as en vivo codes. Below each step is explained in further detail.

Participant answers regarding who they would hire first, and their reasons, were selected as relevant text, as were, comments on the photographed women's physical appearance and participant views of professionality. These excerpts of relevant text revealed the characteristics that influenced the participants' decisions. Additionally, the excerpts show how the different perceptions of the photographed women influenced their hirability. A second set of relevant segments were taken that addressed participant views of the Middle East, as well as Middle Easterners in the United States. This part of the interview occurred post debriefing. The purpose of the second segment of relevant text was to compare participant views of Middle Easterners to their perceptions of the photographed women.

The respective segments were taken out of the interviews and placed together. Placing the excerpts together revealed similar perceptions among participants that were used to answer the research questions through a theoretical narrative. Participant narratives

and subjective observations consisted of direct quotes and overall opinions. These narratives were used to elaborate on participant perceptions of Middle Eastern women and how perceptions influence a woman's hirability.

<u>The Linguistic Turn</u>

Through interpretive social science, a researcher is better able to understand the participants' perspectives by considering the contextual and environmental influencers that play a role in shaping the perceptions of participants. In order for the reader to understand the interpretation process, transcribed excerpts are provided in the next section followed by the interpretation of the participants' words (Taylor, 1971). By doing so, a reader is able to understand how the researcher interpreted the data and the meanings that are present throughout the interviews.

In the following section, the results of the study are presented. In this section, a glimpse into the worlds of the participants is offered. In this regard, the interviews were analyzed for meaning, particularly themes related to the employability of the women in the photographs. The objective is to understand how the ethnic appearance of women influenced their chances for employment.

Chapter 4: Findings and Results

<u>A Brief Overview</u>

When transcribing and coding participant responses, a few patterns emerged, that are grouped into four themes. The first theme is the ambiguity of the Middle Eastern women, coded *I had no idea they were Middle Eastern*, that stemmed from the misrepresentation of Middle Easterners in popular media, in addition to the diverse phenotypes of Middle Easterners. The second addresses participant preference to hire white Middle Easterners depicted by the quote *society would choose white people over anything else, sadly*. The third relates to the expected inferior job position of ethnic looking persons titled *the relegate*, as task completers, the fourth *people associate Middle Easterners with terrorism, whether you want to admit it or not,* and *the paradox* ties together how Middle Easterners are portrayed and the impact this depiction has on perceptions and expectations of Middle Easterners. Collectively, these themes address how Middle Eastern women with stereotypical phenotypes are perceived when juxtaposed with other Middle Eastern women, and how the media molds participant assumptions.

This chapter portrays how differently Middle Eastern women are perceived and ranked based on their skin tones. Even when wearing professional attire, their phenotypes, including facial features, skin tone, and hair texture, influence the perceived employability of the Middle Eastern women in the photographs. Additionally, these rankings are placed in the greater context of Middle Eastern race relations and how Middle Easterners as a whole are perceived, as well as how the portrayals of Middle Easterners in the media influence participant judgments. In general, the participants were not immune to the

influence of colorism on their perceptions of employability. As is shown in the following categories, participants were unable to guess the ethnicities of the photographed women, a phenomenon that influenced the women's likelihood of being hired.

The participants were presented with five photos of Middle Eastern women who varied in phenotype, thus providing participants with a gradient of Middle Eastern women with different skin tones, facial features, and hair textures. The photos were assigned letters to avoid name bias.

I had no idea that they were Middle Eastern

The coding process revealed that the participants' perceptions of the women provided a range of ethnicities. After revealing the ethnicity of the women in the photos, participants were undoubtedly shocked that the photographed women were all Middle Eastern. Middle Easterners, a group comprised of European, Asian, and African ancestry, often have an ethnically ambiguous appearance, which varies greatly from person to person. While there are common traits such as pale skin framed by dark hair, this contrast is not necessarily true for Middle Easterners as a whole who are not a phenotypically homogenous group. As one participant stated, "If we were in a classroom with these people, no one would know they're from Iran." This participant concluded that students may criticize Middle Easterners without knowing they are in their presence, because identifying women from this group is difficult.

Participants noted the women were not white or "true white". A true white is a person of pure North European ancestry, with light skin, hair, and eyes. Participants found a hint of non-white in the women in the photos. For example, "they all could be like half white…I don't know they all have a little bit of some other ethnicity in them…". The

giveaway for the women not being "true white" was often the tint of darkness to their complexion and their dark hair color. While participants believed the majority of women to be non-white, there were two photos which participants saw as "passing" for some type of white, photos labeled O and T. What set G, Q and P apart as not white was the olive skin, curly hair, and sharp facial features that were absent in photos O and T. The varied ethnic characteristics set the photographed women apart from one another, to the point that the participants did not believe them to share a common ethnicity.

O and T were assumed most often to be white or mostly white, whereas G, Q, and P were believed to represent a number of ethnicities ranging from biracial, Greek, Jewish, Latinx to Indian. There was no pattern, or congruency, with respect to the ethnicities of the women among participants, who assigned a range of ethnicities to the photographed women. The participants' misjudgment shows the ethnic ambiguity of Middle Eastern women, how different Middle Eastern women appear when compared to one another, and how they may be assigned completely separate identities from one another.

After disclosing the ethnicities of the photographed women--that they were all Middle Eastern--surprise adequately describes participants' reactions that all the women were Middle Eastern. To portray the intraracial phenotypic variation, one participant who was Iranian had no clue the women were all from her country of origin. Due to the misperceptions of the Middle Eastern women, the following section addresses the influence the varied appearances may have on the women's hirability.

One participant characterized this ambiguity in the following way:

"P seems Latina, I would say T seems more South American maybe Argentina, and G Jewish or Lebanese, and then O is a little more ambiguous. O and T seem the

most ambiguous to me…and Q … she could be of mixed race decent or she could also be of some sort of Latin American decent…I can't really say"

Jess was not alone in her misidentification of the photographed women as Amuru, while noting that T and O looked white while the others did not appear to be white. She had difficulty guessing, but she chose Pakistani for G, biracial for Q, and Hispanic for P. Participant misidentification shows how, depending on her appearance, a Middle Eastern woman may be mislabeled and consequently misperceived.

Chandler notes the diversity among the women by stating that "they all have different skin tones from each other…". She had a hard time identifying their ethnicities but stated that P and G may look Middle Eastern, while O and T may look like tan white people and Q appears to be African American. She assumed P and G to be Middle Eastern due to their thick and black eyebrows, olive skin tone, and curly or wavy black hair, which make them look more Middle Eastern. For T, she states her hair and skin make her look white, whereas the skin color and curly hair texture of Q make her appear biracial with African ancestry.

Society would choose white people over anything else, sadly

As is evident in the previous theme, photographs labeled O and T were described as being "most white" as compared to the others. O has straight dark brown hair with lighter eyes and skin tone similar to T. O was placed first in the hiring queue for most participants, and T was hired second most often. The participants gave a variety of reason why they preferred to hire O. When asked to elaborate on his decision to hire O, one participant who identified as Black stated "you know…society would choose white girls… so I would choose them too" to justify his preference for hiring photos O and T. This participant

understands clearly the bias against people of color, and employers' preferences to hire white employees but agrees with the standards which disadvantage him. Thus, internalizing the societal bias against darker people, he believed the right thing to do was to hire the whitest participants he saw, T followed by O. This participant was unique by explicitly stating his preference to hire white people.

Other participants offered more covert explanations comprised of both concrete and abstract characteristics. Concrete characteristics included physical differences such as attire, makeup, and hair. Abstract characteristics included overall assumptions about the women's attitudes based on their appearances. The pattern that emerged was the dissatisfaction with curly hair. In their explanations, participants stated that curly hair is often unprofessional and found to have detrimental effects on the hiring process; women with curly hair were seldom hired first.

Initially, makeup seemed to influence participant decision; however, this was not the case. While some participants described makeup as a key factor in their decisions, others did not. The preference for makeup was different for each participant. Even though the makeup preferences were different, participants often ranked O as the highest. A number of participants preferred the makeup on Q or T, but O received the highest rankings. A number of participants preferred no makeup or light makeup, saying cosmetics add to the professionality of the applicant. Even though there were mixed views on whether makeup should be worn, and if so to what extent, O continuously ranked higher than the other participants. This discovery leads to the conclusion that makeup may be a cover up for the reasoning behind a participant's decisions. As social desirability inevitably plays a

role in participant responses, commenting on a woman's makeup is more socially acceptable to say something about skin color.

Curly hair is a common trait among Middle Easterners and ethnic people alike, often being an indicator of one's ethnic background. Whites with curly hair are frequently Jewish or of Latin ancestry, and thus are categorized as ethnic whites rather than being what participants described as "true white". One participant stated that leaving straight hair down is fine, but curly hair must be tied back, thereby suggesting that curly hair is problematic and must be hidden from the employer to appear presentable. A number of participants voiced this opinion to justify their views that curly hair is unprofessional and messy.

Another participant explained that curly hair is more *playful* and less professional, and led to her decision to place the women with curly hair third and fourth in the hiring queue. Studies do not show that employees who wear their hair curly are any less competent at their jobs that employees with straight hair. However, research on colorism supports the idea that curly hair is often associated with an ethnic identity and has historically disadvantaged women, in particular women of color, in social and economic attainment (Hunter, 2007).

Danielle who identifies as Black American, and has curly hair, explained that while she loves her natural hair, she would never wear it to an interview. When asked to explain, she said "I feel that so many women… I have been judged and so many women have been judged that it just makes the process easier if you [straighten it] to go with the standards". Danielle goes on to state that although these are small differences, they make a big impact on the hiring process, particularly during the interview. Even though Danielle admits to

having very curly hair, she would take measures to meet the societal expectations and believes that other women should do the same. Hair is a trait that was shown to be an identifying marker for a non-white woman, as the photographed women with curly hair were seldom thought to be white.

What was particularly alarming and surprising was the harsh judgments from participants of color and others who had curly hair. A participant who admitted to having unruly hair, stated the importance of controlling one's hair. He stated:

> even if you have hard hair to control, you should try to take the… like for people like myself it is hard because my hair just blows out … and that sucks, but I do think that when I am going somewhere and I am doing something I try to brush it down and I try to make sure it looks neater.

What the participant describes as looking neat includes tying his hair back to hide his curly hair, a claim made by another participant as well. Another woman, who identifies as a Black Muslim, stated the importance of hair management. Since she must take measures to manage her own hair, she explains the importance of having straight hair for a job interview:

> straight hair, you took the time to like do your hair instead of just coming natural which sucks because I'm African American so I like…I have natural hair …it makes me look less professional if I don't have straight hair…so I feel bad that happens…but I feel your brain is programmed by society to like…these are our standards.

Clearly this participant is not pleased by the societal expectations but conforms to these demands and expects others to conform as well. This participant explained that she

would penalize others who do not take the time to conform to the societal standard of hair management by arriving to an interview with straight hair. While this participant stated that showing up to an interview with natural hair is unprofessional, she particularly meant ethnic or curly hair, since she was not expecting applicants with naturally straight hair to curl or perm their hair in efforts to appear more presentable.

Other participants who did not care whether hair was straight or curly, focused on how organized the hair was and whether the hair was done. However, the meaning behind "doing one's hair" is much different depending on the texture. For women with straight hair, simply brushing or parting the hair was sufficient to be well kempt for participants. However, the expectation for curly-haired women was different—they must tie back or straighten their hair.

Phenotypic diversity among Middle Easterners shows that there are Middle Eastern women with a range of hair; however, the Middle Eastern women with straight hair were thought of as passing for white, whereas the women with curly hair were often viewed to be part of an ethnic minority. This finding shows the varied perceptions of Middle Eastern women and how the natural occurring differences within an ethnic group greatly influence how individuals are perceived and ranked. Therefore, the assumption is inaccurate that all members of a single group experience the same forms of discrimination, when they are perceived, and often treated, as drastically different.

In short, curly hair is an indicator of one's professionality. As in photograph Q, the woman with darker skin and curly hair was only placed first in the hiring queue once compared to photo O who was selected first eight times. Even though participants

acknowledged that Q looked professional, often complementing on her attire, smile, and makeup, she was seldom placed first in the hiring queue.

Participants did not readily acknowledge skin color, the target of more overt form of discrimination. Hair, a softer form of discrimination, played a big role in participant decisions. This finding is problematic, since members of different ethnic groups may have hair curly hair, a trait seldom found among those who the participants described as "true white." Therefore, discrimination based on one's hair is often a form of implicit bias through which people with ethnic traits, such as curly hair, are disadvantaged. This connotation with hair has had historical significance, as "bad hair" is a term used across cultures to refer to curly and, specifically, Afrocentric hair.

The Relegate

This category signifies the submissive roles expected from the ethnic appearing women in the work place. Often times the justification for the participants' rankings of photos G and Q assumed that the appearances of G and Q made them appear more task oriented. This justification was used by participants regardless of where they placed G and Q, who were seldom placed first in the hiring queue.

One participant who did rank Q first concluded that she did not meet the American standards of beauty, and therefore the participant believed Q would be less concerned with herself and focus more on completing the task assigned to her than would a white woman. One participant explained that G and Q will not be as concerned with their appearances compared to the lighter participants who are more stereotypically attractive and meeting America's standard of "hotness." As she stated: "There is a culture with a lot of white women where you care a lot about your appearance…I just think that they (non-white

women) have a lot to offer and have different perspectives and stuff." While this excerpt does not overtly disadvantage ethnic women, this quote shows that darker women are viewed to be less attractive and expected to work harder than white women. This assumption strips Middle Eastern women of their femininity, since they are seen as caring less about their appearance.

Participants who placed the ethnic women last explained that this evaluation is due to their stereotypical appearance, thus reaching the conclusion that the more ethnic participants would be expected to focus more on their work. This conclusion stems from the stereotypes and the submissiveness associated with Asian and Middle Eastern women, who often occupy submissive roles in the media, typically being a sidekick to the white lead, as is seen on Blacklist, a TV show where the Middle Eastern character is tasked with menial jobs that aid the white lead. A self-identified Jewish woman stated that G looks more Jewish, and therefore will be more of a task completer.

> [I put] G last because she also seems accomplish things...accomplish things behind the scenes more technical …the vibe that I get from her seems more awkward and solve the problem myself. It is kind of the look and how I see in the media how they are portrayed…honestly, I get a very Jewish vibe from her…and they seem to put a lot of Jewish women, or international women in a place of inferiority…so it would be more instilled in her to be a background member.

What made the woman in the photograph appear Jewish was her curly hair and ethnic facial features, including a sharper nose and bushier eyebrows, common traits among Middle Eastern women. This participant stated that the media influenced why she

perceives the woman to be a task completer rather than occupying a role of authority, which influenced her decision to place G last on the hiring queue.

Another participant explained that G and Q appeared annoying. While she could not identify clearly why this was the case, this participant stated:

"G looks…I don't know why but she looks like she would annoy me a bit, she just looks irritation… I don't know what it is but just like she would have a lot of questions, a weird sense of humor…just not working for me… Q looks smart, I don't know what it is, she also looks friendly … but I put her third because she also looks a little annoying"

When asked what made the woman in the photograph look annoying, the participant was not able to really answer the question but stated that there was something in the smile or about the woman that she could not explain. Participants were rarely able to explain why they placed Q second to O, even though participants admitted that both applicants are well kempt, wear nice attire, and look professional. There is no surprise that the participants reached this conclusion, since Middle Eastern women often play the insecure, nerdy character in TV shows who often need to be directed on a task. Seldom are Middle Eastern women portrayed as autonomous, self-sufficient characters, thereby contributing to the stigma about their work ethic.

Another participant explained that "what influences [my decision] is where I see people in work now". This participant continued to explain that where she sees a particular ethnic group working influences who she would hire for a position. This participant did not reference where she sees Middle Eastern women working, but that she sees more African American women in the dining hall on her university campus and would therefore more

likely hire an African American women applicant due to their prominent presence in that occupation. Therefore, Middle Eastern women who are often stigmatized by occupying roles of inferiority and background characters will likely continue to be hired in these positions in the workforce. Inferiority in this case does not necessarily mean a low paying job, but rather a submissive position where an employee follows orders rather than delegating tasks from a position of authority.

This discovery led to further probing the participants on their perceptions of Middle Eastern women to understand why they believed these two women were better fit as subordinates in the workforce, including participant perceptions of Middle Easterners in the media, which may influence participant expectations of Middle Easterners. After debriefing participants on the identities of the photographed women and the true nature of the study, participants answered a series of follow up questions regarding their experiences of seeing Middle Easterners in the media.

People associate Middle Easterners with terrorism, whether you want to admit it or not

The participants stated that the negative media portrayals add to these stereotypical perceptions of Middle Easterners and the discrimination this group faces. Not a single participant recalled seeing a Middle Eastern person in the media as anything but a terrorist. One participant explained:

> People associate Middle Easterners with terrorism, whether you want to admit it or not, a large majority of Americans associate you're from the Middle East and that takes their mind to 9/11 or some kind of terrorism based thing…a lot of it has to do with how you are brought up, but I definitely think there are negative connotations associated with middle eastern people.

Participants explained that acts of terror are often not labeled as terrorism when the perpetrator is not Middle Eastern; however, if the perpetrator has any tie to the Middle East a Middle Eastern identity is quickly tied to terrorism. While elaborating on her point, one participant used the example of the Boston bombers:

> If there is a Middle Eastern in the media …its labeled as terrorism no matter how extreme or how severe it is but if its an American person and its like a white male they're quick to call it domestic terrorism…like it's terrorism but you wont call it that because they're not dark skin they're not middle eastern, so I think the media has a huge part on how Americans portray Middle Easterners … because if it's a Middle Eastern person that is always the first thing you hear they're from the Middle East like its not like they're born in America… lived here they're whole lives…they're middle eastern… I definitely think the media is at fault for the reasons Americans associate Middle Easterners with terrorists.

Brooke explained that you definitely see more Middle Eastern people in the news than you would in a show, which may lead to the limited, biased portrayal of Middle Easterners in the media. But many of the participants felt that the biased depiction of Middle Easterners in the media results in the negative perceptions of Middle Easterners. As Brooke states,

> "Well obviously I think for some people the only Middle Eastern people they see are the ones on TV when there are pictures from 9/11 or something or of terrorism like or of people out in a war … especially if you live somewhere where there is not a big population of Middle Eastern people then that's all you're going to see … so it's not like they get a great portrayal"

She went on to explain that if the audience sees people who look like the people on TV committing acts of violence, audience members will connect the two. Thus, when you see a person that fits a description of which you are primed to be skeptical, and even fearful, a link is made logically between the terrorist on TV and the person who fits the phenotype. What the participant describes is the schema that is formed in the brain. By constant negative exposure to a group with homogenous appearances, the brain is wired to associate certain appearances with the violence and primitiveness portrayed in the media (Levinson, 2007). The brain ultimately forms a negative schema as negative traits are assigned to a person whose phenotype meets the criteria.

One participant elaborates on her explanation of how the media links Middle Eastern people with violent, religious extremist groups when she states,

“I do not think [Middle Eastern people] are portrayed very well. I think that Islamism is a major factor in that, and I think that it is not true. I think that most times when Middle Eastern people are portrayed in the media it is based to terrorism or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or something it is never necessarily any good…I don’t think you know ‘look at what this great person did today’ it is more like ‘look how they destroy women or look how they destroy society or look at the Syrian war or look at what they are doing to these people’”

Miranda explains that the media plays a huge part in how persons understand events and obtain their information of others, thus leading them to view the world around them through a particular lens. Therefore, this negative, inaccurate portrayal molds an audience to be wary of people who look Middle Eastern.

The media portrayal of Middle Easterners as terrorists creates "implicit biases" that associate stereotypical, Middle Eastern phenotypes with terrorism. Implicit biases, often undetected and unaccounted for, are, in this case, formed by the constant negative exposure to Middle Easterners in the media (Goff et. al, 2008). When a person's only exposure to this group is seeing a picture of a Middle Eastern person with the headline terrorism or terrorist, the mind is trained to associate negative and fearful emotions with this group. So that when a person fits the stereotypical image, the mind automatically associates the negative emotions and thoughts associated with terrorism with the person who fits the description. This process creates a negative association or schema through which people learn to associate anything Middle Eastern with terrorism.

<u>The Paradox</u>

This theme addresses the paradox of participant responses whose words often contradicted their perceptions. For example, if participants have no idea who is Middle Easter, why do they believe that Middle Easterners experience discrimination? This theme addresses who the participants are referring to when they believed that Middle Easterners face discrimination. The participants are referring to people who are obviously Middle Eastern, either by appearing stereotypically Middle Eastern with darker phenotypes or through the Islamic identity linked to the use of a hijab.

While participants unanimously believed that Middle Easterners in the United States face discrimination, very rarely did they identify the photographed women in the photos as Middle Eastern, particularly photos O and T. Therefore, the following questions probed about who the participants believed faces discrimination, even if it is not clear to them who is Middle Eastern. Upon elaborating, participants meant that the more obviously

Middle Eastern a person appears she is more likely to face discrimination. The traits used to describe an obvious Middle Eastern person were a sharp nose, olive skin, black hair, and thick eyebrows, thereby signaling that the more stereotypical a Middle Eastern person looks she is more readily identified as Middle Eastern and thus more likely to experience discrimination based on her identity compared to a Middle Eastern person who can pass as white. This insight supports the implicit bias explained by Levinson (2007) where participants associated dangerous characteristics to characters who were negatively stigmatized. Therefore, the more stereotypically a Middle Eastern person appears, she is potentially associated with the stereotypes of Middle Easterners in the media.

Seemingly, among Middle Eastern women there are levels to how white a person appears, and those who have a lighter phenotype may fit into the category of ethnic whites along with Jews, Italians, and Irish, who pass as white and have the option to disclose their identity upon convenience. Those who are perceived to be white, thus experience the consequent privileges, compared to the ethnic Middle Easterners who are often perceived as minorities. While the women in the photos are all Middle Eastern and share that identity, the perceptions assigned to the whiter Middle Easterners are associated with privilege that darker Middle Easterners do not experience.

Alex explained that in his understanding,

"the more obviously identified [Middle Easterners] are those that are farther from the Mediterranean…because I figured being closer to the Mediterranean means more mixing with other people around the Mediterranean which means less obvious"

This participant clarified that he meant the Northern and Eastern Mediterranean regions that are labeled European, as opposed to the South of the Mediterranean and the top strip of Africa, that are considered to be part of the Middle East. Alex explains the mixing that occurs the closer a Middle Eastern country is to Europe, and why these persons appear less Middle Eastern. He expects that lighter Middle Easterners are harder to spot and that those people who are more easily identified as Middle Eastern, are more readily discriminated against.

Sarah, who is Middle Eastern, described the variety among Middle Easterners, and that on average there is a darker tint to the skin color. She goes on to explain that Middle Easterners are more likely to face discrimination based on their immigrant status, as well as their religion. Sarah explains how Islam has a bad reputation, and therefore being overtly Muslim may disadvantage a person. Miranda believes that Middle Eastern people do face discrimination based on their appearance as well as their religion, and specifically whether they wear a hijab. She explains that being clearly Middle Eastern, through one's appearance as well as support of Islam, may result in discrimination against a Middle Eastern person.

In addition to having an overtly Middle Eastern appearance, wearing a hijab leads to discrimination. But the distinction must be made between religion and ethnicity, particularly when examining Middle Easterners. While people with ancestry from this region are categorized as Middle Eastern, there is religious variation in the region. Therefore, not all Middle Easterners are Muslim and not all Muslims are Middle Eastern; however, turbans and hijabs have been strongly associated with terrorism in the media. Muslims in the United States, who may have no ancestry to the Middle East, may choose to wear a hijab, overtly identifying themselves as Muslim. The participants explained that

while appearing clearly Middle Eastern contributes to discrimination, overtly identifying as Muslim is another reason to discriminate.

<u>Understanding the Patterns</u>

The findings reveal various patterns through which participants perceived the photographed women and made behavioral assumptions. The themes relate in unique, unforeseen ways. While participants did not identify correctly many of the photographed women, they concluded that Middle Easterners do face discrimination. This paradox was revealed throughout the interviews, as a pervasive ideology. During the interviews participants described that their perceptions of Middle Easterners were often based on a stereotypical appearances or otherwise related to Islam. Based on stereotypical perceptions of Middle Easterners the participants believed that this group faces discrimination. This finding supports the theories on colorism that suggest the more ethnic and stereotypical members of a group are almost destined to fill a subordinate, stereotypical role.

The findings also support evidence of the stereotype threat. The clearest result was that the more ethnic and Middle Eastern a woman appeared she was perceived to be less autonomous and inferior. Specifically, often the more ethnically stereotypical Middle Eastern women were perceived to be annoying and assigned to be relegates. Oppositely, the whiter Middle Eastern women were perceived to fill the stereotypes associated with White women. The stereotypes associated with the lighter women reflected the assumptions that they care more about their appearance and are more professional compared to the other candidates.

The next chapter provides a discussion of these findings and places them in a broader theoretical and political context. Additionally, they will also be linked back to

colorism, as well as the broader research framework, thus illustrating how this study contributes to the current literature and policy studies on workplace discrimination.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The findings suggest there is preference to hire lighter Middle Eastern women. Frequently, participants defended their hiring decisions in terms of soft characteristics. Soft characteristics, as described in the previous chapter, are the woman's smile, perceived attitude, likability, and professionality. Participants rarely used hard characteristics such as skin color or facial features to discriminate, with the exception of hair. Participants tended to describe curly hair as unprofessional, and thus participants ranked women with curly hair low.

There is a paradox with participant explanations. Even participants who used soft characteristics to explain their decisions gave preference to the lighter woman. Regardless of participants' descriptions of soft or hard characteristics, most participants gave preference to the lighter woman. This finding suggests that, there is a link between hard and soft characteristics. In other words, an applicant's hard features, such as skin color, hair, and facial features, are used to draw conclusions about a woman's behavior, attitude, and likeability. These soft and hard characteristics are inextricably linked.

Even though participants rarely acknowledged the differences in skin tones, they consistently gave preference to the lightest women in the photograph with straight hair. They key in this study is understanding how participants articulated their answers. Participant responses show that they are not immune to the influence of colorism; however, rarely did participants use skin color to justify their decisions. This discovery suggests that colorism is linked to implicit bias (Levinson, 2007, Banks 2013). Therefore, participants may not be consciously aware that the skin color and hair texture of the photographed

women influenced their decisions, even though these characteristics undoubtedly played a role in participants' decision making.

Due to social norms, the use of hard characteristics to discriminate is neither socially accepted nor well-received; however, subtle forms of discrimination continue to disadvantage minorities (Feagin, 1977). However, if participants use soft characteristics such as likeability, professionality, and attitude, they use less racially charged traits to explain their decisions, as these forms of discrimination are embedded in socially constructed institutions (Cortina, 2008; Feagin, 1977). This issue lead to another paradox. Even though participants said they noticed the different skin tones and the great phenotypic diversity, they concluded that skin color, hair, and facial features did not play a role in their decisions. Participants noticed the differences, but said they were not influenced by these phenotypic differences. This paradox led participants to believe they were being fair to the photographed women by not acknowledging their physical appearance. However, participants assumed character attributes based on the women's soft characteristics, for example their smiles. Thus, participants attempted to isolate soft and hard characteristics in their explanations, but these subtle assumptions continued to influence their decisions.

Participants often perceived their answers to be objective. As contemporary theorists point out, persons do not exist in spheres of isolation (Geertz, 2001; Bauman, 2016). Every experience is shared, and every decision is influenced by external characteristics (Dussel, 2008). Therefore, when participants attempt to isolate professionality from skin color and hair color, they fail. The way a person perceives certain characteristics depends on different characteristics and narratives (Norenzayan, 2007). When participants attempt to isolate and judge an applicant objectively, they are unaware

of the subjectivity behind their decisions (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992). Participants are unaware of how their implicit biases influence their decisions, because they believe there is an objective reality that can be used to correctly judge an applicant.

A few participants did not give preference to lighter women. While participants acknowledged the variety of skin tones and hair, they did not want these hard characteristics to influence their decisions. Thus, participants believed they were objectively judging women. In this regard, Levinas (1998) shows that perceptions are influenced by a holistic background and narratives are intertwined. Therefore, participants cannot ignore a person's skin color and hair (Takeda et. al, 2006; Manning, 2010). While participants give preference to the lighter women, they claimed that skin color and facial features did not play any role in their decision making. This is essentially colorblind colorism (Carr, 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

The final paradox of the findings is how participants with more ethnic phenotypes are more likely to discriminate against the darker women. White participants with straight hair often did not have a problem with the curly haired women; however, participants with curly hair adamantly believed that curly haired women should straighten their hair for an interview. This behavior suggests the internalization of the White Racial Frame (Feagin, 2013). Perhaps participants have internalized the discrimination against more ethnically phenotypic people as a product of their own lived experiences of non-white people. Accordingly, they project these internalized prejudices towards others who appear as they do. Additionally, participants may project the stereotype threat onto other minorities who look more similar to themselves (Inzlicht, 2012). While lighter people benefit from the affects of colorism, apparently darker people are the ones reinforcing these stigmas.

For this study, participants were recruited from a sociology class; therefore, they may have been primed to be more aware of discrimination against women of color. Nevertheless, there was preference to hire the lighter women. After transcribing and coding the interviews, four patterns emerged: (1) I had no idea that they were Middle Eastern, (2) Society would choose white people over anyone else, sadly, (3) The Relegate, (4) people associate Middle Easterners with terrorism, whether you want to admit it or not.

The first category, *I had no idea that they were Middle Eastern,* refers to the phenotypic variation among Middle Eastern people. Participants had difficulty categorizing the race of the participants due to the ethnically ambiguous appearance of many Middle Easterners. The phenotypic variation left participants confused that the participants were all from the same region. This finding challenges the perceived homogeneity of race (Hollinger, 1999; Celious and Oyserman, 2001). Even though there were a few shared characteristics among participants, the findings show that within a racial group there is great phenotypic variation. This realization leads to members who self-identify as one racial group (i.e Middle Eastern) being labeled as White. Simultaneously, members of the same racial group may be labeled as Latin, biracial, and Asian. Colorism shows that all phenotypes are on a spectrum; therefore, there is no absolute, homogeneity that individuals from a racial group must share. This conclusion calls into question the point of having racial categories if there is little to no homogeneity between members of a racial group. The findings suggest that racial categories are flawed and outdated, since participants were unable to guess the race of applicants.

The second pattern was: *society would choose white people over anything else, sadly*. Stated by a participant of color, this finding shows the preference that is given to

White applicants. Even though participants had a tough time guessing the racial categories of the photographed women, preference were given to lighter women. Participants acknowledged that the women were not white, or at least true white, but they continued to select the lightest woman who most closely resembles what was described as white.

Only one participant explicitly made this point; however, a majority of participants gave preference to the lightest woman. While participants gave preference to the lightest woman, they rarely used skin color and whiteness as a means to rank the photographed women. This paradox lead to the creation of soft and hard characteristics. Participants who did not hold explicit bias against darker women nevertheless drew negative conclusions about these women. Even when racial bias is not explicitly used, the outcome of the decision continues to benefit the lightest applicant (Hunter, 2007). This finding shows the covert and overt forms of discrimination. Perhaps implicit bias is to be included here as well. This discovery should be further researched in future studies.

The third pattern was *the relegate*. The reasons participants used to explain their decisions were more important than the decision itself. Darker women were viewed as being more dependent in the work force (Ghorbani and Tung, 2007). This association may stem from the stereotypes around Middle Eastern and Muslim women. Given that participants had difficulty identifying the women as Middle Eastern, perhaps this stereotype applies to women with foreign appearances (i.e. Latinx, Asian, etc.). The rare occasion that preference was given to darker women, participants envisioned the woman to be a worker, a follower, a relegate. When preference was given to the lighter women, participants expected the woman to be autonomous, a leader. This discrepancy in expected responsibilities and behaviors suggests that Whiteness is often associated with leadership

(Marira and Mitra, 2013). While the preference given to darker women appears better, the explanation behind participants' decisions reinforces the inferior roles expected from women of color (Hunter, 2007).

The final pattern shows the stereotypes associated with people of Middle Eastern origin: *people associate Middle Easterners with terrorism, whether you want to admit it or not.* Participants unanimously identified Middle Eastern people as terrorists. Even though they concluded that they may not agree and reinforce those stereotypes, terrorism is the only role that participants have seen Middle Eastern people occupy in the media.

When acts of terror are broadcasted, often times the title terrorist is only assigned to people of Middle Eastern decent (Tehranian, 2009; Alsultany, 2012). This occurrence has shifted the perceptions of terrorism from anyone who commits an act of terror to a specific perception, a specific profile, of who is a terrorist. Actors who occupy roles as terrorists are often dark Middle Easterners and Indians such as the character Sayid on the TV show Lost was played by an Indian man who is noticeably darker than the average Middle Easterner. Shaheen (2003) depicts over fifty movies in which the Arab character is demonized and villainized. In particular Arab actors are depicted through exaggerated, negative stereotypes.

Post 9/11, many Indians have been asked to fill in the roles of terrorists and Middle Easterners in TV shows and movies. This creates a specific profile of the Middle Eastern person as Indians—who are typically darker toned than Middle Easterners— who begin to resemble what a Middle Eastern person is supposed to look like. The flawed perception of Middle Easterners disadvantages dark Middle Easterners who are often associated with the stereotypes portrayed in the media and pop culture (Shaheen, 2003).

As participants stated, some Middle Easterners look White, perhaps not true White, but white nonetheless. Therefore, if lighter Middle Easterners are hired to fill the role of terrorists, the color lines between whites and Middle Easterners will be blurred. In order to have a starker contrast between the hero and the terrorist, skin tone is used to create an other category that classifies darker Middle Easterners as non-Whites. In other words, skin tone bias is used to show that Middle Easterners are not White. This disadvantages Middle Easterners as a group, but particularly disadvantages darker Middle Easterners who are subjugated to being profiled and stereotyped as terrorists (Tehranian, 2008).

The findings support the current theories of colorism that show preference for lighter Middle Eastern women (Hunter, 2007; Banks, 1999). Additionally, the participants did not assume that the women in the photos were Middle Eastern. They found that the women had very different phenotypes ranging from Eurocentric to Afrocentric. The current label of *Middle Easterner* used to describe people of this region may be too broad and outdated. If the effects of colorism are so great that certain participants who identify as the same ethnic group are perceived and treated completely different, then the legitimacy of group labels are called into question.

The findings are particularly important because they examine a very understudied group. Even though Middle Easterners are understudied, their population in the United States has increased. Therefore, the reason for using Middle Easterners as the population of interest served two purposes: to understand how an understudied group is perceived in the United States and to appreciate how people who are rarely perceived as black or white are treated. Middle Easterners do not fit into the binary categories of race that are readily

used in the United States. Examining a spectrum of shades, features, and hair permits a better understanding of how racialization operates.

One error in the perceptions of terrorism is gender. Participants referred to Middle Easterners as terrorists. A few participants included both men and women in their perceptions of terrorists, but there should be more follow up questions on the interactions between gender and terrorism. For the most part, participants refer to Middle Eastern men as the terrorists they see in the media, but how would this bias affect Middle Eastern women in the workforce?

<u>Importance of the Findings</u>

The findings show that Middle Eastern women who appear more ethnic are often expected to fill stereotypical roles whereas whiter Middle Eastern women are often perceived to be more professional due to their hair and overall appearance. Lighter women were also believed to be self-sufficient workers. These findings suggest that Middle Eastern women who are darker do not pass as white, nor do they experience the same privileges associated with Whiteness (Maghbouleh, 2014).

Middle Eastern women are labeled as white on government forms. However, the findings show that people found most of the women to be anything but 'true white'. Due to their facial features, skin color, and hair, participants did not believe any of the women to be true white, which sets them apart from persons who are recognized as 'true white'. This discrepancy in appearance and racial labeling is called into question. The current categorization of Middle Eastern women lumps them in a group to which they are not perceived to be a part.

Thus, Middle Eastern women are, on paper, labeled white, depriving them of their own identity. Simultaneously, they are not perceived nor treated as Whites (Maghbouleh, 2014). This study shows how Middle Easterners are not perceived as White and therefore should not be labeled as such. Therefore, they should not be expected to have the same privileges associated with Whiteness, when they are perceived to be ethnic and foreign. Furthermore, under 2017 Hate Crime Statistics, it is very difficult to report color based discrimination if the employee and employer are of the same race. This leaves Middle Eastern women in a no man's land when they experience discrimination in the workforce. Thus, providing Middle Easterners with their own racial category allows them to take action against the racial discrimination they experience.

This thesis supports the current theories of colorism and finds that ethnic Middle Easterners are less likely to be hired than Whiter Middle Easterners (Hunter, 2007; Keith and Herring, 1991). This fact implies there may be strong employer bias regarding this group of women. Employers may be more likely to hire whiter Middle Easterners due to their less ethnic appearance and perceived greater levels of professionalism.

Middle Eastern women who are phenotypically darker appear more "foreign" and are perceived to be less native to the United States. Therefore, whether a woman self-identifies as Middle Eastern is less important than the race she is perceived to be labeled in influencing her employability. The phenotypic variation shapes a Middle Eastern woman's lived experiences, and phenotypically darker women are perceived to be less professional than their White counterparts.

These differences in perceptions limit opportunities of darker women who are often "othered" by potential employers (Hennon, 2015). In the employment sector, this othering

of darker women limits their access to opportunities and resources provided to lighter women, based on phenotype. This employer bias limits the socioeconomic assimilation of darker Middle Eastern women, ultimately leading to generational wealth disparities between lighter and darker women of a seemingly homogenous group.

This process calls into question the current racial categories. Even though a great emphasis is placed on a person's race, this study shows the fallacy of racial categories. Participants were not able to assume the race of these women; they were astounded to learn that all the photographed women are the same ethnicity and the same race. All the women were Middle Eastern, but categorized as White in terms of the current racial categories. Racial categories are clearly too restricting given that the participants clearly struggled to place these women in a category.

Future research should take into account names and appearances to understand how the Middle Eastern identity is perceived in the workforce (Widner and Chicoine, 2011). For this current study, no names were used to prevent name bias. Even though all the photographed women were Middle Eastern without names these women are difficult to identify. The exception to this rule is if a woman appears stereotypically Middle Eastern as described by participants. A stereotypical appearance includes the olive skin and dark hair. However, even participants who displayed these traits were not always perceived to be Middle Eastern. In these instants the participant identified that the darker women as not white.

Besides assuming a foreign identity, participants had a difficult time assigning the correct racial group to Middle Eastern women. This difficulty calls into question the bias regarding foreign and ethnic women. Possibly, participants are implicitly biased against

women who appear more foreign, as opposed to white American women. Therefore, including ethnic names for the pictures on future studies will address the bias regarding perceived foreign and Middle Eastern women. But because the participants were used to a binary view of race, women who do not fit into either category are often perceived to be foreign.

Conclusion

Societies with more prominent wealth disparities have higher crime rates. This finding stems from the lack of resources available to citizens (Kawchi et. al, 1999). Not only does this disparity create tension between people of different classes, but also intra-class conflict as people fight to have access to resources. But mass discrimination in the employment market deprives groups of employment opportunities. Therefore, if people are deprived of adequate opportunities to work, they are consequently deprived of other resources. In the next paragraphs, two proposals are made to combat employment bias. The first is creating a Middle Eastern label, so that if a Middle Eastern applicant experiences employment discrimination the employer can be held accountable. The second proposal is to change the system entirely by removing a person's identity from the process in lieu of an identification number.

These findings show that Middle Eastern women are not perceived to be White suggests that Middle Easterners should have their own category on employment, college admissions, and census forms. Thus these forms allow people to self-identify as Middle Eastern. Even though Middle Easterners are labeled as White, they do not experience the privileges associated with Whiteness. Continuing to label this group as White dismisses the Middle Eastern identity and accompanying experiences.

Currently, the Federal Bureau of Investigation defines a hate crime as a "criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity" (Federal Bureau of Investigation). Under the Uniform Crime Report of 2017, there is a section on anti-Arab bias. This means that a Middle Eastern person of Arab decent can file suit for a hate crime; however, this does not account for Iranian people as they are not classified as Arab. Additionally, it is difficult to classify a person as Arab if they are forced to identify as White on the census and government forms. This misalignment makes it difficult for Arabs and Middle Easterners to file these reports.

This definition applies to the employment sector as well. If a Middle Eastern applicant or employee has experienced race-based discrimination by a White employer, her claims are difficult to follow through because both the people are currently defined as White under the law. Though not impossible under Title VII, it is difficult to hold White employers accountable for race-based discrimination against Middle Eastern people. Moreover, holding minority employers accountable for race-based discrimination is difficult since Middle Easterners are classified as White. Under the current political climate, Whiteness is associated with privilege; however, Middle Easterners do not experience the same privileges that European Whites do. If a Middle Eastern person experiences employment discrimination from a minority employer, a complaint appears that a White person is filing suit against a minority for employment bias. This situation is less credible than if both the employer and the applicant are legally classified as minorities.

Additionally, labeling Middle Easterners as Whites creates a problem because Middle Easterners are essentially erased by being branded as White. In the employment

sector, making a racial discrimination claim becomes impossible if both the employee and the applicant are labeled White. Thus, discrimination experienced by Middle Eastern applicants on the basis of race is discounted and the employer is not accountable. Since the number of Middle Eastern immigrants and citizens of Middle Eastern ancestry is on the rise in the United States, there will be more Middle Easterners in the job market. Therefore, preventing this group from having a platform in the legal sector to speak up when they experience discrimination is a slippery slope that may deprive many persons of attaining equal opportunities and economic mobility. As discussed earlier, this may lead to social deprivation and result in a "sick society" (Fromm, 1955).

Perhaps these results may be interpreted in another direction. Rather than creating another racial category, perhaps a better way of dealing with race discrimination is removing option to disclose one's race from job applications. Doing so would require policy changes that alter the application process. For policy and workforce implementation, each person should apply with an application number rather than a name. This number is assigned when someone enters the job market. Such a gambit erases the name and race discrimination. Additionally, interviews should be conducted over the phone. Conducting over the phone interviews will deter employers' implicit biases against applicants of different backgrounds, applicant's appearance and perceived attractiveness influence hiring decisions (Morrow, 1990). Interviewing applicants over the phone provides a meritocratic form of employment by deemphasizing the influence of physical appearance on a person's workmanship. Since people are particularly biased against dark minorities, phone interviews blind employers from judging an applicant on the color and shade of their skin, although voice and accent may be interpreted as a give away. Future

studies should examine the relation between over the phone interviews and employment discrimination.

Although the Civil Rights movement and other change agents have had some influence on addressing discrimination, persons are still judged in terms of their facial features. Hopefully, this work provides some insight into this process by focusing on the importance of skin shade and other facial traits on employment decisions. But much more needs to be done in this area, given the current influx of immigrants from outside of Europe. Many challenges are thus on the horizon.

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