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Muslim Arab American Parents Perceptions, Beliefs, Knowledge, And Actions In Regard To Special Education

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MUSLIM ARAB AMERICAN PARENTS PERCEPTIONS, BELIEFS, KNOWLEDGE, AND ACTIONS IN REGARD TO SPECIAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The current study explored a group of Muslim Arab American parents' perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, and actions regarding special education. Using a phenomenological and interpretivist theoretical framework, this qualitative study investigated the Muslim Arab American parents' socially and culturally constructed realities through accounts of their lived experiences (Fay, 1996). The participants were from the Indianapolis area. This study included a total of 13 participants; six were Muslim Arab American parents with children in special education and seven parents without children in special education. A researcher-designed interview protocol systematically related to the research questions and the literature review was used to collect data. Observational notes were also collected during the interviews and used in the process of data analysis. The semi-structured interviews were analyzed using coding categories and thematic analysis. The goal of this study is to provide a better understanding of the perceptions, knowledge, and actions of both Muslim Arab American parents with and without children receiving special education services in regard to special education placement and procedures. The hope for this study is to provide a frame of reference for educators to take under consideration the impact of cultural and social norms, values, and perceptions when creating educational programs and servicing students from a Muslim Arab American background.

DEDICATION

To my late brother, Illiass Benalla.

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I would like to start by thanking my participants for allowing me to explore and share their rich experiences. I would not have been able to finish my dissertation without your help.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that the Arab American populace in the U.S. is about 3.6 million, and 24% of Arab Americans are Muslims (Arab American Institute, 2002, 2012). This implies that being Arab does not automatically mean being a Muslim. In this study, the population of interest was Muslim Arab American parents, a group of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals considered to be one of the least understood groups in the U.S. (Donovan, 2013; Goforth, 2011; Haboush, 2007). Educators' increased knowledge of their students' backgrounds, including that of their families, could facilitate instructional adaptations, improve collaboration, and increase multicultural education awareness (Dunst, 2002). Accordingly, it is crucial to have an improved understanding of the Muslim Arab American cultural and religious background in order to serve better the educational needs of this growing population of students.

It has been well established that parental involvement in their children's education is important for their academic success. Henderson and Mapp (2002) found that children with involved parents are more likely to obtain higher grades, pass their classes, be promoted, have regular school attendance, and pursue postsecondary education after graduation when compared to children with uninvolved parents. Donovan (2013) highlighted the importance of the level of support at schools, the relationship between the school and Muslim Arab American parents, the degree of school acceptance of cultural differences, and the level of language proficiency when

working with Muslim Arab American parents. This posits that Muslim Arab American parents' perceptions and attitudes toward school services in general are not only a product of pre-established notions and representations, but also they are affected by feelings of acceptance and familiarity with the educational system. Furthermore, the involvement of parents with children who are receiving special education services has been found to be helpful in building a strong collaboration between home and school (Haboush, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

The level of parental involvement in children's education has always been an important factor in students' academic success (Moosa, Karabenick, & Adams, 2001). Federal laws for students with disabilities have emphasized the importance of parental involvement (Whitbread, Bruder, Fleming, & Park, 2007) since the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (also referred to as PL 94-142) was first passed in 1975 and revised and renamed as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 and revised again in 2004. Unfortunately, parental involvement in special education and the level of home-school collaboration continues to be unsatisfactory (Donovan, 2013; Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003). More importantly, studies have stated that parents of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds tend to be less involved in the special education process such as in the evaluation process, the development of the Individualized Education Program (IEP), and the interventions related to their child's disability (Harry, 1992; Lynch & Stein, 1987).

The number of Arab Americans in the United States continues to grow and is estimated to have increased by approximately 40% from the 1.2 million estimated in 1980. The highest concentration of Arab Americans living in the U.S. is found in California, New York, Texas, and Michigan (United States Census Bureau, 2000). Children of Arab descent are reported to

comprise 40% of the Limited English Proficiency students in New York (Kayyali, 2006). This considerable growth in the number of Arab American parents and children within the U.S. education system highlights an expanding need to understand parental perceptions regarding education. The goal of this study was to explore these parents' perceptions and beliefs regarding special education and related services to identify the cultural, religious, and linguistic elements that shape Muslim Arab American understanding of the special education system in the U.S. and that drive their involvement in their children's education.

The Need for Mental Health Services for Muslim Arab Americans

The effects of negative stereotypes on school-aged Muslim Arab Americans' mental health have been highlighted in the literature (Bonet, 2011; Goforth, 2011). In addition, Muslim Arab American families are facing increasing challenges in a post 9/11 America (Bonet, 2011). The events of 9/11 and more recently those of Charlie Hebdo in Paris, France, in 2015 are only two of many incidents that have perpetuated and even intensified the already latent discrimination and stigma associated with being a Muslim, which has led to a growing anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment at the global scale. The events of the 9/11 attacks triggered acts of discrimination toward the Muslim Arab American community in the U.S., which in turn led to 135 cases of hate crimes that occurred in 2007 (Goforth, 2011). Relatedly, incidents like the backlash against the building of an Islamic youth center "near" Ground Zero in New York City, the Floridian pastor who threatened to burn dozens of Qurans (Bonet, 2011), as well as the most recent shooting of three university students in North Carolina are all manifestations of the ever growing stigmatization of Islam. In addition, Islam and Muslims in the U.S. have been a consistently trending topic of discussion and media scrutiny in the last decade due to "acts of terror."

The negativity and hostility that Muslims are facing impact most heavily on school-aged Arab American youth. There are reports that Arab American students have been exposed to a multitude of incidents of harassment ranging from mockery and physical violence to death threats, not only from peers, but also from teachers as well (Wingfield, 2006). Young Muslim women who wear the *hijab* (head scarf) are more often stigmatized and targeted at their schools than their counterparts without the *hijab* (Bonet, 2011). An increasing number of Muslim Arab Americans have been experiencing mental health problems owing to social stressors rooted in the negative perceptions associated with acts of terror in the world (Goforth, 2011).

Special Education and Related Services

Special education is a branch of the educational system through which children with disabilities receive educational services designed to meet their individual needs. In order for students with disabilities to qualify for special education and related services, a suspected or existing disability that affects their academic achievement, learning, and/or their functional performance at school needs to be identified. There are 13 categories under which a child with a suspected or established disability could qualify for special education. Those categories include Autism, Emotional Disturbance, Intellectual Disability, Other Health Impairment, Orthopedic Impairment, Multiple Disabilities, Specific Learning Disability, Deaf/Blindness, Deafness, Hearing Impairments, Visual Impairments, Speech or Language Impairment, and Traumatic Brain Injury (IDEA, 2004). Related services are defined as any type of service that is required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education. These services can include speech-language therapy and audiology, interpretation, psychological assessment, physical and occupational therapy, recreational services, early identification and assessment, school counseling, orientation and mobility services, and school-based medical services for the purposes

of diagnostic or evaluation. Related services also include school health and school nurse services, social work services in schools, and parent counseling and training (IDEA, 2004). Meanwhile, since the population of Muslim Arab American students in the U.S school system is growing at a significant pace, the need for mental health support and services is increasing at an equal pace (Goforth, 2011).

There are many factors that influence whether Muslim Arab families trust school-based services enough to seek them for their children. Cultural values and religious beliefs, particularly surrounding guilt, shame, and grief, are major influencing factors on the perceptions and actions of Muslim Arabs toward mental health (Goforth, 2011). When it comes to matters such as a child's disability, Muslim Arab families reference values such as family honor, avoidance of shame, confidentiality, and privacy (Donovan, 2013; Goforth, 2011; Haboush, 2007). Even though the absolute number of students of Arab American descent is considerably smaller than other ethnicities, it is still necessary for educators at all levels to be aware of the multifaceted stereotypes projected by the media towards this population (Hamdy, n.d.).

Research Questions

To attain an understanding of Muslim Arab American parents' perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, and actions regarding special education and related services, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What knowledge do Muslim Arab American parents have in regard to disabilities and special education in the U.S.?
2. What are the perceptions and beliefs of Muslim Arab American parents toward special education and related services in the U.S.?
3. How involved are Muslim Arab American parents in their children's education?

4. How involved are Muslim Arab American parents in the home-school collaboration process?

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study was built on the connection between three facets. The first facet is the need for information about the perceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of Muslim Arab American parents toward disabilities, special education, and related services in the U.S. As the literature indicates, there is a scarcity of resources for educators with respect to how to work and collaborate with parents of Arab origins (Haboush, 2007). The literature also indicates an increasing need of mental health support for students of Muslim Arab origins due to all the stressors and stigma associated with events such as the 9/11 attacks (Goforth, 2011). Accordingly, this study aimed to expand upon the available literature and to fill the gap in the literature by exploring the elements that influence Muslim Arab American parents' acceptance or rejection of special education and mental health services.

The second facet of this study is the application of this knowledge on the way participants' beliefs and other cultural variables influence their perceptions and actions in regard to special education and related services at schools. Muslim Arab Americans' levels of acculturation and religious identification are believed to play a role in their levels of trust and knowledge toward mental health services (Goforth, 2011). Accordingly, this study explored the extent to which religion, culture, and personal experience affect the participants' perceptions and beliefs toward special education and related services.

The third, and culminating facet of this study, is to provide an increased understanding of this culturally diverse group of parents and to offer a practical and applied frame of reference that could be used by school psychologists, administrators, counselors, and teachers when working with Muslim Arab American parents. This study aimed to help educators and school

psychologists obtain information that can assist them in providing culturally sensitive, aware, and appropriate services to Muslim Arab American students and families as well as building a strong home-school collaboration system.

Definitions of Key Terms

Muslim Arab American parents were defined for the purpose of this study as Muslim Arab persons who immigrated to the U.S. or first generation individuals of Muslim Arab origins that have children who were born or have lived the majority of their life in the U.S.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written educational plan that specifies a student's special education services. The IEP includes information about a student's current levels of performance, annual baselines and goals, special education and related services, accommodations, participation in state and district-wide tests, needed transition services, and measured progress (Lee, 2005).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a scarcity of literature regarding the perception, beliefs, knowledge, and actions that parents of Muslim Arab American children have regarding special education in the U.S. Muslim Arab American families are a significant part of the cultural mosaic comprising the United States' demographic map. The number of individuals of Arab descent residing within the United States is currently estimated to be between 1.2 million and 3.9 million. The need to understand the underlying cultural characteristics of the Americans of Arabic descent has increased and more students within special education programs are of Arabic descent (Haboush, 2007). Accordingly, it is crucial to understand the role of special education and how it is perceived and applied in the U.S., European, and Arab countries.

This literature review sheds light on the identity of Muslim Arab American parents from cultural, religious, and social perspectives. There is an ambiguity in terms of distinguishing who can be identified as Arab American. For this purpose, I provide a description and available data that clarifies the diversity among Arab Americans. This literature review explores the cultural and religious beliefs of the population of interest in this study, and thus attempts to provide a basis for the current values and norms that guide the Muslim Arab American parents' perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, and actions toward special education.

The number of children of Muslim Arab American descent is considerably increasing (Haboush, 2007). In order to be culturally competent with this population of diverse learners, educators need to understand the influence of traditional Arab values on the percepts of family, religion, education, and mental health. This chapter also illustrates the current state of special education in some Arab countries as compared to the U.S. and the nuances that govern the difference in attitudes toward special education.

Islam, Arab Culture, and Arab Americans

Islam at a Glance

The literal meaning of Islam is peace, surrender of one's will and losing oneself for the sake of God, and surrendering one's own pleasure for the satisfaction of God. The message of Islam is believed to have been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad 1,400 years ago by the archangel Gabriel, who subsequently told him the verses of the Holy Quran (Haboush, 2007).

Islam rests on the idea that each and every person is born pure. The Quran says that God has given human beings a choice between being good and evil. It also calls on believers to seek God's satisfaction through faith, prayer, and charity. Islam states that God created mankind as equals, irrespective of race or ethnicity. Also, the importance of caring for one's parents, helping orphans, and helping the needy are clearly stated and emphasized in the Quran (Hoot, Szecsi, & Moosa, 2003). Islam as a religion urges believers to help and support individuals with special needs and regard the weak with tolerance and respect (Islam & Campbell, 2014). The Quran emphasizes seeking knowledge and education.

Muslims believe that the primary message of Islam is there is only one God, also, that the Creator of the world is One and He alone is worthy of worship. In addition, Muhammad is His prophet, messenger, and servant. Muhammad's ultimate mission in this world was to transmit

God's rules and instructions about different life aspects and how life should be managed, including the six articles of faith in Islam: the belief in Allah, in Angels, in the heavenly books, the Prophets of Allah, the Day of Judgment, and in the Divine Laws (Hoot et al., 2003).

Religion and culture are entwined in the Arab world. The cultural traditions and practices associated with Islam are shared by most Muslim Arab religious groups (Goforth, 2011). There are two main denominations in Islam, the Sunni and Shiite. The variations between denominations in Islam are largely manifested in the degree of orthodoxy, strictness, and ethnic affiliation. All Islamic schools are believed to be united in following the five pillars of Islam: making the statement of faith (*shahada)*, praying five times every day (*salah)*, alms giving (*zakah*), fasting (*sawm*), and making the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*; Merry, 2005).

Who are Arabs?

It is important to note that not all Arabs in the world are Muslims; similarly, not all Arab Americans are Muslims. However, there are many substantial similarities between Arabs who practice different religions and the Arab Muslims around the world. Those similarities are shared and transmitted through cultural and linguistic practices. Prior to Islam, Arabs populated Najd (Arabia) and the Syrian deserts. Most Arabs at that time were either Pagan, Christian, or Jewish. This pre-Islamic era was called Aljahiliya, meaning the state of ignorance and darkness. Islam is considered to be the religion that brought enlightenment to Aljahiliya. After the advent of Islam, Arabs split between believers in the faith brought by the prophet Mohammed and those not willing to convert to the new faith. After the death of the prophet Mohammed there was a division between Sunni and Shiite based on religious succession (Dwairy, 2006).

During what is referred to as the Islamic State, Islam spread throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe. Several non-Arab groups converted to Islam during that era such as the Persians, Turks,

Indians, Mongols, Balkans, and the Spaniards (Dwairy, 2006). Many of those groups retained Islam as their main religion throughout centuries and today are a part of the Islamic world.

There are an estimated 285 million Arabs worldwide. They populate 22 Arab countries and only a small percentage of Arabs live in non-Arab countries around the world. The majority of Arabs are Muslims but a considerable number of Christian Arab minorities also live in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt as well as in other countries around the world. In addition, it is estimated that the number of Muslims in the world has reached about 1.2 billion including Arabs and other ethnicities and nationalities (Dwairy, 2006). The differences within and between Arabs and Muslims reside on the specifics belonging to the religious or sub-ethnic group to which they belong. For example, Christian and Muslim Arab individuals have more cultural and social similarities than non-Arab Christian and Arab Christian individuals (Goforth, 2011). Furthermore, there are differences between Christian and Muslim Arabs that are directly related to religious beliefs and practices (Moosa et al., 2001).

Facts About Arab Americans

According to Britto (2008), the immigration of Arabs to the United States happened in three waves. The first wave consisted of Arab immigrants that arrived during the Pre-World War II era beginning in the late 1800's. This wave was mainly comprised of farmers and laborers. The second wave occurred after the World War II. This wave was mainly comprised of educated and bilingual professionals and workers. The third wave brought an influx of refugees who came as victims of political conflicts in the Arab region, especially from Palestine and Lebanon. The Arabs who arrived from Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon from 1875 through 1912 settled predominantly in the Midwest, and between 1914 through 1922, considerable numbers of Arabs began settling in the state of Michigan, especially in the city of Dearborn. As for the second and

third waves of Arab Immigrants, they have settled throughout the U.S. In addition, 90% of Arab immigrants before the 1950's were Christians as compared to the majority of recent Arab immigrants, who are Muslim (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007).

Arab Americans are one of the least studied ethnicities and the most stereotyped group worldwide, especially since the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center (Bonet, 2011). Arab Americans, like other Arabs in the world, are described as family-oriented and committed to educational and economic achievement. Ninety percent of Arab Americans live in metropolitan areas and of those, 85% are reported to have completed a high school diploma (Hamdy, n.d.). Forty percent of Arab Americans are reported to have a college degree. By comparison, just 24% of the entire U.S. population is college educated. Also, 17% of college-educated Arab Americans have a post-graduate degree as compared to 9% of the entire college-educated U.S. population that have post college degrees. Eighty-eight percent of Arab Americans work in the private sector, while 12% work for the government, and 10% are unemployed (Brittingham & de la Cruz, 2005). The 2000 Census reported that 42% of employed Arabs (age 16 and older) chose careers in management, professional, and related occupations. Thirty percent of Arab Americans worked in sales and office occupations. The same census indicated that only 5.3 % of Arab Americans worked in construction, extraction, or maintenance (Brittingham & de la Cruz, 2005).

Arab American families have shifted more toward a nuclear family structure, due to their assimilation into American society's values, as opposed to the extended family structure common in the Arab world. In comparison to traditional Arab families, Arab Americans are also known to be relatively more tolerant and accepting of females' financial, social, and professional autonomy. Arab American family values depend on the level of assimilation to the American lifestyle and level of retention of traditional religious, cultural, and social values (Haboush,

2007). Accordingly, an Arab American family that has a high level of assimilation to the American culture is less likely to engage in traditional cultural practices. Those families are more likely to live an American lifestyle and adopt American values and cultural norms. It is important to note that of all Arab Americans 35% are Roman Catholic, 24% are Muslim, 18% are Eastern Orthodox, 10% are Protestant, and 13% are of other religious or no affiliation (Arab American Institute, 2002).

Stigma and Special Education

According to Fisk (2010), stigma occurs when either an individual or a whole society marks another individual with attributes that are discrediting (especially those with physical and mental disabilities), thus stereotyping them as not being fully human. The stigma associated with special education may be partially due to the practice of assigning disability labels to students who receive special education services, which help educators distinguish them from "typical" same-age peers. Labeling in this context recognizes that a certain biological trait is perceived as a negative attribute that differentiates a given individual from the general population (Green, Davis, Karshmer, Marsh, & Straight, 2005).

Lauchlan and Boyle (2007) discussed whether labeling students in special education (e.g., students with ADHD or Learning Disabilities), with its concomitant stereotyping and stigmatization, could be justified. Although labeling could serve to raise public awareness about the different difficulties that this group of students could encounter during their academic journey, if labeling does not result in addressing students' needs, the label would only play a stigmatizing role (Thomson, 2012). The negative effect of labeling is that the individual may be perceived by others as different and not belonging to the general population. This type of perception could lead to social exclusion, which may have a significant impact on the

individuals' self-esteem and socio-emotional well-being. Lauchlan and Boyle (2007) highlighted how special education labels such as Learning Disability, Cognitive Disability, or even ADHD could stay with an individual throughout their life. Accordingly, labeling could lead to social exclusion that could also affect the family of the individual with the disability (Green et al., 2005). The authors also spoke of how the attitudes and perception of peers and others around the students with disabilities do not necessarily have to be negative. Relatedly, some of the labels, for example, Autism Spectrum Disorder, could increase awareness, sensitivity, understanding, and patience toward the student with a disability.

According to Lauchlan and Boyle (2007), labeling serves a limited function of classifying students with disabilities for legal requirements that in turn allows schools to provide students with special education services. However, the negative repercussions of labeling, represented in difficulties related to career, personal, and social life, as well as self-concept, are greater than the positive results. Labeling can lead not only to stigmatizing, bullying, and reducing life opportunities, but it can also cause people to be misled about the nature and extent of a disability (Thomson, 2012). Bullying oftentimes leads individuals with labels to be emotionally harmed by others if the labels are used in a pejorative manner, such as to describe physical features instead of other characteristics. As for reduced life opportunities, there is a possibility that individuals with disabilities would be viewed less favorably for certain jobs and positions or could even have unsuccessful romantic relationships due to their conditions.

Interestingly, labeling can also be a way to raise awareness about students' disabilities; it is not only a stigma-generating process (Green et al., 2005). Labeling in special education can help educators place students in the right eligibility area so they can get the help and support they

need. However, many studies have shown that labeling has negative effects on students' self-esteem in the way that it leads to social stigma and exclusion (Sayman, 2012).

In their qualitative study, Green et al. (2005) conducted seven interactive interviews with mothers of children with disabilities and eight adults with disabilities. The interviews were with three mothers of children diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and mothers of children with Down Syndrome, severe Autism, Nonspecified Developmental Delay, and Early Childhood Stroke. Of these children, three were girls and four were boys who ranged in age from preschool to high school. In addition, of the eight adults interviewed by Green et al. (2005), four had an obvious physical impairment, one had a hearing impairment, and three had a lesser physical impairment with one of them having a seizure disorder. The tapes of the interviews were examined using the thematic frame of stigma proposed by Link and Phelan (2001). Their thematic frame rested on the following five themes used by Green et al. (2005): labeling, stereotyping, separation (group exclusion based on the feeling of otherness), status loss (lowered self-worth), and discrimination. In this sense, labeling has a social impact because it can incite social awkwardness in the case of social interaction between individuals with certain disabilities and their peers without a disability.

In terms of stereotyping, Green et al. (2005) linked labeling to stereotyping. These two processes go together and are based on social attributes of certain characteristics that are connected to the individuals' perception of the disability. Consequently, the construction of the opinion or stereotype about the individual with a disability does not necessarily have to be negative or judged as abnormal, as it is relative to one's life experiences and personal perception. The researchers also stated that stereotypes could be attributed to individuals with or without disability labels. The theme of separation generally occurs when individuals feel the result of

labeling and stereotyping is mainly stigmatizing and devaluing, disrespecting, or resulting in the person being seen as not fully human. In regard to status loss and discrimination, the researchers spoke of romantic and professional relationships and how those can be affected by the negative effects of labeling, stereotyping, and separation, which enforce and maintain stigma (Green et al., 2005; Link & Phelan, 2001). Further, such a process could limit the social participation of stigmatized individuals in terms of professional abilities and the maintenance of romantic relationships. The greatest concern among these research participants was the fear that the separation levied by the reactions of others would affect their ability to establish romantic and committed relationships. Each of the themes indicated the way through which stigma is produced within a social and cultural context.

The findings also suggested interactional processes among labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination. These themes were at the core of the social experiences of individuals with disabilities and their families. Moreover, these processes or themes are likely to have negative consequences in those individuals' lives. It appeared that placing students with disabilities in special education programs and different special education categories serves both a positive and a negative role in the U.S. (Thomson, 2012). On the one hand, this section discussed how labeling or categorizing students with disabilities could contribute to a negative self-perception as well as to stigma and decreased opportunities. On the other hand, labeling and assigning students with needs into special education categories could raise awareness in regard to the struggles that those students experience throughout their educational journey (Green et al., 2005).

Mental Health in the Arab World

According to Haboush (2007), the attitudes and familiarity with mental health and psychology in the Arab world are generally associated with the level of education of individuals. Although there is variability in the acceptance of psychological services across Arab countries, there is a common reaction of reluctance to acknowledge emotional problems due to the fear of tarnishing family honor. Additionally, the notion of believing in one's destiny because it is dictated by Allah as well as believing in traditional ways of overcoming problems, such as traditional healing instead of modern medicine, play an important role in explaining the lack of acceptance of mental health services (Haboush, 2007). Arabs with traditional beliefs view mental health problems as being caused by evil forces or supernatural powers, as being beyond human reach, and as needing God's intervention (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). Therefore, Arabs are more likely to consider seeking help from a physician than a psychiatrist for mental health problems. Consequently, individuals around the Arab world view the mentally ill as being not quite human and not quite angelic; but in all cases they associate them with the supernatural.

Generally, education is stressed and highly valued in Islam. Although there is a strong emphasis in the Quran on being educated, there are reports of children with disabilities being kept at home out of concern for the family's honor (Goforth, 2011). Those families who view a child with a disability as potentially staining the family honor, do so because this is regarded as the manifestation of God's punishment for something that the family has done wrong. There is also a tendency to place children with disabilities, especially those with physical and cognitive disabilities, into residential facilities rather than enrolling them into a school. These cultural, religious, and social considerations, in which Arabs put the emphasis on an external locus of control (which is attributing and believing that things are happening to one and should simply be

accepted), are of crucial importance resulting, as they do, in the belief that psychopathologies are the manifestations of evil so they are automatically discarded and ignored as mental health conditions (Goforth, 2011). This runs parallel to the belief that this is the result of coming into contact with supernatural elements such as spirits or individuals involved in channeling negative, evil spells toward the affected person (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). Muslim Arabs who do not believe or trust mental health services tend to attribute disabilities and mental health conditions to possessions by evil forces or *jinn*. The propensity to believe in jinn-possession is deemed to be linked to the level of education of the Muslim individuals and reflects a primal fear of the unknown (Islam & Campbell, 2014). In this traditional mindset, sorcery is the main avenue for curing this type of evil.

Muslim Arabs with this traditional mindset have a strong belief in God's will, destiny, and fate that guide their practices. Thus, mental health and psychiatry, which are viewed as creations of man, are seen as unholy, and traditionalists believe that it is better to avoid seeking such services even at the expense of the well-being for the mentally ill individual (Haboush, 2007). Accordingly, both school psychologists and educators have to be culturally sensitive and knowledgeable about such values and norms as they can adversely impact their relationship with Muslim Arab parents, especially those who adopt this traditional mindset.

The Arab world seems to be going through a shift in perceptions and practices in regard to special education and the institutional provision of services to individuals with disabilities. The next section provides an overview of the current state of special education in the U.S., the Arab world, and some of the leading countries in Europe. The goal was to describe the differences and similarities in special education across different regions of the world and whether they influence each other in terms of policy making.

Special Education in the U.S. and Europe

Generally, the American educational system has gone through several reforms that have given the current special education laws the legitimacy they have today. Those reforms and adjustments were brought about by different approaches to teaching ranging from schools of thought that focused on aligning curricula to children's developmental stages and innate abilities (e.g., developmentalists and humanists) to those that focused on the students' motivation and encouragement of learning (e.g., Dewey's heritage and approach to education; Kliebard, 2004). Special education has developed and flourished through the enactment of several individual cases and laws such as the Free Appropriate Public Education for Students with Disabilities (FAPE) and The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education IDEA, 2004).

Special Education in the U.S.

When we approach the special education system in the U. S., it is essential to mention certain dates and events that triggered the different reforms and laws. One such event is the Supreme Court case of Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954). This landmark case concerns the violation of the 14th constitutional amendment, involving discrimination against African American students by segregating them from classes of White student peers. The second significant case is Diana vs. State Board of Education (1970). This case was named "Diana" after one of the nine plaintiffs in a class-action lawsuit. The allegation stated that there was a disproportional representation of bilingual, Spanish-surnamed students in the program for the "mentally retarded." The court ruled that the IQ scores used in the determination of mental retardation were culturally biased (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). The tests did not take into consideration the fact that students of different cultural backgrounds are not retarded when they

do not score as expected, instead being monolingual in a language other than English or not proficient enough in English were reasons for their low scores. The third important case relevant to special education practice is the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) vs. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972). This court case was a class-action lawsuit on behalf of 13 mentally retarded students who were denied entrance to public schools. A federal court ratified the consent agreement between the two parties and disallowed the exclusion of the mentally retarded students from the public schools. Many provisions were mandated in the case by the federal court and they are as follows (Reynolds, 2000; Rhodes et al., 2005):

- To educate children with disabilities alongside children without disabilities to the highest extent possible
- To perform annual censuses to find and assist children with disabilities
- To stop the application of school exclusion laws and practices
- To notify parents before evaluating a child to decide the existence of a disability or before placing a child in special education
- To enact due process procedures
- To reevaluate children identified as having a disability on a regular basis
- To pay for private-school tuition if the school refers the student or cannot realistically meet the needs of the student in the public school

A fourth significant case is that of Mills v. Board of Education (1972). The district was sued because it failed to provide students with disabilities with necessary services. The court ruled to provide the plaintiffs with a free appropriate public education, that due process procedures be established, and that all students with disabilities should receive special education services regardless of the district's financial situation (Rhodes et al., 2005).

Subsequently, during the 1970s, special education in the U.S. was in a transitional state. The aforementioned court cases led to the enactment of several laws. In 1975, the Public Law 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHCA) of 1975 was passed (EHCA, 1975). With the passing of this law many fundamental concepts derived from its different sections came into practice and regulated special education as a profession. Those concepts included the free appropriate public education for children 3 to 21 years old, the due process rights that serve to protect children and parents' rights, the individualized education programs, the least restrictive environment, and the assurance of federal funding support to states for their special education departments (Goikoetxea, 2012).

In 1986, Public Law 99-457 was passed as an amendment to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHCA, 1986). This law stressed the importance of identifying children with disabilities starting in infancy (Goikoetxea, 2012). In 1990, Public Law 101-476 was passed and changed the name from Education for All the Handicapped Children Act to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990). The biggest change brought about by this law was the inclusion of new disability areas such as Autism and Traumatic Brain Injury to the list of special education eligibility. This law also set the parameters for what is called Assistive Technology Devices and services. The IDEA was again amended in 1997 when Public Law 105-17 was passed (IDEA, 1997). This IDEA revision emphasized the importance of transition services and planning. It mandated a transition plan to be a part of every Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students 16 years of age and older (Goikoetxea, 2012). Other major modifications in this amendment included the identification of required IEP information, involvement of a general education teacher in the IEP process, state assessment

requirements for students with an IEP, and the inclusion of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder conditions (ADHD) in the Other Health Impairment category.

In 2004, additional amendments to IDEA were made when Public Law 108-446 was passed (IDEA, 2004). This law brought about many changes and improvements that were connected to other legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) passed by president George W. Bush in 2001 (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). The changes consisted of additional procedures to regulate the identification of students with disabilities. For example, IDEA required states and school districts to abandon use of a cognitive/achievement discrepancy model to determine specific learning disabilities. As an alternative, IDEA encouraged the use of a process based on student's response to evidence-based interventions and alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability (Goikoetxea, 2012).

The law and practice of special education in the U.S. is still subject to improvement. The role of special education according to Hodapp and Fidler (1999) was focused on the "balkanization" of students according to their disabilities. The authors also accentuated the role of special education in the identification and classification of students with disabilities in self-contained classrooms. Hodapp and Fidler's main idea was that every child with disability is genetically distinct from every other child in the same disability category. Relevantly, a study conducted by Ochs and Roessler (2001) examined whether students who graduated from special education programs had the same chances and "perceived efficiency" as those without disabilities. The majority of participants, 75% of the students in the study, were identified as having a learning disability. The general findings showed that career orientation and aspiration must be integrated into the coursework, instruction, and IEPs of students with a disability.

Klingner, Urbach, Golos, Brownell, and Menon (2010) spoke of the role special education teachers play in promoting reading skills in early age children. Although this research spoke mainly about the role of teachers in improving and remediating students' skills in reading, the general message was that teachers' implementation of instruction and regulations is essential to the success of students in special education programs.

Special Education in European Countries

The following section provides an overview of how special education is implemented in Finland, France, Italy, and the Netherlands in order to give a sense of the European approach. These European countries are believed to be some of the leading countries in the world in terms of inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Pepper, 2007).

In Finland, schools determine their own guidelines for their teachers' assessment and interventions for all students, including students with disabilities. Each student with special needs has an Individual Education Plan. The fact that they have an IEP defines whether they are going to be assessed according to the national core standards or according to their personalized goals that are stated in their IEP. If the student has an IEP she or he must be assessed in compliance with the national core curriculum for basic education. This assessment should measure the student's level of performance in relation to the general curriculum objectives. The methods used in the assessment may include:

- Providing the student with a reader/assistant
- Allowing the use of adaptive equipment
- Allowing the student extra time to complete the assessment
- In the case of hearing impaired pupils, exempting students from listening comprehension tests

- Providing separate, acoustically appropriate spaces for hearing impaired students
- Providing special recordings with longer pauses for students with dyslexia in listening comprehension tests
- Exempting students with dyslexia from writing assessments in ink
- Allowing visually impaired students to use special computer software
- Using alternative modes of assessment

Relatedly, a certificate of achievement, obtained after passing the assessment for graduation purposes, does not include the different accommodations used.

Generally, the activity areas that are assessed are motor coordination, language, communication, social, cognitive, and daily functioning skills. The IEP includes a baseline that shows the student's initial level of performance and the target goal in each of the required subject areas. The main goal of the assessment is to monitor students' growth and learning process compared with the baseline and objectives (Pepper, 2007).

In the Netherlands, the ultimate goal is the integration of student with disabilities into mainstream schools with additional support. Students with disabilities get assessed according to their level of performance vis-à-vis their disability. Modifications and accommodations are implemented to make the learning and, subsequently, the assessment processes appropriate to each disability type.

In order to be identified as having a disability, the student needs a certificate from an expert such as a psychologist or remedial educationist, unless the disability is clearly visible. The certificate typically includes the different goals and objectives appropriate to the student's type of disability and needs. The accommodations are similar to those provided in Finland.

In France, students with disabilities of all ages are generally included in general education classrooms. In some cases, when the student's Personalized School Plan (PSP), which is the equivalent of an IEP in the U.S., requires a specially adapted apparatus, they may be placed in a specialized educational institution. The student's PSP states the subjects, level or performance, and goals to be achieved through their education. The equality of rights and opportunities law enacted in 2005 enforced the participation and citizenship of persons with disabilities in their society. On January 1, 2006, the law took effect and confirmed the right of students with disabilities to an appropriate education. It also stressed the responsibility of the education system to provide and guarantee the continuity of education to students with disabilities. This law provided students with disabilities with the following rights:

- An education in a mainstream environment as close to their home as possible
- The involvement of parents at all stages in the preparation of the PSP
- The continuity of education in line with the needs and capabilities of the individual student
- The equality of opportunity with peers without disabilities, by legalizing adjustments to accommodations during examination conditions. The accommodations are personalized according to each student's need and are very similar to those suggested in Finland and the Netherlands (Pepper, 2007).

In Italy, the government mandated through National Law 118 in 1971 that students with disabilities have the right to be included in general education classes in public schools (Pepper, 2007). In 1977, National Law 517 was enacted and provided clearer strategies for achieving the full inclusion of students with disabilities. This law brought several components such as:

- Only a maximum of two students with disabilities should be placed in every general education classroom
- Only a maximum of 20 students at a time were permitted in an inclusive class
- All students have to be included in school extracurricular events and activities
- Teachers who get trained to work with students with disabilities should be supported
- Teachers with special education training will co-teach with general education teachers in incorporated classes, and both teachers must interact with the whole class

Begeny and Martens (2007) conducted a review of literature of a 20-year period of available studies in English relevant to Italy's schools' inclusion model, in addition to studies available in English about the usage of interventions with students with disabilities. The researchers pointed out that Italy is considered to be one of the best models of how the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classroom is beneficial and leads to positive results. Inclusion in Italy is legally mandated. The Italian model is a perfect example of how a country can include almost all students with special needs into the general education classroom. The only drawback according to the researchers is that Italy does not rely on research-based practices.

Begeny and Martens (2007) reported on Vitello's (1994) study. Vitello interviewed 13 parents, 7 teachers, and 3 school administrators from three different schools. The researcher conducted in-person interviews where they asked questions regarding the participants' satisfaction with and perceptions vis-à-vis inclusion practices, their perception of the effect of those practices, and the level of collaboration between parents and school personnel. The conclusions of this study showed that Italian teachers and parents support inclusion. Additionally, only concerns in relation to the nature of services and more coordination among

the individuals in charge of elaborating educational plans for students with special needs were reported.

The models covered in this section showed that special education law and practices in Finland, France, Netherlands, and Italy have been going through several reforms and adjustments in order to serve children with disabilities. All these European countries both advocate for and support the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. One of the major themes shared among these four countries is the importance of customizing the support provided to the students with disabilities according to their need while making sure that their educational support plans are implemented with fidelity and integrity.

Shifts in Perceptions of Special Education in the Arab Culture

The general attitude toward disabilities in the Arab world tends to revolve around the stigma associated with having a disability. The negative perceptions are evident in the language and terminology used to describe children or adults with disabilities. Intellectual and developmental disabilities are considered to be the most shameful, followed by mental illness, physical and sensory disabilities, and visual impairments and blindness. The terminology used in most Arab countries reflects the pejorative perceptions and attitudes towards disabilities. In the Arabic language the term *mu'aq* means handicapped, in a vegetative state, or retarded (in case of a cognitive delay) and is commonly used in Arab countries to describe a person with a visible disability. This derogatory and disparaging attitude decreases the likelihood of marriage and family for the individual with a disability (Donovan, 2013).

Attitudes and practices toward inclusion in the Arab world are believed to be chiefly driven by cultural beliefs and values (Gaad, 2004). An example of how discriminatory attitudes and practices are manifested in the Arab world is illustrated in Lebanon, where only 20 schools

in the entire country accept children with disabilities, and private schools have the authority to reject students with disabilities. This situation pushes students with disabilities to seek alternative educational institutions. Another example is Egypt, where individuals with intellectual disabilities and Down Syndrome are not offered the chance to enroll in public schools and are forced to stay at home or to attend specialized schools that segregate them based on their disability (Donovan, 2013).

It is important to note that there is a slight change in attitudes and perceptions in some of the Arab countries, who are increasingly highlighting the need for a more inclusive educational model for students with disabilities (Alghazo & Gaad, 2004). This shift can be noticed through several of the studied countries regarding the adoption of special education guidelines.

In Saudi Arabia, many laws and regulations are initially introduced in the form of royal or government decrees to be passed by the government into laws. The history of decrees and laws related to individuals with disabilities was summarized by Alquraini (2011). Prior to 1958, individuals with disabilities in Saudi Arabia had no legal rights or services and the entire responsibility for planning and caring for a child with a disability was placed on the parents (Alquraini, 2011). In 1958, students with blindness started receiving their education in what was referred to as "scientific institutions" and in 1962 the Ministry of Education created the Department of Special Learning to enhance learning and rehabilitation support for three categories of students with disabilities including blindness, deafness, and mental retardation. In 1987, a law entitled Legislation of Disability was passed (Alquraini, 2011). This law also included important provisions that guaranteed individuals with disabilities rights equal to those of others in society. The law also provided a definition of disability categories, assessment and diagnostic procedures, and intervention programs that could help individuals with disabilities. In

2000, the Disability Code, first introduced as a royal decree, was enacted by the Saudi government. This Disability Code (Alquraini, 2011) aimed at securing access to free and suitable medical, social, psychological, educational, and rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities. The Regulations of Special Education Programs and Institutions in Saudi Arabia [RSEPI] was introduced in 2001 (Alquraini, 2011). These regulations were modeled after U.S. special education laws. This law provided the rights and regulations for students with disabilities. The disability areas included in the RSEPI regulation are: mental retardation, learning disability, deafness, blindness, and multiple disabilities. This regulation also stated what an Individual Education Program (IEP) should include, the assessments needed for eligibility, and who should participate in the creation of an IEP. Moreover, RSEPI brought about the provisions that all children with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate education, early intervention programs, related services, and transition services (Alquraini, 2011).

Currently in Saudi Arabia, there is a noticeable emphasis on including students in a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Students with mild learning disabilities receive their education within general education classrooms with support from special education teachers as needed. Those students are instructed under the general education curriculum with accommodations that address their needs. Students with mild and moderate cognitive disabilities are in specialized classrooms where they receive instruction. Even though this group of students with cognitive disabilities is in specialized classrooms, the public schools make sure that they get a chance to share extra-curricular activities such as lunch and recess with their peers from the general education classrooms. Generally, students with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities categories attend elementary schools between the ages 6 to 14 years, followed by middle school

until 18 years old. As for high school, unfortunately those students have to finish their education at a vocational training center. Students with severe or multiple disabilities are usually placed in residential facilities to accommodate their needs (Alquraini, 2011).

Alghazo and Gaad (2004) explored the attitudes of mainstream teachers toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Their study was conducted in the Emirate of Abu-Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates [UAE]. The researchers provided an overview of the different attitudes that general education teachers have in regard to the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classroom. The researchers surveyed 160 participants, of which 42.1% were male and 57.9% were female. The results of the study indicated that most teachers have concerns related to the inclusion of students with emotional, cognitive, and behavioral disabilities more than students with specific learning disabilities. The educational system in the UAE is changing and leaning toward the use of more westernized approaches to educating students with special needs. Teachers with more experience had fewer concerns in working with students with learning disabilities, while the less experienced teachers were open to serving both students with more severe disabilities and those with less severe disabilities in the general education classroom. The findings of this study shed light on the fact that teachers who had more experience were not in favor of the inclusion of students with emotional, cognitive, and behavioral disabilities since this requires more time, services, and accommodations (Alghazo & Gaad, 2004).

A study by Hamaidi, Homidi, and Reyes (2012) investigated the importance of the philosophy of inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education classroom and the benefits this had at the social, emotional, and academic levels of student performance. The researchers provided a comparison between the history of the U.S. in regard to segregation and

inclusion, and the transition that has been made through laws such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (Hamaidi et al, 2012).

Hamaidi et al. (2012) stated that the lack of educational policies in Arab countries such as Jordan and the UAE has negatively influenced the enforcement of inclusion. The UAE and Jordan have only laws that speak of handicapped persons' rights as citizens that are unrelated to education. The researchers surveyed 300 early childhood educators from Jordan, UAE, and the southwestern part of the U.S. Random sampling was used and stratified according to country, gender, educational level, and teaching experience with inclusion. The researchers analyzed a total of 225 questionnaires given to early childhood teachers in the city of Amman in Jordan, Sharjah in the UAE, and Las Cruces in New Mexico. More specifically, the sample consisted of 20 kindergarten and public elementary schools from each of the three countries. The results of this study indicated that all three countries held positive attitudes toward the inclusion of students with special needs in general education classrooms and highlighted the importance of international collaboration.

Similarly, Anati (2012) explored the nature and extent of inclusive education in the UAE public and private schools. The study surveyed 26 teachers in 26 randomly selected schools, kindergarten through 12th grade. This study's findings indicated that the participants agreed in principle with the concept of inclusion and had a positive attitude toward special education in general. The results also illustrated that the teachers were dissatisfied in regard to the inclusion process in the UAE schools. In reference to teachers' dissatisfaction, Anati (2012) concluded,

> Their dissatisfaction about the inclusion process in the UAE schools was due to a lack of appropriate training for teachers in mainstream classrooms, ignorance about inclusion

> among senior-level administrators, a general lack of funding for resources and training, and a lack of social awareness regarding the issues they may face during the inclusion process. (p. 83)

Anati (2012) stated that the lack of resources and training related to inclusion practices could be explained by the fact that inclusion is a recent educational trend that many Arab countries have not been introduced to yet.

Al-Faiz (2006) examined the attitudes of 240 teachers who work in elementary schools in Saudi Arabia toward inclusive education for students with autism. The findings indicated that most teachers have positive attitudes regarding including students with autism in general education classrooms. This research highlighted the importance of teaching experience and having a family member or relative with a disability in shaping that positive attitude. In another relevant study mentioned by Alquraini (2011), the researchers investigated related services for students with multiple disabilities. The findings of this study showed that there is a considerable lack of health, medical, and physical therapy services in the special education centers and institutes for students with multiple disabilities in Saudi Arabia.

Interestingly, Donovan (2013) used an interpretive methodology to investigate the experiences of Arab American parents with their children's special education process in a large mid-western city in the U.S., including the referral, identification, and planning of services. Her sample included a total of six Muslim participants, five mothers and one father. Four of the participants were born and educated in the Arab world and the other two in the U.S. The results of this study indicated that more than half of the participants discussed the effects that social stigma had on their children with disabilities and on their families. Parents in this study indicated that they were uninformed about the special education process and only learned about

it while participating in it. As their children were identified and placed to receive special education services, several participants expressed culture-specific concerns about their children's future. These concerns included being subjected to social stigma, exclusion, and decreased chances of marriage and family (Donovan, 2013). Donovan's study shed light on how Arab American parents experience the processes of referral, evaluation, and identification of children for special education services. However, the study did not differentiate between the pre-referral and referral stages and did not discuss the participants' experiences with interventions prior to referral. The importance of this pre-referral phase rests on the fact that many schools are providing interventions to support struggling students with academic and behavioral difficulties as part of a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) approach prior to considering the existence of a disability that requires special education services (RTI Action Network, 2016). The philosophy of MTSS aims to provide evidence-based interventions to students who struggle while monitoring the rate of their response. Given the likelihood that students may participate in such interventions prior to special education referral, it is important to explore Muslim Arab American parents' experiences with the pre-referral phase as well as other stages of the evaluation and identification process. My study extended upon the Donovan study to explore a broader set of Muslim Arab American parents' perceptions regarding all school-based services including interventions and special education processes. The goal is to understand the relationship between parents' background, knowledge, and perceptions, and how these affect their decisions in regard to accepting or rejecting school-based services.

A review of the research suggests that individuals with disabilities may require constant support and help from their families and will be unable to achieve independence and autonomy. The majority of Muslim Arab families worldwide are collectivistic and believe that the

reputation or status of one family member affects the status and honor of the entire family (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). Individuals with disabilities trigger the feeling of guilt for their family members because the family feels helpless being unable to provide support and foster the independence of the person with a disability. Families also believe that others pity them for having a child with a disability, and this perpetuates their feelings of shame and dishonor. Furthermore, Muslim Arab families feel shame and guilt if their child's disability hampers that child's educational success.

Overall, the state of special education in the Arab world indicates that American models and policies are being adopted and customized to take into account cultural variables. Muslim Arab countries are still in the process of accepting and adopting educational policies that encourage including students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Special education as an inclusive practice is still working its way into the Arab world's education system. The inclusion of students with disabilities in general education is a developing philosophy facing perceptual and practical obstacles. Additionally, there is a strong will to import and adopt foreign models. However, stigma and negative perceptions in regard to disabilities and mental health problems seem to be more dominant in the Arab world and undoubtedly dictate the extent of acceptance and application of special education laws and guidelines (Alquraini, 2011).

In summary, it is important for school psychologists and educators to be cognizant of the extent that the perceptions of shame and stigma toward individuals with disabilities dominate the Arab culture in the U.S and abroad (Haboush, 2007). The negative perceptions held by many Arab communities are interconnected with their cultural, social, and religious belief system (Gaad, 2004). Relatedly, religion is deemed to be a central component in shaping the beliefs and

attitudes toward mental health and disabilities among Muslim Arabs (Goforth, 2011; Haboush, 2007).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

There is a need to explore Arab American parents' perceptions, knowledge, and actions regarding special education. Educators and school psychologists need to understand the underlying cultural and social considerations that comprise Arab American parents' attitudes towards special education. This study investigated the three dimensions of perceptions, knowledge, and actions using a qualitative approach. One of the goals of this study was to provide a frame of reference for educators about Muslim Arab American parents' attitudes toward special education. An additional goal was to identify the cultural, religious, and linguistic considerations that shape the Muslim Arab Americans parents understanding of the special education system in the U.S.

Theoretical Orientation

In the present study, my theoretical orientation is phenomenology, which I believe at its core to be humanistic in nature. Both theories revolve around individuals' understanding of their experiences and creating meaning. Specifically, I am referring to the client-centered approach developed by Carl Rogers. This orientation is commonly used in psychotherapy due to its merits in the field, emphasizing unconditional positive regard and empathy that focus on thoughtfully working with the clients from their perspective. Moreover, the humanistic theories assert that all individuals strive to become better persons and reach self-actualization. According to Abraham

Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs, self-actualization can be achieved if physical and psychological needs are fulfilled. However, if individuals do not fulfill their potential for growth, this could result in psychological conflict and illness (Slife & Williams, 1995). The humanistic theories believe that all individuals are unique selves who are free to choose and direct their actions. This freedom is essential to achieving self-actualization. Carl Rogers' humanistic approach spoke of an unconscious process of knowing what individuals need to reach their full potential and growth. Additionally, Carl Rogers' and Abraham Maslow's theories are phenomenological in that they emphasize the individuals' understanding and elaboration of meaning through their own experiences.

The Interpretivist Paradigm and Phenomenology

The present study adhered to the interpretivist paradigm and to the phenomenological method of qualitative inquiry. The interpretivist paradigm views social phenomena from a local rather than a global perspective. It has a culture-bound framework for the understanding of how individuals comprehend and act in specific social contexts and define rules that govern their decision making and planning (Fay, 1996).

For interpretivists the descriptions of experiences made by individuals in regard to their lived realities are only subjective interpretations. Interpretations occur in cultural and social contexts, and as such the interpretations are likely to change from one context to another. The general goal of interpreting different actions, behaviors, and intentions is to understand the system of meanings that individuals construct through their interpretative engagement and explanation. Interpretivists do not intend to understand social phenomena through pre-established notions, but as novel phenomena specific to new contexts (Fay, 1996).

One of the major research methods that adheres to the interpretivist paradigm is phenomenology. Phenomenology is mainly concerned with the meaning that individuals create through their perceptions of reality. In phenomenology, reality is a construction of meaning by the individuals through social interaction. Each individual acts upon his or her own understanding and definition of reality. A group of individuals might have shared meanings or definitions of a certain agreed upon reality but can have a different definition of other aspects of life. Constant social interactions create shared meanings. Accordingly**,** individuals construct meaning of their actions through their interaction with the environment that they are constantly interpreting (Creswell, 2009).

This study used a descriptive phenomenological approach, as the main focus was to capture the participants' own interpretations of their experiences in the most neutral way (Moustakas, 1994). One of the main processes in conducting descriptive phenomenological studies is the *epoche* or *bracketing*. This process requires the researcher to go through a mental preparation that deconstructs and reconstructs any predilections, prejudices, and predispositions toward the topic of research. The topic of study should be taken in as if it is knowledge that is being seen for the first time. Epoche can rarely be fully achieved, but the process of constantly reviewing one's stances and reactions toward the topic of study allows the researcher to significantly reduce their biases (Moustakas, 1994).

Data Collection

Sampling

In the present study, I interviewed 13 self-identified Muslim Arab American parents. I used purposeful sampling, which was based on pre-identified criteria of selection and the idea of finding and working with information-rich cases and studying them in depth (Creswell, 2009).

In this study the main criteria were to be a Muslim Arab American parent of a child(ren) enrolled in grades Kindergarten through 12th grade and between the ages of 5 to 18 years old, be at least 18 years old, and be able to speak and understand English. I interviewed six parents (three mothers and three fathers- adding up to a total of six different families) who have children receiving special education services and seven parents (three mothers and four fathers—adding up to a total of seven different families) who have children not receiving special education services.

Recruitment of Participants

To recruit participants, I obtained permission from the owners of a Muslim Arab American market and the director of the Islamic Center to post recruitment flyers at their establishments; the former is located in the west side of Indianapolis and the latter in the city of Terre Haute. The flyer had a short description of the purpose of the study, the participants' selection criteria, the process of selecting date, time, and location to conduct the interview, and my contact information in order to allow potential participants to contact me. The flyer was posted on bulletin boards, and I was physically present at either one of the two locations to distribute the flyer at least biweekly until the stated sample size was obtained. During the initial meeting or phone call with the potential participant I verified that the participant met the required criteria for the study and set up a mutually agreed upon meeting location, day, and time to conduct the interview. Interviews were conducted at a public meeting place such as a private space at the market place or a nearby public library. Having a mutually agreed upon meeting location helped to ensure the participants' autonomy to identify a location that was both safe and confidential for them.

Instruments

The Interview

As part of this study, I used a researcher-designed semi-structured interview protocol (APPENDIX A). The interview protocol was informed by the review of literature. I met with each participant one time to conduct a face-to-face interview that lasted approximately 90 minutes. I speak Arabic, French, and English, and when necessary I provided translations for the participants during the interview. I believe that conducting the face-to-face interviews provided me with the opportunity to have in-depth conversations with each participant.

On the day of the interview I discussed the process of the study and the informed consent with the participant, stating that their participation was voluntary and that they would not be receiving any compensation for participating. I also answered any questions the participants had before starting with the interview. Once the participant signed the informed consent, I proceeded with the interview. Each interview was audio recorded using a digital recorder. Throughout the interview, I utilized probing and follow-up questions as a technique to gain a better understanding of participant's answers to interview questions and allowed each participant to elaborate when needed (Creswell, 2009; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

Moreover, I assigned each participant a pseudonym, which I used to identify the participant's responses throughout the interview process. Confidentiality was maintained by the use of pseudonyms when labeling participants' identification information and the transcribed interview protocols (Glesne, 2011).

Interview Protocol

The interview used in this study was divided into four sections, based on the review of literature, that was systematically connected with my research questions. The interview sections

and items were tailored for each group of parents; parents with and without child(ren) in special education. Sections 1, 2, and 3 were applicable to both groups of parents. In addition, parents with child(ren) in special education were asked additional questions from section 4, which included questions about their experience with the special education system.

The sections of the interview protocol were the following:

1. Background information regarding the parent's educational level, background, country of origin, level of religiosity, and duration of living in the U.S., as well as circumstances of immigration.

2. Parent's knowledge regarding special education: the questions in this section inquired about the knowledge that the parents from both groups have about special education processes, both in the U.S. and their country of origin.

3. Perceptions and beliefs regarding special education: this section contained questions that asked all the participants about their perceptions and attitudes regarding special education and disabilities in general.

4. Questions for parents of students receiving special education services only: the questions in this section were for parents who have children in special education about their experiences, knowledge, and involvement in the education and services provided to their child(ren).

Data Analysis

After completing all interviews, I began the transcription process. I transcribed all the interviews and began coding and analyzing the data using a descriptive phenomenological framework. This framework had four main processes: epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994).

The first process before initiating any data analysis was to go through the process of epoche or bracketing. Epoche involves creating new ideas, new feelings, new awareness, and understanding of the topic of research. Epoche requires a preparation and setting aside biases and allowing knowledge to enter anew into consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). In order to attain the highest level possible of epoche, prior to conducting the interviews with the participants, I was interviewed by a doctoral-level researcher using the same interview for this study. I subsequently analyzed and synthesized the results of the interview using the same methods I used when analyzing my data. The goal of epoche was to provide myself with a blueprint that included the different biases and preconceived notions that could have affected my attitude toward the research topic. The results were used throughout the next three processes to keep me bracketed and focused on objectively collecting and later analyzing data.

The second process was phenomenological reduction. In this process the researcher emphasizes a bracketed state of mind toward the topic, with the focus being mainly on the topic and its questions. Another step in this process was horizontalizing or coding in which the researcher treats each statement from the transcript as having equal value and importance. In this step the researcher delimits horizons or meanings from statements by deleting irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping statements in each transcript. Once the horizons are identified, the researcher initiates the clustering of horizons into themes for each single transcript. The next step was to integrate the different themes within each transcript into a descriptive text of each participant, creating an individual textual description. The final step was to integrate all of the individual textual descriptions into one coherent textual description of all the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

The third process in data analysis was imaginative variation. Through imaginative variation, the researcher derives structural themes from textual descriptions obtained through the phenomenological reduction. Structural themes are the essence of how the phenomena came to be. According to Moustakas (1994) there are four main steps within this process:

> (a) Systematic varying of the possible structural meanings that lie beneath the textural meanings, (b) recognizing the underlying contexts that account for the development of the phenomenon, (c) considering the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts with reference to the phenomenon, (d) searching for examples that illustrate the structural themes and facilitate the development of a structural description. (p. 99)

The goal here is to capture the different structural qualities of the experiences shared by the participants and to cluster them into structural themes. Then, generate an integrated individual structural description for each participant that should subsequently be integrated into a composite structural description.

Generally, thematic analysis is based on searching for themes and patterns. The goal of my analysis was data organization and reduction toward meaningful codes or as it is referred to in descriptive phenomenology, horizons. When I reached saturation of the data into codes, I organized the codes that belonged to the same patterns into themes (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Following the completion of both the textual and structural thematic analysis, I had two of my dissertation committee members review the codes and themes.

Last, the fourth process was synthesis. This process aims at intuitively and reflectively integrating both the textural and structural composite descriptions to create a synthesis of the meanings and essence of the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, I created two different composite textual and structural descriptions, one of parents whose children receive

special education services and the second of parents whose children do not receive special education services. In addition, I created an integrated textual and structural composite description that combines both groups of parents. Accordingly, I reached the synthesis for each group of parents and all the parents in the study.

Trustworthiness

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) named multiple elements that define trustworthiness in qualitative research. One of these elements is credibility, which involves establishing confidence in the truth of findings and conclusions of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In the current study credibility was established through the use of descriptive phenomenology, a well-established research methodology, throughout the data collection and analysis process. Also, I engaged in debriefing sessions with members of my dissertation committee so that any biases and assumptions on my part were uncovered and addressed.

Another element was dependability of the study, which refers to whether one can depend on the research procedures including the research methodology and the researchers' qualifications to conduct the study. To address dependability, I have been transparent about my methodology and provided a clear explanation of my role as the researcher in this study (Shenton, 2004).

Also, transferability, or generalizing findings to the general population, is not a concern of qualitative methodology. However, it is the researcher's responsibility to provide a detailed account of the procedures of the study so that a reader can transfer the findings in their own way and relate them to their personal experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Shenton, 2004). In this regard I provided a detailed description of the population that my participants belong to, as well

as their cultural and religious background. The description included quotes and excerpts in the participants' own words in the narrative of the thematic data analysis.

Moreover, in qualitative research, triangulation can strengthen a study's methodological design. This research technique focused on approaching a phenomenon of interest from multiple contexts using various means of accountability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In terms of triangulation, I collected data from two different groups of parents, one group of Muslim Arab American parents with children in special education and another group of parents with children in general education.

Last, conformability can be obtained through triangulation and reflexivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). For this part, I maintained a researcher's reflective journal in which I documented any potential biases, beliefs, background, values, or assumptions that were influencing my role as the researcher throughout the course of my study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In addition, bracketing served as a blueprint for guiding reflexivity (Moustakas, 1994).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study investigated the experiences of a group of 13 Muslim Arab American parents' perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, and actions regarding special education. The group of parents was comprised of six parents with a child(ren) who receive special education services and seven parents of a child(ren) in general education (without any special education services). This chapter will provide information about the bracketing process, the participants, a description of each of the participants' individual experience, a discussion of the composite textual-structural descriptions of each group, a synthesis of the textual-structural descriptions of both groups, and an explication of the core themes that emerged from the data analysis.

The Bracketing Process

Bracketing or epoche is the first step in the process of phenomenological data analysis. This process rests on the principle of the researcher being interviewed using the interview of the current study and to apply the phenomenological data analysis steps to the transcript in order to capture any preconceived notions or implicit biases pertaining to the research topic. Relatedly, I had a doctoral-level researcher interview me. Once the bracketing interview was completed, I transcribed and analyzed it.

The content of the interview and data analysis from the bracketing interview was used as a blueprint that was consulted throughout the data collection and the data analysis phases to limit

the influence of any personal knowledge, perceptions, or attitudes toward the topic of special education in the Arab World and in the U.S.

Observational Notes During the Recruitment Process

The recruitment process consisted of personally going to the approved recruitment sites (A Muslim Arab American market and an Islamic Center) and distributing flyers as well as posting the flyer in a visible location. The recruitment lasted approximately ten months. Generally, I found the recruitment process to be more challenging than I anticipated. During the multiple visits to the recruitment sites, it was evident to me that there was a subtle feeling of unease and cautiousness evidenced by the population that frequented the sites with regard to taking part in a study that focuses on Muslim Arab Americans. One of the first things that I experienced was that many individuals with whom I introduced or discussed the topic of the study questioned the reasons behind exclusively targeting Arab Muslims as the main population out of all the other groups. I had to use my own background and almost constantly introduce myself in Arabic in order to reduce doubts and to establish rapport with the persons at the sites. Still, many individuals showed hesitation with regard to participating in the study and to sharing any personal information or opinions even after understanding that it was about special education.

It is noteworthy that throughout the extended time of my multiple visits to the sites, acts of violence and terror involving radical Islamists were occurring around the world. This is to say that those events could have influenced the attitude of reluctance given that the majority of the sites' attendees were Muslims and Arabs. Additionally, the socio-political context during the 2016 presidential election could have also been another factor that contributed to the overall feelings of unease. On many occasions, I sensed an overall vibe of heightened guardedness at

the recruitment sites. My ethnic background and ability to speak Arabic counteracted some of the angst engendered by the invitation to participate in a study that focuses on Muslim Arabs in the current domestic and global socio-political context. Unfortunately, I did not receive emails or calls from any individuals who were interested in participating in my study.

Out of the two groups in the study, recruiting parents of children in special education was the most challenging. The majority of parents from this group that I approached at the sites expressed their sincere desire to help me but indicated that they would rather not be involved or participate in any studies. Additionally, the odds of running into a parent of a child(ren) who receives special education services were very low. I think that I spoke to a total of only three parents who had children in special education at the sites as opposed to dozens who did not (two out of three became participants in the study). Viva voce (the oral passing of information about the study from one person to another; informally known as word-of-mouth) seemed to be a very effective mean of recruitment for the group of parents of children in special education. Six out of the 13 participants were referred by other participants in this study. Six of the parents with children in general education were recruited directly by me and one was referred by a participant in the study. In the group of parents with children in special education, only Samir was directly recruited by me at the site (I spoke with Fatima's husband at the site and he preferred that his wife participate instead of him). Nawal was referred by Soumia. Ibrahim and Salwa were referred by Fatima's husband. Khalid was referred by a parent with whom I had spoken about the study at one of the sites. As indicated in the methodology section, the interviews were conducted at mutually agreed upon locations.

The Participants

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Participant Pseudonyms	Gender	Country of Origin	Highest Level of Education	Length of residency in the U.S.	Children in Special Ed.
Salwa	Female	Sudan	Doctoral Degree	5 Years	1
Naima	Female	Palestine	2 Years of College	5 Years	0
Nawal	Female	Saudi Arabia	Master's Degree	7 Years	1
Leila	Female	Saudi Arabia	Bachelor's Degree	6 Years	0
Soumia	Female	Saudi Arabia	Master's Degree	8 Years	0
Fatima	Female	Palestine	Bachelor's Degree	30 Years	1
Driss	Male	Morocco	4 Years of College	17 Years	0
Omar	Male	Jordan	Master's Degree	8 Years	0
Samir	Male	Saudi Arabia	Bachelor's Degree	5 Years	1
Ibrahim	Male	Palestine	Doctoral Degree	27 Years	1
Jalal	Male	Jordan	High School	8 Years	0
Khalid	Male	Tunisia	2 Years of College	18 Years	1
Fetah	Male	Morocco	High School	17 Years	0

Notes. Male = 7, Female = 6, Parent with Child(ren) in SPED = 6, Total Participants = 13

General Information About Participants

The sample of this study included 13 Muslim Arab American parents of which six were parents of children who receive special education and seven parents of children in general education. The participants' ages ranged between 31 to 55 years old. The participants' overall

number of children ranged from two (Fetah, Leila, Nawal, and Khalid) to 10 (Samir). All of the participants were from Indianapolis with the exception of Fetah who is a resident of the state of North Carolina and at the time of the interview was visiting a friend. All of the participants reported being married and none of them was born in the U.S. In terms of circumstance upon which the participants came to the U.S., the participants reported coming through individual immigration, accompanying their spouses, or pursuing college education.

Textural-Structural Descriptions of the Meanings and Essences of Experiences

This section will present the essence of the textural and structural analyses of each participant's experience with regard to the topic of the current research study. The textural-structural composite is the synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience or, in other words, the "what" and "how" of the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The names of the participants and their children were replaced by pseudonyms in order to maintain their anonymity.

Description of Experiences of Parents With Child(ren) in Special Education

Fatima. Fatima first heard about special education when she was a general education teacher at an Islamic school in the U.S. in the mid 1990's. She said that throughout her teaching career she worked with students with learning disabilities and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. She reported that her knowledge had incrementally expanded, especially following her son's disability identification. Her son, Karim, is an 11-year-old student in fifth grade, who receives special education services under the categories of mild cognitive disability and speech impairment. Fatima reported that she uses her own professional experience as an educator to help Karim with his special needs and to monitor his educational progress. During the interview, Fatima showed a sense of pride regarding her level of involvement in all of her children's

educational and extra-curricular activities, and more specifically her involvement with Karim. Fatima said that she attends every annual Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) review meeting as well as the quarterly parent/teacher meetings with the general education teacher. Fatima also said that she makes sure to work with Karim at home as she believes it is important for his learning and progress. When I asked about Karim's eligibility categories, Fatima knew exactly that the categories were mild cognitive disability and speech impairment. In addition, she said that Karim was still receiving English as a Second Language support.

Fatima underlined the importance of parents' active involvement in their children's education through providing educational and self-help (if needed) support at home. She also stated that the support is needed to align and complement what is offered at school to guarantee its efficiency. She also shed light on the importance of parents' education and awareness about disability. Fatima postulated that parents' level of awareness about disability shapes their perception of their child and also guides actions such as advocating and seeking support. Relatedly, Fatima shared her experience with Karim being bullied and how the fact of being an informed and aware parent made a difference. Fatima stated that she and her husband shared with the school their concerns that Karim was being bullied. Fatima added that as a result, the issue with bullying was investigated and monitored until it was solved. Correspondingly, Fatima communicated her awareness that children with disabilities are susceptible to bullying by peers and classmates.

With respect to the causes of disability, Fatima said that disability could be caused by genetic heredity, father's age at conception, family's stability, and nutrition during childhood. In reference to Karim, Fatima expressed the belief that his disability was God's will and that, as such, she and her husband had accepted it. It appeared to me that Fatima draws a sense of

serenity and spiritual/religious empowerment through her acceptance of Karim's disability as being God's will, which also reinforces her self-concept as a devout Muslim.

Fatima expressed experiencing relief that her son was identified at the early age of four in Pre-K. Her relief stemmed from the fact that the identification ruled out his being on the Autism Spectrum. Fatima said that the identification of a mild cognitive disability also made sense to her as she always had concerns about Karim's information processing abilities. The school psychologist also suggested that Karim had attention deficit disorder, but Fatima and her husband decided that they would not seek to medicate Karim out of concerns regarding the side effects that medication could have on his social and emotional functioning. Interestingly, Fatima seemed to have some doubts about that decision, which was reflected through her questioning the relationship between ADHD and cognitive disability and whether focus and attention problems could be the main reason for her son's processing and learning difficulties.

Overall, Fatima expressed a positive attitude toward the process of evaluation, eligibility, placement, and educational programming of Karim's special education services. Fatima described the evaluation process as lengthy but she did not mind it as it was the way to get Karim the help he needed. She commended the IEP's multidisciplinary teamwork, organization skills, and their expertise at educational planning and programming. She also expressed her satisfaction regarding the effectiveness of communication with the teachers and special education services providers during the IEP meetings. She said that she always felt involved during the IEP meetings, in particular when it comes to approving and reviewing plans and making educational decisions. Accordingly, Fatima underscored the importance of a personalized relationship with the special education teacher, particularly when they are the main special services provider. For Fatima, the relationship with the primary special education services provider guarantees the

effectiveness of the communication flow about the child's needs and progress. In fact, Fatima shared that her communication about her son's educational planning was negatively affected due to the leave of the special education teacher with whom she had built a good relationship. The special education teacher that Fatima trusted was replaced by a teacher who seemed to put less effort into the communication process. Subsequently, Fatima expressed her desire that the communication with the special education teacher and the speech and language pathologist be continuous, proactive, and initiated from both sides instead of only by her. Additionally, Fatima reported that she is getting a sense that as Karim moves into higher grades the quality and intensity of special education services appears to be decreasing as if the systems of support are plateauing.

On the one hand, Fatima expressed her satisfaction that her son made substantial progress in language and speech through his IEP. On the other hand, she seemed to be ambivalent regarding her son's IEP in terms of achievability of goals and efficacy of accommodations. Fatima disapproved of providing children with disabilities accommodations that would substitute the process of acquisition of academic skills (i.e., use of calculator instead of learning the steps of calculating). She said that she sometimes felt that the school emphasizes meeting IEP goals and passing standardized tests more than providing proper and consistent instruction. This feeling causes Fatima to struggle with the negative impact that high academic expectations and standards could have on Karim's emotional functioning. When Karim was in kindergarten, Fatima opted to retain her son in kindergarten in an attempt to give him a chance to catch up academically so he would not feel that he is different from his peers. Currently, Fatima acknowledges that even though her son was in fifth grade his academic performance still remains at a second grade level. However, she is against the idea of placing her son in any lower grades

as she realizes that it could have a detrimental effect on his self-esteem and social-emotional functioning. While showing concern, Fatima intermittently made sure to clarify that her comments were only to say that things could have been better and not to express her unhappiness with the support and services provided to her son at the public school.

Fatima described the U.S. educational system as advanced and caring about the needs of children in general and children with disability, in particular, and she expressed her gratitude that her son was given the opportunity to receive the services and support he needed when he needed them as opposed to if they had lived in Palestine. Fatima described how there are no special education services in the public schools in Palestine and Jordan. She felt comfortable referencing Jordan's educational system as she has family members who had to go through difficulties taking care of their children with disabilities there. Additionally, Fatima articulated the absence of inclusion of children with identified disability at public schools in Palestine and in Jordan; special education services are only accessible through private-pay schools. Unfortunately, the lack of support for children with disabilities by the government and schools in Palestine and Jordan makes a child with disability a burden for their family, as they are de facto the family's responsibility. This situation becomes even more difficult when the family of a child with disability does not have the financial ability to enroll the child at a private school or center. Fatima reflected on her personal experience when she went to school and how she noticed that many of her classmates did not go past sixth grade. She speculated that her classmates could have had learning difficulties that were not identified and the outcome of their dropping out of school was due to the absence of special education services and support at public schools in Palestine. Moreover, Fatima compared the prevalent positive perception toward

supportive education for disability in the U.S. as opposed to the attribution or pity and helplessness in Palestine and Jordan.

Fatima expressed her relief that her son is in the U.S. and that he is on a diploma track as opposed to how things might have been if they had lived in Palestine where he would not have had the same opportunity. Her hope is that Karim will be able to learn vocational skills in high school so he can have a job and take care of himself as an adult. As a parent, Fatima wants to see Karim develop self-advocacy and independent living skills in order to have social and financial autonomy in adulthood and emphasized that in terms of career, some sort of manual job might be best suited for him.

Samir. Samir's daughter, Meriem, is a 14-year-old student in eighth grade who receives special education services under the categories of severe cognitive disability and speech impairment as well as physical and occupational therapy services. Samir's experience was marked by his satisfaction with being involved in his daughter's education and his gratitude for the support provided for his daughter, Meriem, at the public school in the U.S. Samir spoke of how he makes sure to be involved in his children's education and how he regularly attends Meriem's IEP meetings ever since she qualified for special education in 2011. Samir stated on multiple occasions that he has been satisfied with his overall experience with the special education system in the U.S. from the time she was identified when they lived in the state of Tennessee to the time they moved to Indiana. He expressed his appreciation of the level of proactivity, care, and ease of access to service as needed. He especially appreciated the fact that the school bus comes and picks Meriem up to take her to the school and brings her back home at the end of the day in comparison to how he spent time waiting for appointments and not having a clear communication venue to access services in Saudi Arabia. Samir even said that he now

feels that he did not know anything about how to help his daughter in Saudi Arabia, and since he started living in the U.S. he has learned many things in relation to special education and disability. Samir has been impressed by how not only is his daughter allowed to attend the public school along with typical students but also she is provided all sorts of additional services according to her needs. Samir reported that Meriem might possibly not even have been admitted at the private specialized schools for children with disabilities in Saudi Arabia. Samir did not want to sound critical of the support provided for children with disabilities and their families in Saudi Arabia because the Saudi government provides financial support to the families of children with disabilities, but there is more care for children with disabilities and better-trained service providers in the U.S. Samir said that students with disabilities in the U.S. are enrolled at public schools with their typical peers, while in Saudi Arabia they have to be enrolled at schools specialized in servicing individuals with disabilities.

From his experience with his daughter, Meriem, Samir shared the belief that special education is a vehicle that provides support for children with physical, language, hearing, and learning problems. When asked about the causes of disabilities in children, Samir postulated that injuries due to accidents and genetic heredity are possibly the main causes of disabilities. He added that he believes that children with disabilities usually struggle with communication, mobility, and self-care skills and that they would need help in those areas, making special education's role in helping children with disabilities with independent living skills and learning very important.

When Samir was asked about his daughter's special education eligibility categories he expressed unfamiliarity with the specific technical terms, but did state that she has a physical disability and is in a wheelchair and that her intellectual ability is low. Due to his uncertainty, he

opted to text the special education teacher in the midst of the interview to ask her about his daughter's eligibility categories. She answered by stating that the daughter's eligibility was for a severe cognitive disability, speech impairment, and that she receives physical and occupation therapies.

Samir expressed his satisfaction with the initial evaluation process and he felt involved by the IEP team during the decision-making and educational planning process. He also praised the collaborative work and effective and continuous communication that the IEP team showed. Samir alluded to the strong personalized relationship he has with special education teacher through which he feels that he has real-time updates and information about his daughter's needs and progress and showed his eagerness and full commitment and involvement in supporting his daughter. It is noteworthy that Samir was the only interviewee who asked to preview the interview questions in order to have time to think and provide good answers. I agreed to Samir's request as it was evident that he was acting from a place of care to make sure that he could convey his thoughts as clearly and thoroughly as possible.

Ibrahim. Ibrahim's daughter, Souad, a 15-year-old ninth grader has an IEP under the special categories of mild cognitive disability and speech impairment. Ibrahim knew Souad's eligibility categories and had a good level of knowledge about special education in general due to his involvement in the field of education. As an educator himself, Ibrahim expressed his early concerns and frustration with his daughter Souad's difficulties acquiring two languages (Arabic and English) and how he felt relieved once she became a fluent speaker of both. Ibrahim proudly talked about his role in Souad's early identification as a child with a disability. Ibrahim initiated a request for his daughter's evaluation following his brother's recommendation when she was four years old (Ibrahim's brother is also the family pediatrician).

Generally, Ibrahim felt proud of his level of involvement in the education of Souad and his other children. Ibrahim highlighted that out of his four children, only his daughter, Souad, attended a public school between first through third grade (in contrast to his other children who attended a private Islamic school only). However, Ibrahim experienced feeling dissonance and ambiguity regarding whether to keep Souad enrolled at the public school, as he knew that she would receive better special education services there. Ibrahim ended up opting to remove his daughter from the public school following her complaints of being bullied. Ibrahim stated that students with disabilities are susceptible to bullying, which is usually very difficult to spot and prevent, leading to such students' struggle with self-esteem and emotional difficulties that usually go unnoticed by both parents and educators. For Ibrahim the social emotional well-being of his daughter is of cardinal importance and thus he felt that he made the right decision. At the IEP meeting where Ibrahim announced his decision to remove Souad from the public school, he felt that he was being personally challenged by the remarks cautioning against his decision of enrolling Souad at a private Islamic school, making the decision even more difficult since he knew from first-hand experience that they lack the resources needed to give an equal level of support to Souad.

Ibrahim expressed a positive regard toward special education and thinks that it is an efficient way for children with disabilities to receive the help and support they need. As an educator, he said that he often finds himself defending the merits of receiving special education services as opposed to the stigma and shame that leads some parents to hide that their children have a disability and consequently deprive them of services and support. Ibrahim said that he disapproved of the stigma toward disability that permeates society in Palestine and other Muslim Arab countries. Ibrahim expressed his relief that his daughter is in the U.S. where children with

disabilities have a chance to succeed in life and career as opposed to Palestine where they are considered a burden on their families. Accordingly, Ibrahim said that, as an educator, he thinks that teachers can only refer for an evaluation but they cannot diagnose disabilities, though a teacher's opinion needs to be taken into consideration when making referrals for special education evaluations.

Ibrahim was thankful for the way the public school promptly responded to his request of testing and later provided the special education services his daughter needed. However, it appeared that he did not think that the process of evaluation and discussion of the results was thorough and efficient. Ibrahim questioned the manner with which the evaluation team approached his daughter's testing and described it as being too technical and aloof. He appeared to take issue with the concept of IQ testing and determining the children's levels of ability functioning based on scores and the lack of emphasis on the full picture of their strengths and talents. Ibrahim also commented on the technical nature of description of ability and performance on the evaluation report and how it talks about ranges and levels instead of looking at the child as a whole. Additionally, he spoke of the importance of cultural and linguistic considerations while evaluating bilingual children like Souad that are sometimes overlooked. Nevertheless, he still expressed his satisfaction with the organizational and professional aspect of service provision and follow-up by the evaluation and IEP team members. The latter is also linked to Ibrahim's favorable view of the quality of education and services provided by good school districts. Still, Ibrahim thought that the state of special education in the U.S. could be better, that there is a need to train general education and special education teachers to provide good quality services at both public and private schools in the U.S. He also felt the current educational culture emphasizes academic abilities and neglects other talents and skills that

individuals with disabilities might have. Ibrahim spoke vehemently about the importance of emphasizing and capitalizing on the strengths and talents of children with disabilities.

Retrospectively, Ibrahim described how he started noticing improvement once Souad started receiving services. He hopes that Souad will be able to finish high school and even go to college, but he still believes in the importance of providing vocational skill training for students with disabilities. Ibrahim shared that having a child with a disability is a struggle and a life changing experience for the family. Notably, Ibrahim might be feeling partial responsibility with regard to his daughter's disability conveyed by his opinion that one cause of disability is very likely the marriage of cousins and that he is actually married to his cousin. However, being an educator and living in a society that provides support and possibilities made him hopeful that Souad could still have a decent life and career if she keeps receiving the right support. He asserted that he will never go back to live in Palestine where his daughter would not have a chance at success due to her disability.

Nawal. Nawal indicated that she knows her son, Jamal's, eligibility category and that he has an IEP only because of mild articulation difficulties. She asserted that he has a strong chance to overcome his articulation difficulty and to not require any services in the near future. Nawal is proud of Jamal as he is one of the strongest readers in his classroom. In contrast, Nawal thinks that he is not being challenged enough at his level of reading performance in order for him to improve.

Nawal is generally appreciative and satisfied with the quality of education and support that her son is receiving in the U.S. However, she takes issue with the thinking that some teachers have that if a student is doing fine, there is no need to challenge them and try to improve their skill. Nawal reported that she puts a of lot effort into being involved in her son's education

as much as she can, but she stated with regret that sometimes she cannot keep up with all the school activities and events due to her own school schedule. Nawal praised the quality of the overall educational services and support provided for children with disabilities at schools in the U.S. She also pointed out that there is a lack of support of the general education teachers, which in turn leads to a lack of supervision and assistance of students with disabilities in general education classrooms during inclusion time. Relatedly, Nawal was very impressed by the positive perception and the support that individuals with disabilities receive in the U.S. and how it leads to their professional and personal success.

Nawal believes that disabilities are generally caused by marriage of cousins, genetic heredity, childhood injuries due to accidents, and birth complications. She noted that children with disabilities usually struggle with social exclusion and in certain instances are subject to maltreatment and physical abuse. Nawal first learned about disability and special education when she was in college in Saudi Arabia and subsequently through her graduate studies in the U.S. She maintained a positive attitude toward special education, and she believes that it is a channel of providing students with disabilities the help they need. Nawal reported that generally disability ranges from mild to severe and from being able to learn to being able to train.

Nawal underscored the important role that acceptance and inclusion play for individuals with disabilities in the U.S. Judging from what she has observed in the U.S. as a doctoral student in the field of special education and as a mother of a child with a disability, her opinion is that special education has only advantages and no disadvantages. Nawal said that the advantages range from developing academic skills, communication skills, social skills, to independent living skills and career opportunities. She expressed her appreciation for the well-rounded and practical training that students with disabilities receive in the U.S. and praised the availability of

college and career opportunities for individuals with disabilities in the U.S. in contrast to being very limited in Saudi Arabia.

While speaking of the state of special education in Saudi Arabia, Nawal expressed her utter disapproval of how children with mild disabilities are usually placed in the same classrooms with others with more severe disabilities. Conversely, Nawal expressed optimism regarding the future of special education in Saudi Arabia due to continuous efforts by the government to advance the field. However, Nawal thought that the field faces multiple obstacles such as social stigma about disability, the absence of a culture of inclusion, the lack of belief that individuals with disabilities can learn to be successful, as well as the fact that special education is exclusively available to families that can afford the private schools or have connections. In recent years, Nawal reported that she noticed that there is an increase of attention and interest in supporting the field of special education, but thought that even though there is an availability of resources, there is a lack of quality training and implementation and that the field is at a rudimentary stage. Nawal added that there is a prevalence of a culture of shame and guilt that permeates the perception of society and parents of children with disabilities. Moreover, the absence of a culture of inclusion in Saudi Arabia also plays a negative role in perpetuating the stigma against disability. Nawal added that social seclusion, home confinement, and physical abuse of children with disabilities in Saudi Arabia are issues that need to be handled. Moreover, Nawal said that in addition to perceiving children and individuals with disability as helpless and piteous, parents in Saudi Arabia often do not believe that those individuals can succeed in life and have careers. Conversely, Nawal articulated that U.S. society in general trusts the abilities of children with disabilities to learn and succeed. According to Nawal, special education services in Saudi Arabia are for the most part provided through private schools that only parents

who have financial means can afford. Although there are some government-funded specialized schools for children with disabilities, there are not enough of them to cover the need. In addition to the shortage, nepotism is commonly practiced to enroll children with disabilities at those establishments.

Nawal said that, overall, she was grateful for the services and the effectiveness of communication with the teachers in the U.S., but she still had mixed feelings about the evaluation, eligibility, and service processes for her son. On the one hand, she felt grateful that the school responded to her concerns about articulation and completed the evaluation and put the IEP in place, but she was disappointed and surprised that the process was not clearly explained to her. Nawal reported that she had not expected that the speech and language pathologist would not communicate with her about Jamal's educational plan, services, and progress. Nawal shared some comments about the evaluation process and shed light on the parent's role in bringing awareness to the school about bilingual and linguistic considerations in relation to speech and evaluation procedures. She referred to the importance of a personalized relationship and a proactive communication style between parents and special education service providers in promoting collaboration. Nevertheless, Nawal emphasized her focus on being positive and not letting the unfortunate details overshadow the positive aspects of her son's experience.

Khalid. Khalid's overall experience was marked with regret, disapproval, and helplessness. Khalid appeared to struggle with the fact that his son, Sami, has a disability and with the idea of him being on the Autism Spectrum. Khalid expressed a great deal of skepticism and questioned most of the services and support that were put in place for Sami at the public school. At the beginning of the interview, Khalid showed an awareness that Sami had special needs but he was uncertain if he had an actual IEP. Khalid ended up texting his ex-wife in order

to confirm that his son had an IEP. Khalid communicated that he knows for sure that Sami received services for reading, math, and writing. He also reluctantly added that Sami recently obtained a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder outside of school. Khalid stressed that Sami's Autism is mild.

Khalid recounted that at first he did not approve of his son receiving special education services because he felt that the school was using his son's use of medication as a condition for providing services to him. Khalid reported that the divorce was partially caused by the conflict about his son's eligibility and medicating. The situation deteriorated following the parents' divorce. Following the divorce, Khalid was deprived of being part of his son's education due to losing guardianship and to a restraining order. Khalid expressed his strong desire to make up the time that he missed and to be present and involved as much as he could.

Khalid thinks that disabilities are basically caused by genetic heredity, environment, mother's diet during pregnancy, childhood accidents, and vaccination. In his view, the main challenge individuals with disabilities face is the stigma associated with being labeled as in special education. Khalid seemed to generally have a positive attitude toward the mission of special education from the perspective that it offers help to individuals with disabilities. However, when it came to his son's disability, Khalid became ambivalent and shifted his focus to the stigma associated with labeling and his feeling of being coerced to follow the school's directives. As a way to defend his implicit skepticism and to work through his conflicting feelings about his son's disability identification, Khalid referred to how struggling at school was perceived as normal when he was growing up in Tunisia. Khalid did not know if he should be happy that his son was identified with a disability or be unhappy as it feels at times like an overreach and a culture of over-identifying disability. Still, Khalid reported that he currently

appreciates the support and help that the educational system in the U.S. offered his son as opposed to what he hypothetically would have had access to in his country of origin, Tunisia.

Relatedly, Khalid expressed his discontent about the state of special education in Tunisia and described it as rudimentary. Khalid added that it is generally difficult to have access to services for individuals with disabilities in Tunisia, and even when the services are available outside of school, parents have to have the financial means and the knowledge to seek the services, which is, in his opinion, both unfair and unfortunate. Khalid said that there are no free-of-charge special education services available at public schools in Tunisia. However, he still thought that the field was slowly developing and expanding. Khalid reported that he has noticed an increase in autism identification in both the U.S. and Tunisia compared to when he was growing up. He speculated that this increase was likely related to the notable advances in the field of disability identification, awareness, and education as well as an increased level of parental involvement and willingness to seek support for their children.

Khalid added that even though very advantageous, special education in the U.S. can sometimes lack flexibility in terms of how services are accessed and provided. He explained that this rigidity and lack of options is connected to professional competence of the teachers and service providers. Similarly, he referred to the tendency of some school officials to overreach and abuse their position by giving directives about what the child needs, which in Khalid's experience was medication. Khalid conveyed that his negative stance regarding special education has changed throughout the years as he has been able to see its benefits on his son's learning and behavior. Interestingly, Khalid vehemently communicated his wish that schools put more emphasis in monitoring the quality of the educational services. Khalid also highlighted the need for schools to work more on making learning enjoyable and motivating for the students.

Salwa. Salwa shared that her youngest daughter, Safaa, who is a six-year-old Kindergartener, has an IEP under the categories of developmental delay and speech impairment. Safaa also receives physical and occupational therapy as related services. When asked, Salwa knew her daughter's eligibility categories and the related services through which she received support. Salwa underlined that she is fully involved with all of her children's educational and extra-curricular activities as she is the only parent currently present in the U.S. to take care of them. Currently, Salwa's husband is in the UAE working. Accompanied by her immediate family, Salwa came to the U.S. five years ago to finish her doctoral studies in pharmacology. Salwa's experience was marked by strong negative and positive feelings resulting in ambivalence. Salwa's primary positive feeling during the interview was gratitude that Safaa was given support and services in the U.S. school system. However, Salwa had significant concerns related to her children's acculturation process and to her ability to voice her opinion at school.

Salwa was born in Sudan but lived most of her life in the UAE. Salwa's family emigrated from Sudan to the UAE in the 1980's in pursuit of a better life and work. Growing up, Salwa lived through her family's experience with her brother's blindness and perseverance to get an education. Through that experience, Salwa learned firsthand that disability can be overcome when the right conditions and support are available. This experience seemed to have a significant impact on how Salwa perceived her daughter's disability, and she believes that Safaa can and will learn and progress at school. When Salwa's parents were searching for special education services for her brother, they became aware that non-citizens and non-native born do not have the same rights and privileges as native-born citizens in the UAE. The privileges include access to medical and educational support and services for individuals with disabilities. Salwa communicated that it just did not make any sense to her that a family that lived and

worked in a country for a very long time would not have access to the same rights as native born citizens. Salwa's family ended up taking their son to Kuwait, as they couldn't find a school for the blind in the UAE. Consequently, Salwa ended up spending a significant amount of time traveling between the UAE and Kuwait.

Salwa believes that disabilities are caused by genetic heredity and accidents leading to physical injuries. She also thinks that individuals with disabilities usually struggle with social inclusion, self-care skills, and financial autonomy. Salwa's experience with disability and special education did not start with her daughter, Safaa. Salwa said that she remembers first hearing about special education when she was in sixth grade. She said that special education plays a crucial role in helping and supporting individuals with disabilities. Salwa shared her knowledge regarding the different categories of disability and said that it could be a developmental delay, blindness, deafness, physical, and mental difficulties.

Salwa expressed her dissatisfaction with the state of special education in Sudan but at the same time thinks that the issues that the country faces are due to its economic struggles. She added that her brother received high quality special education services at the center/school for the blind that he attended in Kuwait and that the outcome was his success in life and work. Salwa reported that even the UAE and Kuwait, that have more resources than Sudan, still have a special education system at a rudimentary stage when compared to the U.S. Salwa used as a reference to support her idea the fact that there were not any specialized schools for the blind in the eighties in the UAE. She stated that currently students with disabilities are not admitted at public schools, not to mention in general education classrooms. Subsequently, Salwa pointed out that there is still a prevalence of a negative perception and stigma regarding disability in the UAE, Kuwait, and Sudan and that children with disabilities are expected to be placed at private

specialized schools and not with typical peers. Salwa articulated that the private specialized schools or centers are usually expensive and that unfortunately most families with children with disabilities in Sudan are poor. Moreover, Salwa reported that in the UAE and in Kuwait, students with disabilities of different types and levels of severity are placed together in the same classrooms at the specialized centers, which she described as not good. Conversely, Salwa expressed her apprehension and discontent with the fact that Arab countries that have the financial means, like the UAE, do not consider special education as one of their top priorities. Generally, Salwa said that she noticed that the wealthier countries in the Arab world have more services and support available. Salwa believes that the situation today in the UAE and Kuwait has been ameliorated compared to the eighties. She also highlighted that Arab countries are exerting more effort to advance the field of special education.

With regard to special education in the U.S., Salwa described her experience as satisfactory. She spoke of the ease of and accessibility to services in the U.S. She said that one of the best things about special education in the U.S. is the early identification of children with disabilities, continuity of services, and effectiveness of communication about children's progress. Accordingly, Salwa commended the fact that general education and special education in the U.S. are a right and not a privilege and are available to all children and individuals with disabilities without exception. She also praised the practices of inclusion of children with disabilities at public schools and in general education classrooms. Relatedly, Salwa emphasized the importance of the inclusion of students with disabilities in a general education classroom and public school the same as it is commonly practiced in the U.S.

From her experience with her daughter, Salwa stated that she was also satisfied with the evaluation, placement, and the individualized educational planning process that was

collaboratively elaborated and put in place. Moreover, Salwa added that she always felt included and involved during the evaluation and the IEP meetings. She said that she was content with the communication flow that she has with the special education teacher and the other service providers. Salwa reported that she feels that she was fully and continuously informed and involved in the process of identification, planning, and service planning for Safaa. She also shared that she is pleased with the efficiency and proactivity of communication that she has with her daughter's service providers (special education teacher, speech therapist, physical therapist, and occupation therapist) since she was in the First Steps program.

Salwa's children attended a private Islamic school in the U.S. up until she enrolled them at the public school two years ago due to concerns about the quality of education they were receiving. However, this decision led to her recent experience of dissonance due to significant worries about her children's cultural and religious identity development in light of the current social and political context. Salwa was referring to the preponderance of the negative perception and prejudice toward Muslims and Islam. Salwa reiterated that although she was very grateful for the special education support that Safaa received, she was unsure if the public school could assist her family with their concerns and needs about cultural identity development. Salwa was saddened and made uneasy by the impact that the current political context has had on her ability to voice her opinion and advocate for her children's education at the public school.

Being a Muslim woman, Salwa felt disenfranchised as she felt uncomfortable expressing her disapproval of some culturally insensitive activities that her children have to participate in as part of the school curriculum. Salwa feared that if she expressed her views, she would perpetuate the negative perception about Muslims and of Islam as being a troublesome religion, which in turn could potentially lead to more discrimination against both herself and her children.

Salwa also struggles with the feeling of failing at being a parent who has taught her children about the merits of their background values given the current negative rhetoric about Islam that they are exposed to at school and through the media. She worries that her children might now feel the need to repress their cultural and religious identities to fit in at school and the community. Salwa thought that her worries came true after her son told her that he feels that he does not belong at the public school. Accordingly, Salwa is finding herself questioning if she should have kept her children at a private Islamic school where at least they would have felt that they fit in and could identify with others from the same cultural and religious background.

Description of Experiences of Parents With Children in General Education

Fetah. Fetah shared that he has two daughters who generally never struggled at school. The oldest daughter was born in Morocco, so when they first arrived to the U.S. she went through a year-long English as a Second Language program. The youngest daughter was born in the U.S. and did not need language support. Generally, Fetah expressed his gratitude for the educational services and support provided to students and their parents in the U.S. as opposed to what he knows about what is offered in his country of origin, Morocco. Fetah was very satisfied with the frequency and means of communication that his daughters' school used to reach him and his wife when needed. He was also satisfied with the medical, language, and educational support provided for both of his daughters. Fetah's youngest daughter has diabetes and he reported that the school put in place a health plan for her and that they are doing a great job taking care of her medical needs. Fetah said that he does not actually know his daughter's current grade but he knows she is in elementary school. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the extent of his knowledge and involvement in his daughters' education and wished he was more

involved. He attributed his lack of involvement to the fact that he is the breadwinner in the family, while his wife is in charge of the kids' education.

Fetah shared that he does not know much about special education either in the U.S. or in Morocco. However, from what he knew about his country of origin, there might be some services provided to individuals with blindness or deafness, but they are offered at specialized schools and are not part of the public school system. Fetah thought that the government in Morocco was not as suitably involved as it should be in providing the resources needed to assist students with disabilities. For Fetah, the lack of involvement of the government was manifested in the lack of proper training for the professionals (special education teachers and service providers) in charge of providing services for individuals with disabilities. Fetah did not think that there were any special education services at public schools in Morocco at this time.

Fetah communicated that he likes the fact that all children with disabilities are offered the support they need in the U.S., but he added that he is opposed to the culture of separation and stigma associated with the placement in special education classrooms. Fetah highlighted the negative social and emotional effects that the stigma against special education has on students with special needs when they are separated from their typical peers in specialized classes. Those effects for him could have devastating results ranging from difficulties in integrating and adjusting to school and society to reduced work and life prospects. Fetah called for the importance of the immediate family's role in laying the foundations of resilience for the children with disabilities in order for them to be able to tackle life's hardships. For Fetah, immediate family support and acceptance was the backbone to a healthy upbringing of a child with a disability. Fetah communicated that it all starts in the family and then might spread to society.

Fetah believed in God's will when it comes to knowing when and where disability occurs. He also pointed out the role of cousins' marriage in increasing the occurrence of disability in children. He stated that children with disabilities typically struggle with family and social acceptance and stigma. Given the negative perception associated with special education, Fetah said that, if offered, he would not accept special education services for his children. For him the negatives of being in special education outweigh the positives of receiving special education support.

Naima. Naima was born in Palestine but lived most of her life in Jordan. Naima reported that the only time her children struggled at school after their arrival to the U.S. was in the first couple months. She communicated that their struggle was due to the acquisition of English, which they overcame very quickly thanks to the teacher's support and the ESL services they received in their first year at school in the U.S.

Naima expressed her satisfaction and gratitude for the good quality of education and support provided to all of her children in the U.S. as opposed to what she experienced with public schools in Jordan. Naima reported that there is a connection between the level of educational support at schools and students' achievement and that she noticed that in her children; she added that her children are doing so much better academically and that they like the school in the U.S. better than their school in Jordan. Naima believes that the effective communication with and by the school and parent's involvement in children's education is linked to their academic success as well. Naima feels very involved and that she is given more opportunities to be part of her children's education in the U.S. as opposed to in Jordan. Here in the U.S. she is able to volunteer at the schools when she can, and she is able to meet with the

teachers whenever needed. Naima articulated that she also attends most if not all of the cultural and educational events that the school organizes.

Naima stated that she has noticed the schools' effort for being culturally sensitive toward her family's cultural background. She still expressed some worries regarding her children's exposure to different cultural values and the extent to which they could affect their cultural identity development. She worries that being completely immersed in a different culture could alter or confuse her children's cultural beliefs and values, but she has a sense of reassurance from the trust she has toward the schools. Naima believes that the school staff will help her and support her children when needed.

Naima first learned about special education when she was at school through a friend who had epilepsy, and then through her cousin's son who is on the Autism Spectrum. Naima also had heard about special education at her children's school as they have classmates who have special needs. Relatedly, Naima noticed that there is a causal relationship between intra-family marriage, childhood accident, medical errors, lack of pre-natal care, and poverty and the occurrence of disability in children. She shared her opinion regarding marriage of cousins in Jordan, and she expressed her disapproval while still being respectful of the cultural norms of her country of origin. Naima spoke of the adversity that families with a child with disability experience due to not having access to any help or support from the government in Jordan. She expressed her discontent regarding how access to help for children with disabilities is very expensive and limited in Jordan; it is only available to the families who can afford it. Naima said that, in some instances, children with disabilities from poor families in Jordan would end up dying due to a lack of support and are sometimes considered a burden to their families due to the lack of resources and support. She alluded to the families' feelings of guilt and shame and how

those feelings lead to hiding children with disabilities at home. Nevertheless, her cousin who is on the Autism Spectrum was a success story as his parents were able to afford the cost of enrolling him in a specialized school where he received good quality services. Naima added that nowadays most care services are becoming privatized and that makes it even more difficult for families of low income to procure the help their children need. Naima pinpointed that one of the major challenges in Jordan is the lack of resources and investment in public education by the government; but she expressed some hope and enthusiasm for the direction that Jordan now is taking regarding education in general and to special education, in particular. Naima shared that she is noticing the emergence of some college programs in Jordan that train special education teachers properly, although those teachers do not receive funded positions in the public schools.

Naima expressed how impressed she was with how individuals with disabilities in the U.S. have access to community services and jobs as opposed to in Jordan where the rates of unemployment are affecting everyone and individuals with disabilities in particular. Naima praised the efforts and involvement of the government in the U.S. in supporting education and the merits of social inclusion for individuals with disability and the role it plays in promoting the acceptance and normalization of disability. Naima has a great deal of trust in the educational system in the U.S. She said that she would definitely accept special education services if they are offered and recommended by her children's schools while at the same time stressing the importance of the immediate family's role in building resiliency in children with disabilities through support and acceptance.

Driss. Driss reported that the only time any of his children had difficulties at school was when he enrolled them at a private Islamic school. Driss did not think that his children's academic struggles were due to learning or behavioral problems, but mostly due to their negative

experience at the school. He praised and expressed a great deal of satisfaction with the quality of education and support that his children received in the public school prior to enrolling them in the private school. Driss' experience was significantly marked by his regret for enrolling his children at a private Islamic school because his children's academic skills had been negatively impacted. Moreover, he learned that the private Islamic school his children previously attended discriminated against his family based on his professional and social status (being a cab driver as opposed to other educated and wealthier parents). He realized that staff members at that private Islamic school not only verbally mistreated his son but also that they did not allow him to have access to his children's educational records, which was his right as a parent. Furthermore, Driss experienced an internal conflict, as he did not want to pursue legal action against the school out of respect for the shared religious beliefs. At the time of the interview, Driss was looking for a better school that would teach his children his religious values while providing good education.

Driss expressed his dissatisfaction with his level of involvement in his children's education. He attributed his lack of involvement in attending school-based events and meetings at his children's school to his work schedule, and he reported that his wife takes care of it. He expressed his satisfaction with the effectiveness and timely communication with the public school as opposed to his experience with the private school. He reported that his overall experience with the public school was mostly positive with the exception of the instance when he felt coerced to accept the school's opinion that his two sons had ADHD and subsequently needed to be medicated. Driss expressed both his discontent and disagreement with the school's push to diagnose and medicate his sons. To support his position, he referred to his own hyperactivity during childhood and how that was considered normal in Morocco. He said that his parents agreed that his sons were just like him when he was a child and that there was nothing

problematic with their behavior. Subsequently, Driss' conclusion was that there was a tendency to over-identify students in special education in the U.S.

In his opinion, disability is caused by birth anomalies and it is generally God's will. Driss reported that some of the challenges that students with disabilities face are bullying and having a negative self-perception. Driss said that those challenges could adversely affect children's life and career opportunities. He added that the negative self-perception is rooted in their feeling of being different from typical peers. Driss described the merits of providing special education services in the U.S. in helping students with disabilities with their academic and emotional needs while still having concerns about the adverse effects of receiving special education services. Driss' concerns pertained to how stigma could negatively impact the students' self-perception and social emotional well-being. While Driss sees some merits of providing special education services, he emphasized that not all students with disabilities would need it. As a case in point, Driss referenced his experience with his younger son who did not require special education services and only needed a behavioral plan to provide him with support in the classroom, noting that his son did not have any academic difficulties.

Driss praised how advanced educational services are in the U.S. as compared to Morocco and expressed his dissatisfaction as well as his disappointment regarding the absence of special education in the Moroccan public educational system. He noted that services for individuals with disability are available but that they are limited to private centers where parents are expected to pay and those who cannot afford paying for their children to receive services will not have any support. Driss expressed his discontent with the lack of involvement and the lack of concern by the Moroccan government. Driss spoke of the number of students with mental health

problems who end up dropping out of school in Morocco due to bullying and the lack of special education services and support.

Omar. Omar enrolled his two sons at a private Islamic school two years ago. His older son who is currently in second grade attended a public school for Kindergarten. Omar said that his two sons spent two years in daycare and that helped them acquire many linguistic and academic skills. He added that because of that they did not need any language (ESL) support either at the public or private school. Omar's decision to enroll his sons at the private school was motivated by his need for them to belong and be part of the school community. He said that he had less trust in public schools due to not sharing the same religious values and their lack of a sense of cultural community.

Omar and his wife provide their children with continuous educational support at home in the areas where they feel the children have weaknesses. Omar reported that he was continuously informed by the school about new events and that he enrolled his children in as many different extra-curricular activities and events as were available at the private school. It appeared to Omar that public schools provide more cultural events and activities than private Islamic schools that seemed to put more emphasis on educational competition. To his dissatisfaction, Omar shared that he was usually unable to attend school events and educational meetings due to his work schedule. However, he expressed pride that his wife started an after-school architecture club and that they volunteer at school events as it showed their depth of involvement and commitment in the school community.

Omar had some knowledge about special education and described it being a means of providing extra support for students with learning delays, comprehension difficulties, communication disorders, and autism. Omar said that he did not see any disadvantages to

receiving special education services but sees only positives, believing in special education's role to help children with disabilities overcome their challenges even if they do not go to college. He also stressed the importance of providing individualized instruction for students with disabilities according to their abilities to guarantee their academic and life success. As far as Omar knew, disability is caused by genetic heredity and car accidents. He thought that children with disabilities struggled chiefly with learning and comprehension.

Omar expressed disappointment with the way children with disabilities are mistreated in Jordan due to teachers' lack of professionalism and job dissatisfaction. He also disapproved of the practice of not admitting children with special needs into public schools and not including them in general education classrooms with their peers. Omar highlighted the importance of parents and society's awareness and acceptance of disability services which he saw as acting as a locomotive to advance education in the U.S. as opposed to Jordan. At the same time, Omar pointed out that one of the issues that he felt affected the advancement of special education in Jordan was the country's lack of resources and lack of interest about children with disabilities by the government.

Conversely, Omar praised the educational system in the U.S. and how it makes sure that children with disabilities and typical children get the proper and free-of-charge education they need to be successful. He said that he would accept without hesitation special education services if they were needed for his children as he respects the educational system and its service providers in the U.S. He emphasized that for him, the most important thing is to get his child any help they need to be successful in life and at school. Omar reported that in some instances, the lack of awareness about disability and the feeling of shame experienced by parents affect their decision about accepting special education services.

Soumia. Soumia has a background in teaching as she taught in Saudi Arabia for five years before coming to the U.S. Soumia expressed her satisfaction with the English as a Second Language services that her children received in the first year upon their arrival to the U.S. She added that following that year of language support her children did not have any struggles at school. She also reported her satisfaction with the quality and frequency of communication that she has with the general education teacher and the public school staff. Soumia said that she enjoyed volunteering at her children's schools every time she had the opportunity to assist the teacher in providing educational support and help with the activities. Soumia also communicated that she attended all of her children's educational meetings and conferences regularly.

With regard to disability, Soumia believed it is caused by injuries due to accidents. Soumia stated that individuals with disabilities often struggle with expressing themselves (communication) and with mobility due to physical impairment. In Soumia's opinion, special education plays an important role in teaching students independent living skills, socialization skills, and community services use. Relatedly, Soumia shared that in the past she followed her son's doctor's recommendation to have him evaluated for Autism at the age of two. Following the evaluation, Soumia felt relieved as her son did not meet diagnosis criteria for Autism. Soumia said she would accept special education services if they were deemed necessary for any of her four children. Her attitude toward special education is based on her trust of the educational system in the U.S. and its merits that she has witnessed first-hand.

Soumia disappointedly reported that students with disabilities are not included with their typical peers at public schools in Saudi Arabia. She also noted that although there is some allocation of funds for special education in Saudi Arabia, there is still a noticeable lack of effectiveness and quality training for special education professionals. Additionally, Soumia

underlined that special education training, preparation of professionals, and sense of care are significantly better in the U.S. than in Saudi Arabia. Speaking from her personal experience and her conversations with female friends who are currently teachers in Saudi Arabia, Soumia described the career and freedom of mobility restrictions for women in Saudi Arabia and how they have a negative impact on the quality of teaching and special education services. She added that work conditions for women in Saudi Arabia in general are not conducive to professional growth and development. For instance, Soumia said that female teachers are not allowed by their families and societal norms to apply for jobs that are far from their male chaperone (husband or male in charge in the family). Soumia said she also feels disappointed with the quality of the educational services that are available for children with disabilities because they do not measure up to what is available in the U.S. At the same time, Soumia was very subtle and respectful in her descriptions in order to not come across as disloyal to her country of origin. Conversely, Soumia praised and described the merits of teachers' work conditions in the U.S. from what she personally observed at her children's schools. Soumia expressed her optimism vis-à-vis the progress that special education, as a new field, is undergoing in Saudi Arabia; she is hopeful that the work opportunities and conditions for female teachers will improve.

Jalal. Generally, Jalal's experience with his children's education was marked by his overall satisfaction and gratitude toward the U.S. educational system. Jalal conveyed that his children only needed language support through the English as a Second Language program upon their arrival to the U.S. Jalal regretfully explained his inability to attend most of his children's educational meetings and school events due to his work schedule and because he is the breadwinner for his family. Still, he still believed that he was indirectly involved as he discusses

and has an input in all matters related to his children's education. Jalal's wife was typically the one who attends educational meetings and school events for their three children.

Jalal communicated his overall satisfaction with the quality of educational services and support that his children are receiving and with the way the school communicates with him and his wife about their children's learning and progress in the U.S. Jalal said that his experience with the schools in the U.S. is much better than how it was with schools in Jordan, where it was very difficult to reach the teacher or school staff if they had a concern. In his opinion, all of the challenges and difficulties that he experienced with the educational system back in Jordan are a manifestation of the bigger picture of the lack of care and involvement of the government with regard to education in general and to special education in particular.

In terms of knowledge about special education, Jalal shared that he feels that he lacks knowledge about the topic; however, he thought special education has to do with supporting children's academic and medical problems. He stated that disability could be physical and thus affect children's mobility. In his view, disabilities could be caused by birth disorders, marriage of relatives, lack of thorough medical testing prior to marriage, and childhood accidents. Relatedly, Jalal argued that the majority of disabilities in Jordan are due to marriage of relatives and the lack of pre-marital medical care. Jalal outlined that children with disabilities in Jordan struggle with stigma and social exclusion, while children with disabilities in the U.S. are accepted and empowered. Jalal emphasized the importance of society's acceptance and integration of individuals with disabilities as part of the process of helping them thrive and succeed in life. With regard to special education services in Jordan, Jalal reported that he is aware that there are many private schools in Jordan but in his view they only care about financial gains. Jalal added that those specialized private schools are capable of providing services for

children with disabilities, but the main challenge for the children's parents is the expense of these schools. Jalal spoke of how some of the available specialized schools in Jordan are government owned, but access to them is difficult as they are typically over-crowded. Jalal referred to the importance of devoting more attention and allocating more resources toward education in general and toward special education in particular in Jordan since, in his opinion, Jordan has the financial means and resources to provide children with disabilities with the services they need. Jalal argued that this could be achieved only if the government pays attention to the field of special education.

Jalal spoke highly of special education in the U.S. and praised the culture of empowerment and support toward individuals with disabilities that exists in the U.S. He condemned the culture of attributed helplessness and pity that is dominant in Jordan. Jalal expressed his discontent with the lack of support and the negative perception toward individuals with disabilities in Jordan, as it leads to adverse effects on their social and emotional well-being. Concluding, Jalal asserted that he would definitely accept special education services if they were offered for any of his children, as he deeply believed that the most important thing was to make sure that his children have a chance to have a normal life.

Leila. Overall, Leila was satisfied with the quality of the education her son is receiving in the U.S. Leila was thankful that her son did not struggle with the acquisition of English as a second language as he came to the U.S. at an early age. She shared that her son had some academic difficulties in the area of writing and sustaining attention that the teacher had informed her of at their latest meeting. Relatedly, Leila's experience was marked by her appreciation of the different educational and behavioral services that are available for her son in the U.S. and her satisfaction with the flow of communication between her and her son's school. Leila regretfully

spoke of her occasional inability to attend some of the extra-curricular activities held at her son's school due to her studies and school schedule. Still, she reported that she tries as much as she can to remain involved.

At first, Leila perceived herself as lacking knowledge about special education, but as the interview progressed, she showed some insight into the topic from her personal experience with her aunt's difficulties with Down Syndrome. From her experience with her aunt, Leila observed that individuals with significant disabilities require a lot of care and patience, as they have many needs. Leila underscored the need to have faith and acceptance of God's will when it comes to the occurrence of disability. Relatedly, her belief that some of the causes for disabilities, besides being God's will or plan, are marriage of relatives and genetic heredity. When asked about what she knew about special education, Leila stated that it is concerned with intellectual and physical handicaps and that it aimed at providing support and care for individuals with disabilities. Leila added that she believes that special education plays a very important role in helping children with disabilities in the U.S. and when it is accessible in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, in her view, children with disabilities typically struggle with comprehension, mobility, and behavior.

Leila said that the special education services available at private specialized schools in Saudi Arabia are good. However, she is displeased that the services are limited to families who have connections and the financial means to enroll their kids at these schools. Leila feels that it is unfair that not all children and individuals with disabilities in Saudi Arabia have access to the help and support they need because of the cost and the geographical location of the private specialized schools in the big cities only. Moreover, Leila highlighted the need to include children with special needs with typical peers at public schools in Saudi Arabia; unlike in Saudi

Arabia she observed that students with emotional and intellectual disabilities are included in general education classrooms in the U.S.

Subsequently, Leila spoke of the importance of teachers having the skills and experience needed to work with children with disabilities in order to promote their learning. Leila thinks that individuals with disabilities have slim chances of attending college and obtaining a degree in Saudi Arabia. She also communicated that work is generally hard for all individuals with disabilities and that they do not have the patience needed to complete it. Still, she reported that all individuals with disabilities usually have hidden strengths that need to be discovered. She added that their strengths are usually in manual activities and tasks that do not require intellectual effort. Conversely, Leila commented that she noticed that in the U.S. individuals with disabilities can attend college and that they are provided with more support to have successful careers. Leila expressed her satisfaction with the quality of education and the support available for children with disabilities in the U.S. Toward the end of the interview she referenced her own positive experience with her son's academic and behavioral difficulties as an example of the high quality of the support available for all children at his school. Accordingly, Leila said that she would definitely accept special education services if they are deemed needed for her son, as she trusts the school.

Textural-Structural Synthesis of Parents With Children in Special Education

Generally, participants from the group of parents with children in special education collectively had some knowledge about disabilities and the general mission of special education. The participants in this group stated that disabilities could be intellectual, physical, communicational, emotional, auditory, visual, or in learning. The participants reported that children with disabilities struggle primarily with social exclusion, bullying, self-esteem, mobility

and community use/access, parental neglect, self-care, and independent living skills. With regard to the causes of disability, the participants listed marriage of cousins, heredity, malnutrition, and injuries due to accidents. Three out of the six parents in this group reported having knowledge about special education prior to their experience with their child's initial identification. Only Samir and Khalid said they had not been exposed to or known about special education before their children's identification. Samir had no knowledge about special education prior to coming to the U.S. He stated that when he was in Saudi Arabia access to disability services and support was very difficult. Likewise, Khalid recounted that growing up in Tunisia the idea of struggling at school was not perceived as an issue as it is nowadays. Presently, he reported noticing a rise in the identification of disabilities in children in Tunisia in comparison to when he was still living there. Ibrahim said that his learning curve about special education commenced when his daughter qualified for services at school in the U.S.

The participants all conveyed their involvement in their children's education and school activities. Nawal referred to the fact that at times she does not find time to attend some of the school's activities, but that in totality she makes sure to attend the most important events, namely educational meetings. Khalid shared that in the past few years, he was not allowed to be involved in his son's education due to not having custodial rights. He said that now that he regained his custodial rights, he would make sure to be involved in his son's education and even extra-curricular activities. Both the fathers and mothers in this group of participants reported similar levels of involvement or desire to be involved in their children's education and special education services. Even Khalid, who did not have a chance to be part of his son's life for years, expressed his vehement desire to be more involved in his son's education as soon as he could.

Five out of the six parents shared their overall satisfaction with their communication with the general education teacher with the exception of Khalid, as he is not the school's primary contact parent. Three of the participants, namely Samir, Ibrahim, and Salwa, expressed their satisfaction with the quality of communication they have with the special education and other school service providers who are involved with their children, while the other three parents had some reservations. Fatima expressed her reservation regarding the communication that she has with her son's new special education teacher, as it seems less frequent and detailed than before. Nawal expressed her dissatisfaction with the communication that she has with her son's speech therapist, as the therapist has not contacted her. Both Fatima and Nawal expressed their wish that their sons' service providers would be more engaged and would initiate communication with them instead of only responding to questions when asked. As for Khalid, he was reluctant to formulate an opinion about this matter, but he asserted that the special education teacher who works with his son regularly communicates with his ex-wife.

With respect to the level of satisfaction with the evaluation, identification, and placement process, Fatima, Samir, Ibrahim, and Salwa all expressed their full satisfaction with the process. However, Nawal's experience was marked by a complete absence of information about the timeline of the evaluation. Moreover, she shared that she was presented with only a few documents such as the consent she needed to sign and the evaluation report without a meeting or a conversation to explain the process or the results. Khalid said that he does not remember anything about the evaluation process but that he remembers that the school suggested the need to medicate his son. In terms of satisfaction with the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), the participants expressed their overall satisfaction with the IEP that the school presented, with the exception of Khalid and Fatima. Khalid was not involved due to not having guardianship and

Fatima communicated that the IEP usually looks good on paper only, whereas in practice the educational goals are usually unattainable and unrealistic. She also had formed the opinion that the accommodations are not conducive to actual learning but are short cuts to get the student to perform.

All of the parents in this group expressed overall satisfaction with special education services. Both Fatima and Ibrahim commented that overall they are satisfied and felt involved in the process, though things could be always be improved. Nawal noted that her only concerns relate to the lack of information and communication, but that overall she is grateful that her son receives help. Similarly, Khalid said that overall he is satisfied that his son receives the help and support he needs, but he still has questions about his son's disability and eligibility in general.

The participants agreed that special education in their countries of origin is limited to families with financial means or those who have connections. Families are expected to be able to afford enrolling their children at a private specialized school for children with disabilities. Unfortunately, even when parents can afford the tuition, the children with different types and levels of disabilities end up being placed in the same classrooms. The participants agreed that their countries of origin--Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, UAE, and Tunisia--need to pay more attention and put more importance on supporting children with disabilities. The participants collectively attributed the lack of services and support in Arab countries to the government's lack of care and involvement while still believing that they are, to a certain extent, shifting toward better practices and toward allocating more resources to the field of special education. In their view, children with disabilities in the U.S have more support and are socially more accepted and included, which is conducive to better career and life opportunities in the future. The participants also agreed that there is a need to change the negative stigma associated with

disability in the Arab countries by spreading awareness about these children's ability to learn, improve, and become autonomous and productive members of society. In order to achieve that, governments need to provide more resources and better training to educators. Additionally, they agreed that parents need to be advocates and to become more informed and aware about disability in order to advocate more effectively for their children. In this regard, they saw the parents' role as paramount, as they are the main agent to foster and empower their children's resiliency and to equip them with the skills they need to tackle life's challenges.

All six participants in this group expressed their gratitude and satisfaction with the overall quality of services and support that children with disabilities receive in the U.S. as opposed to their countries of origin. Ibrahim, Khalid, and Salwa communicated that they do not think that their children would have received any of the help they needed if they had lived in Tunisia, Sudan, or Palestine. Similarly, Samir said that he did not think that his daughter would have been admitted to any school due to the severity of her cognitive disability. Samir and Nawal alluded to the fact that Saudi Arabia has the means to provide support to children and adults with disabilities, but that help is limited and difficult to access.

Textural-Structural Synthesis of Parents With Children in General Education

Generally, the participants from the group of parents with children in general education had some speculative knowledge about special education based on what they know about services and support provided to individuals with disabilities in general. The participants' knowledge was based on their life observations and anecdotal accounts from friends of how individuals with disabilities are treated and supported in the U.S. and in their countries of origin. Naima reported that she heard about special education when she was at school and later through her cousin's experience with a son who has autism. She also added that she is aware of some of

her children's classmates who have disabilities. Soumia reported that her knowledge of disabilities and special education originates from her discussions with friends who are currently teachers in Saudi Arabia and from her personal observations of what is available at her children's school. Interestingly, Soumia had her son evaluated for autism at the age of two (and he did not meet diagnosis criteria), but she did not seem to realize that experience was her most direct experience with special education until she shared her experience in the interview. Leila's knowledge about disability and special education stemmed from her personal experience growing up with her aunt's disability in Saudi Arabia. Leila also drew some of the information she shared in the interview from direct observations of what is available for individuals with disabilities in the U.S. Fetah, Driss, Omar, and Jalal referred to what they observed growing up and as adults in their countries of origin with regard to how individuals with disabilities are perceived and what sort of services are available for them. The participants in this group reported that disabilities could be in the form of blindness, deafness, Autism, medical conditions, mental health conditions, physical handicaps, or in learning. The participants reported that the main struggles that children with disabilities face are social exclusion, stigma, learning difficulties, bullying, and maltreatment. With regard to the causes of disability, the participants reported marriage of cousins, heredity, and injuries due to accidents. In Jalal's opinion, the leading cause of disability in children in Jordan is marriage of cousins. Fetah, Driss, and Leila believed that disability is primarily God's will and then attributed it to a combination of aforementioned causes.

It is noteworthy that all of the fathers in the group reported that they are not involved in their children's education and that they usually find themselves unable to attend educational meetings and extra curricular activities due to their work schedule. Fetah, Driss, and Jalal

expressed the wish to be more involved but stated that it is not possible as they are the breadwinners for their families and have to put work first as their primary role in the family. Omar expressed that he tries to be as involved as much as he can in order to help his wife, but that she is still the parent who is in charge of attending educational meetings and school activities. Naima and Soumia reported that they are fully involved in their children's education and that they actually enjoy volunteering at schools. Leila is the designated parent with regard to her son's education, but she shared that she sometimes feels that she is not as fully involved as she would like to be due to her school schedule.

All of the participants in this group reported their satisfaction with the overall quality of support and services that their children received at the public school in the U.S. such as English as a Second Language services and the school-wide behavioral interventions. Fetah's daughter has a health plan as she is a child with diabetes and he expressed his total satisfaction with how the school is taking care of his daughter's medical needs. Fetah said that his daughter would not have had access to the medical services and support that she currently has in the U.S. if they lived in Morocco. The participants expressed their satisfaction with the levels of communication they have with their children's schools. Leila shared her experience with her son's behavioral difficulties and how the plan that the school put in place helped him better adjust to classroom expectations. Driss expressed his reservation with regard to quality of education and treatment that the private Islamic school in question offered to his children. With regard to overall satisfaction with the special education services, all of the participants stated their overall satisfaction with how children and individuals with disabilities are perceived and treated in the U.S.

With regard to disability in their countries of origin, the participants reported that special education is not part of the public education system and that children with disabilities have to enroll at specialized private schools in order to receive services and support. The participants reported that access to the private schools is difficult as they are usually so costly that most of the parents of children with disabilities typically cannot afford them. Fetah, Naima, Driss, and Omar articulated that there is a lack of involvement and interest from the government of their countries of origin with regard to disability, while Leila and Soumia reported there is some support from the government, but that it is still not enough and not all children have access to help when they need it. Fetah, Soumia, and Leila brought up the lack of proper training and job satisfaction of professionals in the field of special education in Arab countries.

The participants expressed their disapproval of the negative perception and stigma associated with disability in the Arab world. This negative perception takes the form of the attribution of helplessness, of pity, of lack of autonomy, and of reduced life and career prospects for children with disability. Additionally, the participants reported that children with disabilities are often perceived as a burden for their families due to the absence of support from the government. With such perception, children with disabilities are considered their parents' responsibility, which usually drastically changes the family's dynamics. The same families end up battling social stigma that leads to shame and consequently to negative practices such as the hiding and keeping of children with disabilities at home. Omar shared that some parents of children with disabilities experience shame and that it affects their openness for seeking and accepting help for their children. The participants also underscored the importance of parents' support and care with regard to building resiliency in children with disabilities.

From a different perspective, Driss, Omar, and Naima brought up culturally related aspects pertaining to their children's education in the U.S. Driss initially enrolled his children at a private Islamic school because he wanted them to be in touch with their cultural and religious background. Omar enrolled his children at an Islamic school because he felt that there was not a sense of community at the public school due to a lack of a common cultural and religious background. Naima expressed her concerns regarding her children's cultural identity development. She wanted her children to respect and act according to their values and norms but worried that her children might acquire values in the public school that do not correspond to their Muslim Arab background.

All of the participants with the exception of Fetah, reported that they would accept special education services if the school deemed them necessary. Fetah reported that for him, the negative impact of the stigma associated with receiving special education services outweighs the importance of receiving support. Driss shared similar concerns about the adverse effects of receiving special education services on children's social and emotional well-being. Although Driss underlined the fact that not all children with disabilities need special education to be successful, he acknowledged that he would still accept special education services if his child needed them to succeed. All of the participants expressed their trust in the public education system in the U.S. and value the level of support it offers.

Integrated Textural-Structural Synthesis of All Participants

The participants from both groups, with the exception of Driss, Fatima, and Nawal, reported that the quality, medium, frequency, and content of the communication that they have with their children's school in the U.S. is satisfactory overall, especially when compared to their countries of origin. Assertively, Fatima and Nawal expressed the need for more proactive and

not one-sided communication with their children's special education service providers, while Driss' experience with a private Islamic school was overall negative. With regard to parental involvement, the parents of children with disability expressed their full involvement in their children's educational and extra-curricular activities. Only the fathers in the group of parents with children in general education expressed their lack of involvement whereas the mothers were more involved. The latter group of fathers attributed their lack of involvement and participation in their children's education to their parental role as the breadwinners. The parents from both groups drew their knowledge from a comparison of their lived experience in the U.S. to the one they experienced in their respective countries of origin. It appeared that the gratitude expressed by participants in both groups was rooted in their feelings of being privileged to have access to services in the U.S. while in their own countries access to services is laborious.

Participants from the group of parents with children who receive special education services had more knowledge about special education based on their lived personal experiences with their children's disability and identification. The participants from the group of parents with children in general education drew many of their impressions and conclusions about what special education is from what they knew about the services and support available to children with disabilities in the U.S. The participants from both groups showed an increasing insight in terms of the depth of information that they provided about special education in their countries of origin, as they were constantly making comparisons and contrasts to what they observed and experienced in the U.S.

The participants from both groups shared that disabilities can be intellectual, physical, visual, oral, auditory, emotional, or neurodevelopmental. Several specific conditions that fall under the various special education categories were reported by the participants in the group of

parents with children with disabilities, such as Autism, ADHD, Physical Impairment, Learning Disabilities, Deafness and Blindness, and Cognitive Disability. The group of parents with children in general education reported some conditions that required special education such as Epilepsy and Down Syndrome. Fetah spoke of his daughter's diabetes in the context of it being a medical condition that requires support outside the context of special education. Both groups attributed the development of disabilities to marriage between cousins, heredity, and significant injuries due to accidents. The participants from both groups held similar views that children with disabilities struggle with social exclusion, bullying, low self-esteem, mobility, parental neglect, physical abuse, self-care skills, and independent living skills. Many participants from both groups spoke of the attribution of helplessness and pity to individuals with disabilities in Arab countries and how that perpetuates the stigma against them, which in turn leads to reduced future life and career opportunities. The attributed helplessness and the struggle for social acceptance are likely linked to a cultural perception of individuals with disabilities as somewhat less than normal humans. Some of the participants from both groups also spoke of how parents of these children experience feelings of shame and denial because of the stigma associated with having a child with disability in Arab countries. Both groups of participants alluded to the role of divine destiny through the assertion of their belief that disability is first and foremost God's will, as it was expressed by Fetah, Leila, and Driss.

Ibrahim, Driss, and Khalid alluded to the fact that there is more frequent identification of disabilities in children in the U.S. than in their countries of origin. Driss and Khalid shared that when they were growing up in Morocco and Tunisia, being overall active and struggling with academic subjects was not perceived or treated by the school and parent as being a big problem, which is the opposite of how it is regarded in the U.S. The participants also speculated on

whether the increase in identification could be due to the advances in research and medicine in the U.S.

All of the participants expressed their satisfaction with the current state of special education services offered in the U.S. as opposed to their countries of origin where it is at a rudimentary stage. The dissatisfaction with their country of origin was due to the lack of care and involvement of the government, absence of special education in the context of public education, prevalence of stigma against disability, lack of appropriate training for service providers, absence of inclusion practices, difficulty to access available services and support, and the absence of career and life prospects for individuals with disabilities. The participants from Saudi Arabia, namely Leila, Samir, and Soumia, agreed that their government put in place some level of support to individuals and their parents, but also noted that those services are difficult to access due to the prevalence of favoritism and nepotism and also because they are too expensive to afford.

A pattern of concerns about cultural identity emerged in both groups. On the one hand, Ibrahim, Khalid, and Fatima expressed their concerns about their children's self-concept in relation to their identity as individuals with disability. The parents' concerns are linked to their children's chances of learning and succeeding and subsequently becoming independent adults. Ibrahim and Fatima referred to independent living skills and career opportunities as two areas that need to be integrated in the schools' educational planning. On the other hand, Naima and Salwa brought up their concerns about their children's cultural identity development vis-à-vis learning about their background values in the context of a full immersion in the American culture. Driss, Omar, and Salwa brought up the reasoning behind their decision to move their children from the public education system to an Islamic school in an attempt to preserve and

teach their children in a Muslim cultural environment. This confirmed the importance of their children's cultural identity development and sense of belonging for the parents in both groups.

Thematic Analysis

The units of meanings that were identified from each and every relevant statement from the participants' interviews were clustered into themes for each individual transcript, then organized and categorized. The themes that were recurring across at least two participants were clustered into core themes (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The final clusters of themes were then organized into four thematic statements that align with the study's research questions. The thematic statements and core themes for the study are illustrated in table 2:

Table 2

Thematic Statements and Core Themes

Thematic Statements	Core Themes
Perceptions and attitudes rooted in feelings of gratitude	Is educational support a right or a privilege? Importance of special education and of inclusion Repressed choices and identities
Beliefs as a product of cultural values and acculturation	Gender roles and parental involvement Relatedness and sense of belonging Guilt and acceptance of disability
Knowledge of special education	Disability, stigma, and social exclusion Difficulty of access to services Social-emotional struggles
Actions based on the level of involvement and awareness	Disability and parental awareness Cultural competence and collaboration Communication, satisfaction, and collaboration

Perceptions and Attitudes Rooted in Feelings of Gratitude

Is educational support a right or a privilege? Parents from both groups expressed their gratitude for the services and support that their children are offered at the public schools in the U.S. The parents from the two groups juxtaposed the available services in the U.S. with what they remembered was available in their respective countries of origin. Ibrahim went so far as to say that because of the quality and availability of services for their children in the U.S. he would not consider going back to their countries of origin. Ibrahim said,

> I will never move back home because I can't move back with a special needs child. She will never have a chance in life. So I have to stay in the U.S. so she can get the services. She is not going to get any services over there. So it becomes part of life and turns your life like that.

Relatedly, Samir referred to the fact that his daughter would not have been admitted at any school in Saudi Arabia due to her cognitive disability whereas in the U.S. she is provided with whatever services she needs. Samir explained, "Many schools wouldn't accept my daughter, as her intelligence is weak. Here [in the U.S.] it was normal, intelligent or not, they put her with other students and they are educating her." Participants from both groups also praised the ease of access to special education and general education services in the U.S. as opposed to how difficult it is in their countries or origin. Access to special education services and support in Arab countries has to be through specialized private schools that are costly, making it impossible for parents who don't have the financial means to enroll their children at those schools. The participants also mentioned the culture of nepotism that influences the way admissions are offered and prioritized at the available private specialized schools in the Arab countries. Nawal said,

> But there is only few of them [specialized private schools in Saudi Arabia] and they don't accept all the children. They are free so parents need to know someone to get their child admitted. We also have some very, very expensive private schools.

Communication between parents and school personnel was also found to be a crucial variable for participants with regard to building and maintaining trust and collaboration with schools in the U.S as discussed next.

Importance of special education and of inclusion. With regard to attitudes, participants from both groups communicated their favorable and positive attitudes toward special education's mission and role, with the exception of Fetah, who expressed that he was against the special education services available in Morocco due to their negative effects on children's social and emotional well-being. He added that special education services in the U.S. are better than those in Morocco but that the adverse effects outweigh the benefits:

> I am against special education, as I don't see any benefits. When these kids are going to grow up and become mature adults, people will see the difference at the workplace in productivity and motivation. This will all happen because we put them in separated groups of normal people versus special education. I don't like that. I want them to get the same education even if they are handicapped. All services here [in the U.S.] are very serious. They don't lie and when they do their jobs, they do it right. Overseas it is a different story.

Parents of children receiving special education services praised special education as they felt that it provided their children with the opportunity to learn and consequently have a chance at succeeding in a career and in life. Special education was described as vehicle through which children with disabilities receive the support that helps them cope with and overcome their

challenges, and enables them to attend school to learn and have opportunities that are similar to their typical peers. Ibrahim said,

> Special education is a wonderful avenue for kids who otherwise could be denied good education. You adjust the education to their needs. The students are still in the classroom like any other students but they get services like extended time.

Special education was also described as a medium that empowers children with disabilities to develop self-advocacy, self-care, independent living skills, academic skills, emotional skills, and social skills. Samir described the extent of the services that his daughter receives:

> The services are good here and the buses come to your house and it is equipped with an automatic wheelchair lifter. The bus is special for those with special needs. My daughter has a wheel chair and gets lifted into the bus and taken and then brought back at the end of the school day. That's one thing. The other thing is that they have her exercise in the classroom to train her because she can't walk. She has artificial legs to help her walk and to strengthen her leg muscles. I was in Tennessee before coming here and even there they provided her with what she needed over there and now here it is the same thing.

The participants in this group of parents with children in special education credited the increasingly positive career outlook that individuals with disability have today to the special education programs that exist in the U.S. Special education in the U.S. was also praised for its role in the early identification of children with special needs. Parents of children in special education highlighted the critical role that early identification played in helping their children acquire the academic skills needed to function at school and society. Salwa described her experience with her daughter:

> Just from what I experienced with my daughter since she was one year old. When she was one year old she started with occupational and physical therapy and speech and she continued to take that. Then when she was in the pre-school the early childhood education and now she is in kindergarten and she is still receiving the same services. We started with First Step after she turned three they told me she was going to be in special education.

Parents from both groups articulated the belief that it is beneficial, indeed imperative**,** to include children with special needs in general education classrooms. For the participants, this notion of inclusion meant the admission of students with disabilities into regular public schools and that special needs students who are already enrolled at public schools should be integrated into general education classrooms as much as possible. Participants believed that inclusion has benefits for children's social, emotional, and behavioral well-being. The parents also identified the benefits that inclusion has in promoting self-esteem and learning for children with disabilities. According to parents from both groups, inclusion is literally a foreign concept in the public education system in the Arab world.

Parents from both groups spoke of how they perceive education in general and special education in particular as favorable in the U.S. as opposed to in their countries of origin. In the Arab countries that were represented in this study, special education is considered a privilege that only parents who have the financial means, the connections, and the knowledge about the existence of services can access. Parents from both groups praised how the K-12 educational system in the U.S. rests on the fact that all students ought have the right of access to appropriate education services regardless of circumstances. In the U.S. the educational system operates under the mandate of finding and identifying children with disabilities in order to make sure they

are provided with the special education services that they need to be integrated and successful at school and subsequently in life.

Repressed choices and identities. The repressed choices and identities theme relates to parents' need to feel that their choices and concerns are addressed and considered in their children's educational planning. The first dimension within this theme relates to the need for highlighting and empowering the individual strengths of children with disabilities as contrasted with the standards used with typical peers. Parents of children with disabilities expressed a desire for their children to have the opportunity to feel valued and celebrated through their unique strengths. The second dimension within this theme involves parents' choices around the topic of medicating their children. The third dimension has to do with parental experiences of disenfranchisement coupled with their worries that their children may experience alienation from their own cultural and religious affiliation.

The first dimension of this theme captures the concerns of Ibrahim, Fatima, and Khalid that while they recognize their children have disabilities, they also know that their children have strengths that need to be highlighted. Ibrahim said that his daughter has artistic talent that is not recognized, assessed, or encouraged in the standards of the current educational system. Ibrahim and Fatima expressed some unease with regard to the way their children's school put a lot of emphasis on aligning educational planning to educational standards. The issue in this case is that school and state assessment become a particularly stressful experience for children with disabilities, as even with accommodations and modifications they still have to perform at grade level. Ibrahim explained,

> Like for example my daughter is an artist, she is a gifted artist. She would draw you where you are and that is gifted in my opinion . . . and in our mainstream academic

> system you know . . . I think it is crazy, you know, like you know are not that good at math then she realized when she went to the public school that she is two years ahead in math because our school . . . you know . . . it is crazy we go here and we are two years ahead it is like almost instead of taking your seventh grade math you are taking ninth grade math already.

Fatima expressed some relief that she was able to have her son held back in Kindergarten thinking that this decreased some of his frustration with the difficulty with the academic expectations. However, she still did not feel completely satisfied as holding him back could have had a negative impact on his self-esteem and confidence. In a related way, Ibrahim disagreed that the main focus should be on attempting to get the performance of children with disabilities to match established academic standards; rather, he thought it is crucial to focus more on the students' abilities and what they can do in order to capitalize on their individual strengths. Both Ibrahim and Fatima identified the need to adjust the educational standards to include more relevant vocational training that would match the unique strengths and talents of children with disabilities as opposed to focusing only on conventional academic and cognitive abilities. Ibrahim said,

> Like for my daughter it is art, she would sit down and draw forever. She is a gifted artist. The other kid he likes to build things. The other one, he likes to do mechanical things. The other day, he built a battery for me, a solar battery. He built it, he is a special need! But you know he has a gift and that's unfortunately what is not seen. You come and do an IQ test and say he is two years behind. Two years three years behind but this kid did something that nobody else is capable of doing, which is building. He actually had an invention that he built for me, he built for me a charger for my IPhone using solar system.

> He built a solar system and had the wiring and I put it in my phone and it started charging my phone. Yeah! And he is a special need.

Parents with children in special education emphasized the necessity of meeting the needs of children with disabilities and tracking their growth rather than focusing on simply meeting the established educational standards. Khalid spoke about a similar concern that focuses on the need for making learning more enjoyable and motivating for children with disabilities as they already have an impediment that hampers their school functioning. Khalid stated,

> I feel they are not doing as much as they can do. I think they need to make school more interesting for the kid. If my son comes back from school and doesn't want to talk about his school day, I feel he doesn't get what he needs.

The second dimension under the theme of repressed choices and identities has to do with parents' choice and attitude toward medication. Fatima and Khalid expressed that they do not want their children to be medicated as they are not comfortable taking any risks with side effects. Fatima was influenced by her friend's daughter's experience with ADHD medications and how it negatively affected her emotions and affect. Fatima said,

> My worry is really about the side effects of medication. Like I have a friend and her daughter is hyper and she decided to give her the medication. After taking the medication like the kid became good at school but she gives her a break from the medication when she has a break from school. Whenever the kid is off medication, she is depressed. The kid is in seventh grade and is really depressed. So thinking about the side effect of these medications as a parent gives you a real scare. Some of those side effects, some kids their heart is not able to keep up with it so they die from the medication. So these side effects make it scary to parents and if they give it to them they

have to worry about the psychological side effects of the medication on kids in special education.

Khalid also didn't feel comfortable with medication as he felt that the school gave him an ultimatum to either medicate his son or else his son would not receive services. Parents with children in special education expressed the significance of feeling that their choice regarding medication is respected and accepted by schools. However, this concern was not unanimous; Ibrahim was comfortable with medication as long as it helped his daughter learn and progress at school. Khalid recounted,

> I can't tell, you know, but I can tell that I was actually against it. I thought it wasn't enough test . . . but hmmm . . . I think the requirement that he had to take medication to be part of this program is what bothered me about it. I mean you have to be on medication to be in special education. I am against that.

The third dimension of the repressed choices and identities theme has to do with feelings of cultural and religious identity repression. Salwa from the group of parents with children in special education, and Naima from the group of parents with children in general education spoke about similar concerns. Both groups of parents expressed their discomfort with the ways that the public schools might affect their children's process of cultural assimilation and that this could have a negative effect on their children's acquisition of cultural and religious values. Naima recounted,

> I was worried about Nabil as he is a teenager and sees a lot different things like relationships, but he is ok. I told him that you have to be married to have relations and he understands. We came from Jordan and we have our cultures. I try to control TV and make sure that they don't see they don't need to see or know.

Driss and Omar from the group of parents with children in general education also communicated the importance of making sure that their children are in touch with their religious and cultural values. This aspect had a direct influence on their decision to enroll them at an Islamic school. Driss said,

> I would have never enrolled my kids at an Islamic school, but at the time I heard from friends and acquaintances that an Islamic school is better than the public schools. After dealing with them for two years I learned that it is not true. It's a lie. They cannot be compared to American public schools. The one thing that I liked about them [the private Islamic school his children attended] is that they always prayed on time during the noon prayer (*Dohr*) only.

Comparably, Salwa expressed regret with regard to withdrawing her children from an Islamic school and enrolling them at a public school where she feels disenfranchised and almost alienated. Salwa and Naima referred to the fact that they worry that their children may move away from their background cultural and religious practices and adopt mainstream American norms due to the process of cultural immersion and acculturation. Salwa emphasized that a major part of her concern is that she does not feel she can voice her opinions at the public school given the current social and political context where Islam faces a lot of public criticism and prejudice. Salwa feels that because she is Muslim she needs to be careful about the image she portrays at her children's school to decrease any risk of discrimination against them. With regard to her feelings of worry about her children's cultural identity and her worries about voicing her opinion, Salwa explained,

> I brought them here, at the beginning it was ok. When we came we had still Arabic and there was a religious referential and Quoran. In the first year ok, but now, especially with

> the activities, my thirteen years old . . . this year . . .some of the activities . . . I don't want her to be involved in . . . Like she in the choir. When I first came she was young and it was ok, she was eleven years old. This year she grew fast so to be honest I don't want her to be in the choir . . . the outfits . . . it was a problem. [Salwa started tearing up.] I thought for example if the time/context was a different time. These are difficult times, right? I could have talked to the school about the outfits. No, now I don't think I can. It is impossible.

Beliefs as a Product of Cultural Values and Acculturation

Gender roles and parental involvement. According to the interviews conducted with Muslim Arab American parents with children in general education, the task of monitoring children's education is typically assigned to mothers while fathers are tasked with providing for the family. Interestingly, this division of work was not apparent in the group of parents with children in special education, as the fathers in this group were as involved as the mothers.

The fathers in the group of parents with children in general education attributed their lack of involvement in their children's education to their work responsibility, as they are considered the breadwinner in the family. Fetah said, "No. I receive a lot of letters and invitations to events from them (school) but I don't go. Sometimes they ask you to come volunteer, but I got to go to work to pay the bills." The fathers in this group expressed their desire to be more involved in their children's extra-curricular and educational activities but believed that they couldn't be due to their work schedules. Jalal reported, "My wife is usually the one who attends the meetings and events at school. I usually can't find time to attend because of my job. I am a truck driver, so most of my work is out of state." The fathers in the group of parents with children in special education expressed their complete involvement and support for their children. Samir said,

> I have attended festivals and I volunteered in some activities that help the environment [in the U.S.]. I also went to meeting with teachers for my kids. I also attended meeting about my daughter who has special needs. Sometimes they ask me about my daughter when she is in the house, what she can do and what she can't do and what we need from them to help her like with the hospital or to order a wheel chair.

The mothers from both groups communicated their involvement in their children's extra-curricular and educational activities and meetings, as they believed that such involvement is their duty. Soumia described it this way:

> I volunteered to be a teacher assistant in one of my children's classes and I also helped with one of the reading classes to sit with the child individually and help him to read a story. I also participated in the festival, the annual festival. Volunteer helping with the games and this stuff.

Relatedness and sense of belonging. It was evident that religious and cultural teachings were very important for the Muslim Arab American parents from both groups in this study. Driss spoke about his conflict with a private Islamic school but ultimately concluded that he did not want to pursue legal action against them even after being denied access to his children's educational records. He also referred to instances in which his children experienced bullying and discrimination. Driss endured these negative experiences with the private Islamic school in question out of respect for the shared religious and cultural values. He confessed,

> I could have sued but I didn't because we are all Muslims, you know. When it was prayer time the kids have to line up and one time the principal told everyone in the line that if Omar led us he will take everyone to the dumpster. They even refused to give me my son's records.

Driss explained that the reason why he enrolled his children at an Islamic school in the first place was to provide them with the religious and cultural education that would align with Islam. Similarly, Omar referred to the sense of community and trust that an Islamic school gives him and his family as opposed to his experience at the public school. Omar reported that when his children attended the public school he felt that they did not fit and did not feel the sense of community that would be present at an Islamic school. For Omar, the shared religious and cultural background among the parents at an Islamic school inspires trust and a sense of belonging. He added that he could trust parents at an Islamic school to take care of his children in his absence but he would not feel comfortable doing the same at the public school. Omar explained,

> The thing about this private school [the Islamic school] most people they know our culture tradition there is more trust actually between the community like when I send my Muslim brother. Actually in the public there is no trust a lot like here like you feel more comfortable because you are dealing with people we know ourselves and our religion, they know the Islam rules of how to respect and how to take care of friends' children.

In a comparable way, Salwa expressed her regret following withdrawing her children from an Islamic school, which stemmed from the fact that she was very concerned about her children becoming discriminated against at the public school due to their religious and cultural background. She was also concerned that her children would feel uncomfortable with their identity and move away from it as a result of the prejudice and negative rhetoric that permeates public opinion. Ibrahim referred to the fact that he enrolled his daughter at an Islamic school after learning about her being bullied at the public school. For Ibrahim being at an Islamic

school means being among people who would care and respect you more because you share the same cultural and religious background. He articulated,

> But one summer she kept telling us, "I will not go back to the public school." I did not know what was happening, but then I figured out that she was bullied and she was having a very hard time with some kids bullying her. And I said ok, I took a deep breath and took her put her at "Amal School" starting either third or fourth grade.

Interestingly, Ibrahim, Salwa, and Driss all acknowledged that the quality of education and services at the public schools is much better than at a private Islamic school, yet they would rather have their children at an Islamic school than at the public schools. This position is a result of their need to feel a sense of community, safety, and belonging.

Guilt and acceptance of disability. Parents from both groups referred to the fact that disability is God's will and that it needs to be unconditionally accepted as such. In reference to her son, Fatima said, "God created him [her son Karim] and it takes him longer to process information." Additionally, the parents attributed the cause of disability to marriage of cousins, genetic heredity, and injuries due to accidents. It was evident that parents of children in special education still had questions about what could have caused their children's disability. Ibrahim indirectly expressed guilt and responsibility with regard to his daughter's disability when he referred to the fact that he was married to his cousin. He said,

> It is hard to tell, you know. I mean I can tell from myself, the possibility is that I am married to my cousin that is a genetic related-to-family marriage. It was a family marriage and you would expect you could have you know a recessive gene going there.

Similarly Khalid questioned if nutrition during pregnancy, genetics, or vaccines were the cause of his son's autism. Both Khalid and Ibrahim pointed out that they noted an increase in

identification or even an over-identification of disabilities in children and they felt ambivalent about it. Khalid said that he is still to this day trying to figure out what caused his son's disability. In this regard, Khalid communicated,

> I think it is something related to genetics or something like that, I don't know. There is a lot of changes in the environment and it might affect things. Until now, I don't know why Sami might be autistic and where this comes from. I would love to know. Maybe it is from food or exposing him to different thing in certain time. I sometimes think that it is maybe the mother ate something when he was in the womb or maybe it is from a vaccine. I don't know. Until now, I don't know exactly what it is. A lot of people say it is from vaccine and a lot of people say that they were diagnosed as babies or in the womb. I can't tell you for sure, but there is a lot of things in the environment that change and the food has a lot of preservatives and a lot of stuff. It maybe affects people's genetics. Maybe it is also because of accidents. I can't tell you hundred percent. A lot of things but they are just in my head.

Fatima reflected on the reason behind her son's mild cognitive disability. She speculated that it might have had something to do with genetic heredity and the father's age at the conception. It was evident that Fatima, Khalid, and Ibrahim experienced some feelings of guilt with regard to their children's disability and that grief and acceptance is an ongoing process. The belief in "God's will" and the strong drive to be involved and advocate for their children appear to play a role of redemption following possible feelings of responsibility by reframing them into something outside of their control. The participants' reliance on "God's will" for the occurrence of disability may function to support their belief that they are a staunch Muslim. At the same time, relying on "God's will" might have had a function of ameliorating some of their

guilt over possible feelings of concern for their child and, perhaps, their own occasional feelings of alienation from their disabled child. They might have used this religious explanation to support their efforts at coping and also to justify their feeling of being powerless to really know what their children need.

Ibrahim said that having a child with disability is a life-changing experience and that it makes a parent review and see things in a different light. Even though Ibrahim and Fatima had a feeling that their children might have a disability, they still experienced shock and grief. It appears that having a child with disability makes Muslim Arab American fathers become more involved in their children's education and quotidian needs. It is likely that the difference in the level of involvement between the parents from the two groups stems from a combination of feelings of guilt, an increased sense of responsibility due to the presence of the extenuating circumstance of disability, and the need to give greater help to the mother and disabled child.

Parents from the two groups both underlined the importance of family's acceptance of children's disability in building and strengthening their resiliency. Fetah, Fatima, Ibrahim, and Driss communicated that parents who do not show support and acceptance of their children are typically less likely to have the required knowledge and drive to look for support. Fetah emphasized the relationship between society's acceptance of disability and the child's parents' and family's acceptance and support. Fetah explained,

> Only God would know what kind of disability it's going to be. It depends on how their parents make them believe and think of their disability. Parents need to teach their kids to accept it first and that's how they were born. If they don't succeed in their relationship with their kids, how are they going to succeed in the outside? It first starts in the family. I think if they can overcome the problem in the family, they can be ok in the outside

world. Like when the child knows everyone loves the child and everyone will help him, you know what I mean.

Fatima, Naima, Nawal, and Ibrahim referred to the fact that some parents choose to deny and hide their children's disability out of shame and stigma, especially those still living in these parents' countries of origin. Parents' denial or non-acceptance of disability leads to depriving children with disability of the help and support they need and in turn harms their development and self-esteem. Ibrahim said, "I always tell my parents try not to hide it, address it. The kids are more important than the stigma you may feel. Just go and help them, but unfortunately that's a learning curve for some."

Knowledge as a Product of Personal Experiences and Comparison

Disability, stigma, and social exclusion. The participants in this study communicated their recognition of the role of social acceptance in promoting mental health and the success of children with disabilities at school. Fetah spoke of how social acceptance is an important factor that has the power to change the negative social perception about disability in the Arab world and globally. Fetah stressed that the change in the social perception of disability cannot be achieved unless it starts at the family level. This implies an increase in parents' awareness and education about disability that would in turn lead to more advocating for the rights of children and individuals with disability. Fetah explained, "The struggles depend in the population [society] and what people think on handicapped people. It starts in family and the outside is a different story. People need to be educated on how to think and treat handicapped people."

Similarly, Jalal articulated his belief that the main challenge that children with disability face is to be accepted by society. Relatedly, Driss, Naima, Ibrahim, and Nawal discussed the same challenge from the perspective of children with disability's need to feel that they are

neither different nor less able than their typical peers. In Ibrahim's opinion, the parents who deny their children's disability fear the idea that their children would be perceived or treated as different. Nawal and Naima praised the efforts of public schools in the U.S. in minimizing the culture of treating children with disabilities as different than their typical" peers. This was in contrast, again, to the way children with disabilities are treated in the participants' respective countries or origin. Nawal explained,

> Here [in the U.S.] I can't really think of any struggles, but in Saudi Arabia one of the biggest struggles is how they are kept separated from other students in normal schools . . . I think what can be improved in special education is the perception that some students with special needs can't learn or improve. That perception needs to change and teachers and parents need to start thinking that all children can learn but differently. I see here in the U.S. that parents trust their children's abilities more.

Moreover, Samir reported that his daughter was not accepted at schools in Saudi Arabia because her level of cognitive functioning was too low, which was not a criterion of exclusion in the U.S. He expressed his gratitude that in the U.S. the educational system includes children with disabilities and makes them feel accepted. Samir reported,

> Back home I always had to ask and have appointments even at school. Many schools wouldn't accept my daughter, as her intelligence is weak. Here it was normal, intelligent or not, they put her with other students and they are educating her.

The notion of "difference" and "acceptance" discussed by the participants implies that the dominating social perception in the Arab world is based on categorizing individuals with disabilities as less than "typical" or "normal" persons. This is a perception that focuses on the physical, emotional, and cognitive levels of ability rather than the individuals' humanity. In this

sense, it seems that the need for acceptance of disability equates a need to perceive children with disability as capable of being independent and successful like anyone else while considering their disability one part of who they are. This appears to not be the dominant perception in Arab countries.

Considering the reports of all of the participants in this study, there is a predominately negative perception in relation to the treatment of disability in Arab countries. Their sense is that in these countries, individuals with disabilities are mostly regarded and treated as helpless and in need of constant emotional, physical, and self-care support. It is possible that this perceived helplessness and dependence fuels the negative attitudes of the society and perhaps underlies the decision of some governments not to allocate resources towards the support of individuals with disability. This negative attitude very likely hinges on the notion that there are no life or career prospects for individuals with disabilities as they are not capable of functioning as normal people. This perception of helplessness also engenders the attitude of pity toward the families of individuals with disabilities, which in turn causes those families to experience shame. As a result, in certain instances, families choose to deny the existence of their children's disability. The participants referred to the feeling of shame that parents of children with disabilities experience, especially in Arab countries due to the prevalence of stigma against disability. As a consequence of the stigma, some parents would opt to hide their children's disability rather than getting them the support they need. Another aspect that intensifies the challenges that families of individuals with disabilities face is the lack of support from some Arab countries' governments. This lack of support in Arab countries renders children with special needs a burden for their families. As a parallel, it appears that the tendency of some Muslim Arab American parents to choose to deprive their children of special education services due to shame and denial when they

immigrate and live in the U.S. could be rooted in the already instilled fear of being perceived as deserving of pity.

Interestingly, it appears that when the participants spoke of disability, they spoke about it only in terms of individuals with severe physical, emotional, or cognitive delays. Disability categories such as learning disabilities or ADHD appear to be perceived and treated as difficulties that do not fully rise to the level of a serious disability. This perception about what qualifies as a disability in the Arab world was identified throughout the analysis of the participants' interview transcripts. Driss and Khalid both described how growing up in Morocco and Tunisia and being hyperactive or having difficulties with learning was and still is not perceived as a big problem.

The participants shared their experiences with disability through the process of contrasting and comparing their knowledge from their countries of origin to what they experienced in the U.S. Part of their call for awareness is linked to their realization that their own perception has shifted through experiences in the U.S. The participants emphasized the significance contrast between the supportive attitude toward disability in the U.S. and the lack of this attitude in Arab countries. The parents of children with disability in this study reported the absence of support in their countries of origin. Their experiences with their children allowed them to appreciate the extent of support available to them in the U.S. as opposed to their respective countries of origin. Additionally, the depth of their knowledge about special education and disability was incrementally acquired through advocating for their children and being involved in their education in the U.S.

Difficulty of access to services. When the participants spoke of some available special education services in their countries of origins, they described these as being chiefly for

individuals with significant disabilities such as blindness, deafness, physical disabilities, and cognitive disabilities. The participants spoke of how difficult it is to have access to any services even when they are available in countries like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Ibrahim and Samir reported that if their daughters lived in their home countries (Palestine and Saudi Arabia) they would not have received any help.

Omar, Naima, Fetah, Salwa, and Driss all reported that the availability of services and support for individuals with disability rests partially on the countries' economic wealth. Omar said,

> I wasn't thinking about that but I think that most of countries with strong economy giving more resources more creative like the USA they have a better special education. From the policy the plan . . . how they follow up and how they take care of the children.

Salwa spoke of how her family had to go abroad to seek services for her brother in Kuwait as it is one of the countries that offered such support. She also referred to the fact that the UAE did have disability services but that they were exclusive to native-born citizens. Salwa described,

> I think in Sudan it is worst, because these areas (Kuwait and UAE) are the wealthiest areas in the Arab countries but still special education was not advanced. So the situation in Sudan would be very bad. I think the overall experience was good though. In UAE today things are better I think not like before but it is still limited and not open for everybody. I don't know exactly what the situation is now, but in the eighties they just started special education services so it was very limited for a small group, if you are originally from UAE because we were from Sudan and working there.

The participants communicated that the available services in their home countries and other countries they are familiar with are provided only through either private specialized centers/schools or government funded organizations. They emphasized that there are not special education services at the public schools in Arab countries. As a consequence, many of the students who struggle at public schools end up dropping out of school at the elementary level due to the lack of support for children with learning problems. Fatima said, "Back home when I was there I had friends and even cousins who get to a certain level in education and they stop and cannot go past sixth grade. Was it because education was hard?"

The participants all described the involvement of their countries as insufficient. They felt that governments in Arab countries did not put as much care and attention to helping individuals with disabilities as is the case in the U.S. Fetah called upon the Moroccan government to provide more help. He asserted, "They [Moroccan government officials] need more help. The ministry of education needs to give that population (with special needs) more attention. They need to specify more budget for them." This neglect is manifested through the absence of clear policies and funding geared toward supporting and protecting individuals with disabilities. Relatedly, the participants described searching for services in Arab countries as an arduous task where parents usually end up giving up and opting to keep their children at home. Naima explained,

> The government encourages parents here. In Jordan the government has more restrictions. They [public schools in Jordan] don't want to lose the kids they have already in their schools and have students who have special needs. Students with special needs are expected to be put at special school and parents to pay a lot of money . . . They [parents of children with disabilities] end up keeping them at home.

In this sense, it is clear that access to support and special education services in the Arab countries is not a right but a privilege. The participants also articulated that servicing and supporting individuals with disability is not a priority for Arab governments, which could be part of the cause of or a result of the negative perception associated with disability in Arab countries.

Nawal, Soumia, Leila, and Samir agreed that there is some support for individuals with disabilities and their families in Saudi Arabia, but they noted that the knowledge of and the initial access to those services is difficult due to the prevalence of nepotism and systemic discrimination based on the families' socio-economic status. That is to say, if a family had connections or the financial means, they would be more likely to have not only the necessary knowledge about services available to them, but also priority of access to those services. Leila said, "Special education is very expensive in Saudi Arabia and is found only in big cities, not small cities and towns." Relatedly, Naima and Salwa spoke of the direct link between the rate and frequency of occurrence of disability and poverty. According to their observations, most of the families who have a child with disability usually are poor and could not afford enrolling them at a specialized private-pay school or facility, which would unfortunately mean that most children with disabilities would not receive any services. Nawal described,

> We have two types of specialized schools: we have private organizations, for example, a prince or sheikh who gave money and we have government-owned ones. But there is a limited availability for the students. They are considered good for the students with this type of need and their services are almost as good as here in America. But there are only few of them and they don't accept all the children. They are free so parents need to know someone to get their child admitted. We also have some very, very expensive private schools.

Yet, the same participants from Saudi Arabia said that there are some efforts from the government to ameliorate the service scarcity and to provide more funding to the field of special education; however, the field is still in a rudimentary state and needs improvement.

In addition, the scarcity of resources allocated to the field of special education in Arab countries has a direct connection with the quality of training and number of careers in the field. Fetah, Soumia, Leila, and Nawal referred to the need in their home countries for quality training in the field of special education. They asserted that as long as there is a lack of career opportunty and support to educate and train professionals in special education there would not be good services. Nawal explained,

> We [in Saudi Arabia] have a lot of resources, but the teachers' training is not at the same level as the resources. Actually we are way behind to get the special needs people help in society. Very, very behind! We still have people hide their children because they don't want to be judged and get others' pity. They don't want that.

Accordingly, Leila and Nawal spoke of the available services at the private schools in Saudi Arabia that are offered in a self-contained format in which children with different types of disabilities are placed in the same classroom and receive the same instruction and behavioral support. Nawal recounted,

> I was once in one of their classrooms and they had like five students. One had Down Syndrome, one autistic, and the other three had ADHD. So all five them were in the same classroom, and I think it is wrong. They started to learn certain behavior from each other. The three who had ADHD could have been in a normal classroom. Their issue could have been solved with medication or behavioral modification and that's all. The child with autism was very severe; he was aggressive, and he would scream. The student

> with autism was flapping his hands and the other students started to do the same thing and made it a habit. This was wrong, I mean the school just wanted money and they put this kid in the same classroom to teach them. I did not feel it was right.

Leila clearly recognized the relationship between the lack of quality training and the unprofessional practices used with children with disabilities such as physical discipline that at times could amount to abuse. She said, "Some teachers don't know how to treat them and would slap their hand or even head if they dirty their clothes. That's wrong! And they should not stop those with complete physical disabilities from learning." Moreover, Soumia spoke of the negative role that cultural constraints imposed on female teachers with all the mobility limitation rendering the field less appealing to many. In Soumia's view, the quality of education in Saudi Arabia is affected by the shortage of training and career opportunities perpetuated by restraining cultural expectations for female teachers such as remaining close to their home towns and family.

All in all, the participants from both groups agreed that special education in Arab countries faces many systematically interrelated problems that range from not being part of the public educational system, being expensive, being available only in urban areas and to citizens of that country, being a response to something that is stigmatized by the culture, and not being part of government support to families. In addition to these issues, as the participants also reiterated, even when the services were available, parents would face the hurdles of nepotism and favoritism, lack of quality services and training of service providers, and the lack of individualized and specialized services.

Worth noting, Fatima, Leila, Nawal, and Salwa communicated that there are several adverse effects that emanate from the rudimentary state of special education in the Arab world.

These effects range from a high rate of dropping out of school, social discrimination, social shaming and loss of status for families, educational neglect of children with disabilities, and reduced life and career opportunities.

Social-emotional struggles. Bullying is a topic that Driss, Ibrahim, and Fatima described as particularly problematic for children with disabilities. Driss said that bullying could have serious ramifications on a student's education and could even affect their career prospects. He added that in the U.S. there is an emphasis on preventing bullying from occurring due to its significant adverse effects. He said, "They [teachers in the U.S.] make sure kids with handicaps are not bullied. Bullying is bad and could affect the kids' life and career." Fatima emphasized that bullying continuously occurs when teachers do not notice it. Fatima qualified bullying as one of the main disadvantages of receiving special education services as it puts the child in a vulnerable position where they are perceived as different or less capable than typical peers. Fatima explained,

> So, bullying sometimes is an issue unless the teacher is really aware of what is going on in the class, and she stops it to put an end to this. Other than that, it can keep going in special ed . . . one of the disadvantages [of receiving sped] is bullying.

Ibrahim agreed that being in special education renders the child a target for bullying which in turn affects their education and learning and self-esteem, and causes a constant state of anxiety in the child. Ibrahim made the decision to move his daughter from the public school to a private Islamic school due to bullying. Driss, Fetah, Fatima, and Ibrahim described bullying and negative self-perception as the main difficulties that children who receive special education struggle with and they all highlighted the adverse effects that it could have on their learning, self-

esteem, and mental health. Accordingly, the participants placed schools' role of awareness and efficiency at identifying and preventing bullying in a central position.

Actions Based on the Level of Involvement and Awareness

Disability and parental awareness. Parents from both groups reported that parents' involvement and attitudes toward disability directly correlates with their level of knowledge and awareness about the topic. As mentioned earlier, Fetah went as far as to tie society's level of awareness and perception regarding disability to parental responsibility and involvement. In this regard, Fatima reported,

> Back home it is the parents' responsibility to find a private school for their kid, and pay out of pocket to educate that child if the family is educated and don't just want to think of him as just handicapped. If the family is educated they will help the child become independent.

Samir spoke about when he lived in Saudi Arabia that he did not know about special education or the support that his daughter could receive. He reported, "Yeah, I didn't know that much in Saudi Arabia. Just basic thing." He said that he thought that his daughter was just not going to enroll at any school due to her cognitive delay. After arriving to the U.S. and learning about the different options and rights that individuals with disabilities have, Samir became a strong advocate for his daughter. Nawal and Fatima agreed that they have learned a lot about disability rights and services through their experience with their children. Ibrahim and Fetah said that they would never go back to their home countries, as they know that their daughters would no longer have access to the same services and support. Ibrahim, Naima, Nawal, and Fatima all identified a relationship between the absence of parent advocacy for disability rights and having a stigmatized perception about the topic. Nawal, Naima, and Fatima referred to the

fact that some parents in their countries of origin would hide their children at home instead of looking for educational and care support due to shame and an avoidance of society's attribution of pity and helplessness. Similarly, Ibrahim spoke of parents of children with disability, even in the U.S., who would not disclose or even deny their child's disability out of shame and fear of losing social status in their community. The parental awareness that the participants referred to appears to include knowledge about what having a disability means, the ways they could help their children, as well as freeing themselves from the negative perception that culture attributes to disability.

Cultural competence and collaboration. The topic of cultural competence and sensitivity in the child's school was brought up by parents from both groups of participants from different perspectives. It was evident that cultural awareness and competence plays a prominent role in building and maintaining trust and collaboration between Muslim Arab American parents and schools. As mentioned previously, both Salwa and Naima spoke of their trust and gratitude for all the support that the school had provided for their children. However, they expressed concerns regarding the acculturation process of their children and how it could be placing them at a risk of having their cultural and religious identities suppressed. Naima and Salwa wished the schools showed initiative to provide some guidance and options for them as parents on how to keep things balanced between assimilating to the U.S. culture while maintaining and empowering their background cultural identity. Naima feels that through her supervision and continuous involvement she will be able to minimize the negative effects of her children's immersion in American culture. Salwa is finding herself questioning whether she made a mistake by placing her children at a public school instead of keeping them at a private Islamic school. Salwa did not feel supported to voice her concerns to the school personnel out of fear of

a backlash that would put her and her children in a position of more discrimination and prejudice. Many participants realized that there is a balance between what can be gained and lost through public school enrollment. That is to say, special education services can be accessed at public schools but at the possible expense of losing one's commitment to cultural and religious values. The Muslim Arab American parents in this study struggled with this and sometimes regretted the decisions they made while trying to find the balance to maintain cultural and religious values and provide good education for their children.

Ibrahim and Nawal noted the importance of taking the linguistic and cultural background of their children into consideration when evaluating their skills and abilities. Nawal expressed her hope that being bilingual is already a factor that the speech and language pathologist considered when she evaluated her son. When describing her son's speech difficulties, Nawal explained,

> Because it is the second language it is different from his first language. I see it in both languages, he puts his tongue out when he pronounces it. So, it is not one of the big concerns because he is still young.

Ibrahim spoke of his daughter's struggles in acquiring a second language and how it took her longer than her siblings to become bilingual. Ibrahim articulated that at the beginning being a second language learner made things more complicated for his daughter, and it played a big part in her academic challenges. He articulated,

> The most difficult thing for me that makes things really bad is the fact that we speak two languages, so with these guys they are assuming it is one language but it is two. So they would think that the kid is non-vocal (non-verbal) like that the kid is in very bad shape,

> they can't speak, you know. You know, but I try to tell them you know, there is another language spoken at home and that's probably contributing.

The parents from the group with children in general education collectively praised the English as a Second Language (ESL) program that their children went through when they needed it. Even though some of the participants' children did not really need ESL support, the mere fact that those services were available gave them a sense of relief and support. This stemmed from the fact that the participants knew that their children's cultural and linguistic difference was acknowledged and taken under consideration by the school.

Communication, satisfaction, and home-school collaboration. Generally, parents from both groups stressed the importance of effective communication with their school and their children's teachers in forming a relationship of partnership, trust, and collaboration. While speaking about his experience with his children's old school in Jordan, Jalal exhibited great intensity as he expressed the conditions in effect when he lived with his family in Jordan where communication with the school was non-existent while, in contrast, it is constant in the U.S. He said,

> They [public school in the U.S.] communicate with us through emails, text messages, and phone. They contact us as needed, but usually once or twice every month. There is a big difference in the way the school communicates with you here. If they get a hold of you about many different things like even when your child made a mistake or mistreated another child or your child is not doing ok in a subject or doing great at another. This kind of things [communication] does not exist in Jordan and the public schools are very bad.

Parents of children in special education emphasized the importance of communication with the evaluation team while their child is at the stage of evaluation, and subsequently with the specific service providers when special education services are provided to the child. While Fatima and Nawal expressed their overall satisfaction with the special education services provided to their children, they expressed their ambivalence regarding the quality of communication that they have had with the service providers. Nawal said that she generally feels that she should be satisfied with the overall services but that she does not understand why the speech and language pathologist did not initiate communication or explained the services that she provided to her child. Nawal explained,

> I don't know about it. So far think it is ok. I wish I could meet the speech therapist and she tells me what they do. They started in the 9th of September. I wish she would meet me and tell me exactly what's going on, even if she thinks he doesn't need services. As a mom, I really want to know what is done at school and if there is something I can do at home. I know she has more difficult cases than his, but still I want to know what's going on. I think they want the parents to be involved, I probably just need to ask.

Nawal questioned the reasons behind the lack of communication from her son's speech and language pathologist as it went against what she knew about how things were supposed to have taken place. Nawal found it odd that all of the communication about her son's IEP and services went through the general education teacher. She reported, "I never heard directly from the speech pathologist, it was always the teacher between us. The report I got it from the teacher not the therapist." Yet, Nawal still expressed her overall satisfaction with the special education services that her son received. Both Nawal and Fatima emphasized that they are thankful that

their children get to receive special education services in the U.S. even though they are not totally satisfied with how the communication with the school service providers is going.

Fatima expressed her satisfaction with regard to how the special education team scheduled and conducted the IEP meetings. Fatima said, "I am happy with it, and I appreciate that I am in this country, and I am satisfied in general." She praised their cohesive and thorough collaborative teamwork. However, she did not like that the new special education teacher did not initiate contact and thoroughly explain the services. Fatima felt that the new special education teacher did not put as much effort into being involved and communicating with her about the services, which made Fatima feel dissatisfied. As for Salwa, Ibrahim, and Samir, they felt that the school service providers do a good job keeping them informed about the services and any other information related to their children's special education plan. Khalid is not the primary guardian, so most of the communication that occurred about his son's IEP was through his ex-wife. With this, effective communication appeared to play a role in building both parents' trust and collaboration with the school.

Ibrahim, Fatima, Samir, and Salwa expressed their overall satisfaction with the process of evaluation, eligibility determination, and planning and programming of the IEP services for their children. These four parents communicated that they felt fully involved in the process since its initiation. Ibrahim, Salwa, Samir, and Fatima praised the IEP team effectiveness in working collaboratively with them with regard to informing them about the results of the testing, scheduling of meeting, and seeking their consent prior to implementing any plans. From this, it appears that there is a direct connection between parental satisfaction with the quality of special education services and their feeling of being involved with the school service providers or IEP team during the evaluation and educational planning processes. This is conveyed through

parents' willingness to collaborate with the school team when they feel that their concerns are heard and that their choices are respected. Relatedly, the provision of continuous information about services appears to be a catalyst for a positive dynamic of home-school collaboration. Salwa described,

> She had an evaluation. The experience was very nice and I was satisfied. They were very organized, on time, and the evaluation was huh . . . fair. Whatever I noticed about my daughter they told me about. The same things I noticed they noticed. In Hamilton County, they are good. I am satisfied with them.

The findings of this study highlighted the importance of actively involving and continuously communicating with parents from both groups in promoting their satisfaction with services and in preserving home-school collaboration. Interestingly, a parent's feeling of gratitude appears to have a significant impact on their overall satisfaction with the quality of special education and general education services. Nevertheless, the participants from both groups provided recommendations to improve the quality of services and support that their children receive in the U.S. The recommendations included aligning IEP goals with students' actual level of performance rather than academic standards, making learning more engaging and motivating to students, schools showing more cultural sensitivity and awareness, promoting the parents' and students' sense of belonging and community, introducing vocational training as part the curriculum, and providing more monitoring of students' social and emotional well-being.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Overview of The Study

This study explored a group of 13 Muslim Arab American parents' perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, and actions regarding special education. Six of the parents were parents with children in special education and seven were parents of children not in special education.

The participants in this study were born in various countries of origin, and they go back to visit every time they can. The participants were from Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Palestine, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia. The participants were from various educational levels ranging from high school to doctoral education. Generally, most studies conducted with Muslim Arab American parents on education include more mothers than fathers. This study, however, included seven fathers and six mothers. It is important to note that Salwa, Fatima, and Naima lived sporadically in two to three Arab countries. For example, Salwa lived in the UAE and for short periods of time in Kuwait. This renders the sample in this study more reflective of the opinions and attitudes toward disability and special education in the Arab world. With regard to special education primary eligibility categories, three of the participants' children have cognitive disability (two mild and one severe). One has a child with developmental delay; one has a child with a Specific Learning Disability; and one has a child with a speech impairment. Four of the participants' children have speech impairment as a secondary eligibility area, and two receive

occupational and physical therapy as a related service. Observational notes were used not only to enrich the discussion of the findings, but also to provide an overview of the context in which this study took place. These notes were completed after each interview and used in the writing of my reflective journal.

The research questions that guided this study are as follows: What knowledge do Muslim Arab American parents have in regard to disabilities and special education in the U.S.? What are the perceptions and beliefs of Muslim Arab American parents toward special education and related services in the U.S.? How involved are Muslim Arab American parents in their children's education?

The findings of the study yielded the following thematic statements that described Muslim Arab American's beliefs regarding special education and disability as being a product of cultural values and the process of acculturation; parents' knowledge about special education is drawn from their personal experiences and the comparison of support available in the U.S. to their countries of origin; parent's perceptions and attitudes towards special education and disability were rooted in their feelings of gratitude toward the availability of help and support; parents' actions toward special education are based on their level of involvement and awareness regarding their children's education.

Culture, Religion, and Parent's Perceptions

The findings of this study yielded information that highlighted the role of culture and religion as it was reported across the participants from both groups. Concomitantly, Goforth (2011) and Haboush (2007) underscored the interplay between religion and culture in shaping Muslim Arab American parents' attitudes and perceptions toward disability and mental health. The following sections discuss the role of religious coping in relation to parents' guilt toward

disability as well as the gender role considerations when it comes to levels of parental involvement in children's education.

Religion and Acculturation

Arab Americans' acculturation is affected by multiple variables including the level of prejudice and discrimination, religion, gender, language skills, education, reasons for immigration, economic status, and family support (Al Khateeb, Al Hadid, & Al Khatib, 2015). The variables that were used to determine the participants' level of acculturation in this study were length of residency, level of religiosity, level of education, age, gender, enrollment of children in an Islamic or public school, and country of origin. The participants' length of residency in the U.S. ranged from five to 30 years.

The demographic factors (i.e., age, level of religiosity, level of education, length of residency in the U.S.) included in this study attempted to gauge the level of the participants' acculturation in relation to their perception, knowledge, and actions regarding special education. Based on the 13 interviews in this study, there was not a clear connection between factors such as length of residency in the U.S. or level of perceived religiosity and acculturation. The most significant factor that affected the participants' level of knowledge and actions regarding special education was their personal experiences with disability in their families or friends. The latter was found to have a direct role in the parents' level of acceptance and advocacy for special education services in both their home country and the U.S. Additionally, factors such as the parents' experience with their children and observation of other individuals with disabilities receiving support in the U.S. appeared to play a role in shaping their perceptions vis-à-vis career opportunities and prospects of individuals with disabilities. To illustrate, while all of the participants expressed openness to accepting special education services, contrariwise, Fetah

(male; high school education; lived in the U.S. for 17 years) communicated that he would not accept special education services out of concerns about stigma.

Religious Coping, Guilt, and Disability

Religious coping is a support mechanism that is widely used in the Arab Islamic world as it helps individuals deal with negative experiences such as trauma and mental health problems (Koenig & Al Shohaib, 2017). All of the participants in this study self-identified as moderate Muslims with the exception of Ibrahim who described himself as very religious (Ibrahim occasionally assumes the role of the imam at his local mosque). When asked about the causes of disability, the participants from both groups indicated that disability is first and foremost God's will. This finding is commensurate with the concept of locus of control (discussed in chapter two), which posits that some Muslim Arabs perceive mental health as a happenstance that is outside of their control and dictated by God (Goforth, 2011). Islam emphasizes the importance of accepting God's will and avoiding ruminating on the negative side of misfortunes such as illnesses and mental health problems in order to be given absolution. The majority of the parents of students who receive special education services mentioned that their children's disability is part of God's will. When referring to disability, Driss said, "Some people are born with it. It's just God's will." Concurrently, the importance of religious coping is also manifested in terms of the available research findings that highlighted the positive correlation between religious involvement and the decreased risk of mental health problems among Muslims (Koenig & Al Shohaib, 2017). This type of religious coping plays a multifaceted role in the respect that it provides the participants with a mechanism to appease the guilt associated with the disability of their children as well as solidifies their religious self-concept as good faith practitioners. This

affirms that besides the fact that the occurrence of the disability is accepted as God's will, it is still an experience in which the parents require emotional and spiritual support. Leila said,

> First thing is that it [disability] is God's will and second thing marriage of relatives. This is a problem that we have in the family actually. That's why we have kids with Down Syndrome. I also think genes can be a cause.

While religious coping reduces some of the dissonance and negative feelings associated with having a child with disability, some of the participants with children who receive special education services expressed feelings of guilt in relation to their children's disability. The feelings of guilt relate to the possibility that the parent might have directly or indirectly caused the disability through the passing of their genetics, marrying a relative, or a lack of effective monitoring during pregnancy. Fatima said, "From what I found, I have five other children and none of them have issues. What I found out after having my son, Karim, there is something genetic and related to heredity."

All of the parents of children in special education in this study indicated that they suspected that their child(ren) had a disability of some sort before they were tested and identified. This appears to a certain extent to play a role in buffering the parents from experiencing shock or surprise. In a different but related way, Ibrahim said that having a child with a disability was a life-changing experience for the whole family. Both Ibrahim and Fatima shared that their efforts to help their children are continuously changing, as their children grow older. Meanwhile, Khalid seemed to still struggle with his son's disability even after he started acknowledging the benefits of receiving special education services. Khalid said, "Until now, I don't know why Adam might be autistic and where this comes from. I would love to know."

Some of the struggles that were consistent across the participants pertained to wondering what happened or went wrong and caused the disability.

While participants consistently reported that they accept the disability as God's will, it appeared that they went through various feelings when their children were formally identified with a disability. The findings of this study seem to be congruent with what Donovan (2013) described in how parents go through various feelings such as shock, denial, disbelief, anger, guilt, and stress when dealing with their children's disability. The findings of this study provided an indication that different parents go through those feelings in a non-linear or ordered manner. The feeling of disbelief was manifested in questioning the over-identification of disability in the U.S. and trying to identify what went wrong during pregnancy. On the other hand, Ibrahim, Fatima, and Samir appeared to rely on religious coping at the initial stage to reduce their feelings of guilt. Furthermore, it seems that the fact that Ibrahim, Fatima, and Samir knew that their children had a disability prior to identification played a role in their acceptance of their children's disability.

Gender Roles and Parental Involvement

The findings of the current study showed that the task of attending to children's education and school activities is somewhat assigned to mothers while fathers are expected to be the providers for the family. This family dynamic is well reported in the literature about Muslim Arab families' gender-based role division and patriarchy (Al Khateeb et al., 2015; Donovan, 2013; Goforth, 2011; Haboush, 2007). Muslim Arab mothers are generally more involved than fathers (Donovan, 2013). Interestingly, the gender role expectation of taking care of children's educational needs shifted according to the reporting from the Muslim Arab American parents with a child(ren) in special education. It appeared that the experience of having a child with

disability shifted the parental role attribution to become both parents' responsibility. Muslim Arab families are collectivistic and what affects one family member affects the whole family by default (Al Khateeb et al., 2015). Fathers in this study, including Samir and Ibrahim, expressed their complete involvement in their children's educational need and support. Even Khalid, who did not have custody of his son for a certain period of time, expressed his vehement desire to be involved in his son's education. It appears that disability is a gender equalizer that enables the families' involvement and sense of responsibility to help with the children's special needs. The level of fathers' involvement also depends on the severity of the disability and the extent of the needs. To illustrate, Samir articulated, "I have attended festivals and I volunteered in some activities that help the environment. I also went to meetings with teachers for my kids . . . I also attended meetings about my daughter who has special needs."

In the group of parents without children in special education, the fathers expressed that they would have been more involved if they were able to and they attributed their inability to their work schedule and role as breadwinners. Omar's wife has a full-time job as an architect, yet she was more involved than he was. Omar explained that the reason his wife was more involved than him was due to his work schedule and that his wife is just better than him when it comes to taking care and keeping track of the children's educational needs. Omar's position seems to reveal that gender role attribution is deeply ingrained in some Muslim Arab American individuals to an extent where it shapes their perception about their ability to take care of the educational needs of their children.

Disability in Arab Countries

The participants from both groups in this study appeared to have very similar experiences and knowledge in relation to special education in their home countries. The overarching

perception that was noted across all of the participants was a general attitude of dissatisfaction with the current state of special education in Arab countries. Notably, a slight variation in the level of dissatisfaction across the participants was reported, and it appeared to be mainly related to the economic ability of each country. Parallel to the findings of Donovan (2013), all of the participants in this study kept comparing and contrasting the services available in the U.S. to their countries of origin.

Access to Services in Arab Countries

The participants from both groups spoke about the existence of special education services in their countries of origin. When describing the services in the Arab countries, the participants spoke of how limited and specialized the services were. Correspondingly, Donovan (2013) spoke of how individuals with disabilities in some Arab countries are not offered the opportunity to enroll in public schools and are forced to stay at home or attend specialized schools that segregate them based on their disability. Besides, the available services were described to typically target students with severe disabilities like cognitive disabilities, autism, and physical disabilities (deafness, blindness, orthopedic impairment). In addition, the participants described that there is a difference with regard to the increase of the identification of students with those types of disabilities as compared to when the participants were growing up in their countries of origin. Still, all of the participants agreed that progress is very minimal and unavailable for everyone. Special education services were described to be exclusively available at specialized schools and/or centers that only families with financial means can afford. Jalal said,

> Just that these schools are not public or through the government, they are all private. And if there is a government-owned school they are overcrowded and they don't accept

everyone. Like the area where I live in Jordan we have one school, only one school, and people can't afford the private school as it costs a lot.

The participants collectively agreed that access to special education services in Arab countries is more difficult than it is in the U.S. where it is a right and not a privilege. Parents in Arab countries do not automatically receive support from the government. Soumia, Nawal, Samir, and Leila, who are all from Saudi Arabia, explained that there are government-funded programs and schools that provide support to the families of children with significant disabilities. Nonetheless, access to those programs and schools is bound to the families' connections and financial influence. Interestingly, the participants emphasized that the available special education services in countries like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are actually good quality programs. From the participants' reports, it was notable that the countries' economic status dictated the quality of the services.

The Shift in Perceptions of Special Education in the Arab Culture

While the participants in this study expressed their dissatisfaction with the state of special education services in their countries of origin, they also shared that there is slight improvement with regard to the process of identification of disabilities and the allocation of some of the support in countries like Saudi Arabia. Along these lines, recent studies discussed the progress that Saudi Arabia is undergoing in the field of special education through the enactment of laws and regulations to support individuals with disabilities (Alquraini, 2011).

Many participants in the study spoke of the relationship between societal perception of disability and the promotion of special education services. There appears to be an interplay between the way society perceives disability and the amount and nature of intervention and support they allocate towards it. Accordingly, the Arab countries where the dominant perception

is attributed pity and helplessness, there is a lack or outright absence of special education services that cover the wide continuum of disability. Many Arab countries provide paid services for children with severe disabilities only. Disabilities such as ADHD and learning disabilities are still not identified and serviced as in U.S. public schools. The available services in Arab countries are usually not free or are only offered to parents who have access to knowledge and financial means, which limits the prospects of a free and appropriate education for all children with disabilities. Arab countries that have a stronger economy such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and UAE have more resources and are capable of providing more specialized services for individuals with disabilities. However, according to the results of this study, the services cover only severe disabilities such as Autism, Cognitive Disabilities, Blindness, and Deafness. Some participants mentioned that services are also provided to children with significant ADHD, but those students are usually grouped with others with more severe disabilities in the same classroom. When available, the services are provided at private centers or government-funded institutions with long wait lists, which are not capable of providing the necessary help to all children. A different aspect that was discussed in this study is the quality of services, when they are available, in countries like Saudi Arabia. The quality of services in Saudi Arabia was described by the participants as lacking rigor and consistency. Additionally, the findings of the study also showed the lack and need of quality training for special education teachers and service providers such as speech language pathologists. Relatedly, the participants called for more quality training for special education teachers in Arab countries. Furthermore, the results of this study indicated the absence of special education services in public schools in Arab countries. The concept of inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms also appears to be an area that is lacking in Arab countries. Nawal said, “Actually we are way behind

to get the special needs people help in society. Very, very behind." Gaad (2004) discussed how the attitudes and practices toward inclusion in the Arab world are chiefly driven by cultural beliefs and values. According to the participants, there is a slight shift in terms of society's perception about disability in Arab countries. The shift is mostly related to the allocation of more resources and training of special education teachers. Still, the scope only covers significant disabilities, and it is still not an officially integrated part of the educational system. The latter is due to the fact that disability in Muslim Arab countries is still associated with significant physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities; the societal attribution of pity and helplessness is still predominant in Arab countries.

Interestingly, the slight shift in perception in the Muslim Arab world could also be detected through the change in the language used to describe individuals with disabilities. Donovan (2013) discussed how in the Arabic language the terms used to describe disability were pejorative in nature (i.e., term like *mu'aq* in Arabic to mean mentally or physically disabled). During the recruitment process, a few parents from both groups in this study used the term "*mu'aq*" and also the automatic translation from English to Arabic of individuals with special needs. Prior to conducting the interviews, Driss, Fetah, Fatima, Leila, Jalal, and Ibrahim expressed that they knew that both terms *"mu'aqeen" (*plural of *mu'aq)* and individuals with special needs are being used in their countries of origin. Additionally, some of the parents that I approached to discuss the topic of my study at the site (who were not recruited), did not recognize that special education is the education for children with disabilities. Some of those individuals thought that special education meant an education that is for everyone and that is very special. Driss, Fetah, Jalal, and Naima also did not recognize the term special education at

first. However, once I explained to those parents that it is the education that provides services for children with disabilities at school, they immediately made the connection.

In sum, the findings of this study showed that special education in Arab countries is lacking inclusive practices, sufficient allocation of funding, and quality training for special education teachers (and service providers in general). Studies such as the one conducted by Anati (2012) yielded similar findings that underscored the need for training for teachers and administrators as well as the lack of inclusive practices.

Parents' Experiences With Special Education in the U.S.

Forced Choices and Repressed Identities

The findings of this study shed light on some of Muslim Arab American parents' concerns and worries in relation to their parental choices and self-concept. Parents from both groups brought up their feelings of unease when it comes to deciding whether to medicate their children. With a different perspective on the topic, Ibrahim believed that if medication would help his child better learn and function, then it is a good thing as long as it is the family's decision. Fatima, Khalid, and Driss expressed their unhappiness when they felt that the school was pushing them to medicate their children. Khalid and Driss did not see the benefit of medication and expressed their suspicion that the tendency to recommend medication hinges on the over-identification of ADHD. Driss and Khalid recounted how they themselves would have been diagnosed with ADHD if they had grown up and attended school in the U.S. Driss emphasized that schools need to put more effort into behavioral interventions to help the children who struggle with hyperactivity instead of opting to recommend medication directly or indirectly. Fatima expressed her concerns about medication's side effects, which could adversely affect the children's emotional well-being. Khalid said,

> That's what actually happened, they have to have medication to be in school. That's the reason why I got divorced . . . like he has to have medication and I am like maybe he is too young and doesn't want to go to school.

With regard to voicing opinions and choices, Salwa said that she felt that she needed to be careful about what she says and how she says it at her children's school even if it is related to their education. She described that things could be misinterpreted or perceived negatively especially given the fact that she is visibly a Muslim. Concurrently, a number of Muslim Americans have become cautious about different aspects that reflect their religious belief or identity such as outfit and names. This state of panic has yielded cautious changes in Muslim American individuals' behaviors ranging from not acknowledging one's religious and ethnic background to not wearing headscarves or shaving beards (Sue & Sue, 2016).

It is important to pay close attention to the effects of those feelings of not having the freedom to express one's opinions and needs in accordance to cultural and religious choices and beliefs. Current research highlights the association between acculturative stress, mental health difficulties, and psychological maladjustment among immigrants (Goforth, Pham, Chun, & Castro-Olivio, 2016). Acculturative stress typically emanates from the interactions of immigrants and culturally diverse individuals with the host culture and norms. Acculturative stress among Muslim Arab Americans has increased due to prejudice and discrimination following the events of 9/11 (Goforth et al., 2016). Accordingly, the findings of the current study reflected the prominence of the levels of stress that some Muslim Arab American parents feel due to the negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims. This aspect is most crucial as it plays a cardinal role in determining the quality of collaboration and partnership between parents and school and could consequently affect parents' levels of involvement. The process of

acculturation and assimilation is important for Muslim Arab American families because it is associated with lower levels of stress and feelings of disenfranchisement (Goforth et al., 2016).

Parents' Need for a Sense of Community and Belonging

The Muslim Arab culture is collectivistic in nature. Muslim Arab Americans come from collectivistic societies where family is the most important social unit (Haboush, 2007). In this sense, collectivism also extends to being part of a community where families feel welcomed and valued. Goforth et al. (2016) described the importance of schools and society's acceptance of Muslim religious values and practices in decreasing the risk of acculturative stress.

Additionally, the importance of collectivism in the Muslim Arab culture rests in the fact that it plays a social support system role when dealing with adversity in general (Sue & Sue, 2016). In light of the current socio-political context where there is a prevalence of prejudice and discrimination against Muslims, the need for a sense of community increases. The need to be part of a community also provides individuals and family with the possibility of accessing guidance in coping with problems. Many participants in this study expressed the reasons behind enrolling their children in Islamic schools. The findings align with the available research that underscores the importance of the sense of community and belonging for Muslim American parents, especially in light of the current political context (Sue & Sue, 2016). Goforth et al. (2016) spoke of the importance of social and community support that Muslim Arab families are receiving for reducing acculturative stress and increasing the families' willingness to seek out academic and psychological support.

Five of the participants brought up their ambivalence regarding whether enrolling their children at a private Islamic school is the right thing to do. The parents feel the need to have their children in an environment that uses the teachings of Islam and provides a sense of

community and support, especially in light of the current sociopolitical context that is leading to more discrimination and bullying against Muslim students (Saada, 2017). A different reason for enrolling children at a private Islamic school is the parents' concerns about the development of their children's cultural and religious identities, which parents believed could be threatened at public schools. Devout Muslims usually enroll their children in private schools to protect them from exposure to drugs, sex, and inappropriate behavior (Tiflati, 2016). The ambivalence is rooted in the fact that the parents in this study acknowledged that the quality of education and special education services in the public school are much better than in an Islamic school. Salwa shared,

> We just enrolled in the public school system, because my daughters were in the Islamic school. We enrolled and this is the second year. I thought an Islamic school was better but we had problems. I brought them here, and at the beginning it was ok. When we came we had still Arabic and there was a religious referential and Koran. In the first year it was ok, but now, especially with the activities, my 13-year-old daughter . . . this year, huh, some of the activities, I don't want her to be involved in those activities. Like she is now in the choir (at the public school). When I first came she was young and it was ok, she was 11 years old. This year she grew fast so to be honest I don't want her to be in the choir . . . the outfits . . . it was a problem."

The participants from both groups expressed significant dissonance with regard to this topic and what choice would be right for their children. What makes the choice even more difficult is that good Muslim parents would typically look for an Islamic environment that would shield their children from culturally inappropriate behavior and values. Islamic schools typically aim at preserving the religious values and beliefs through incorporating religious practices and

instruction in the school's educational programming (Tiflati, 2016). Participants in this study acknowledged that Islamic schools lack the resources to provide appropriate special education services for students with disabilities. Ibrahim communicated, "I sent her [my daughter] to the public school because of her special needs and I wanted her to receive services and I didn't want to deny services for her. I figured an Islamic school doesn't have resources, so I put her in public school." Additionally, students who enroll in public school from Islamic school run the risk of struggling to adjust to the culture of the new school in addition to being at risk of exposure to discrimination and bullying (Saada, 2017). Salwa said, "My son can't get involved. He wants to go back to the Islamic school. He doesn't like it. He can't adjust to the public school and the society (community), I mean."

Challenges to Social-Emotional Well-Being of Children With Disability

The findings of this study yielded several parental concerns about various challenges that children with disabilities struggle with including bullying, low self-esteem, social exclusion, negative self-concept, and limited life opportunities.

Stigma and Limited Life Opportunities

All of the participants reported that there is less stigma against disability in the U.S. than in their countries of origin. However, they still expressed concerns about their children's chances of having good life opportunities due to the limitation that their disabilities created and that societal expectation might impose on them. Fatima and Ibrahim expressed their worry that the educational system somehow attributes limitation to children with disabilities through the plateauing that the programming and skills teacher reaches in advanced grades. They worry that because of the assumption that there is nothing more to provide to children with disability, they do not get a true chance at reaching their true potentials. Both parents criticized the focus of the

educational system in the U.S. on standardizing and aligning the educational and vocational goals with state standards. This leads to overlooking the students' actual needs and to perpetuating the cycle of setting unrealistic goals that only look good on the IEPs but do not reflect the children's true levels of ability and performance. Fatima said, "Plans might look good, but it doesn't mean that they really achieve their goals with the kids." A different aspect that also relates to the indirect effect of stigma is the emphasis on weaknesses and strengths that are identified through standard assessments. Parents spoke of how children with disabilities might have hidden artistic or technological talents that are usually missed and not promoted due to limitations of the educational standards. Additionally, Fatima and Ibrahim vehemently emphasized the need to focus on life skills and vocational training for children with disabilities especially at the high school level. Both parents shared their concerns that the skills taught at school will not carry over to real life and make their children capable of independent living. All the parents in this study expressed the adverse effects that school and societal perceptions and expectations have on the self-esteem and self-concept of children with disabilities. Ibrahim articulated,

> I think, you know, providing other services like educational services that can grow other skills, not just math or reading. Things like extra curriculars like sewing or art or something. They need to examine the students' intellect. I noticed all these special needs kids they have a special intellect in an area that may not fall under math or reading that means chain learning.

Labeling children with disability and the lack of inclusion practices were also found to be aspects that perpetuate stigma, social exclusion, and bullying. Fetah and Omar highlighted the struggles of children in special education to feel included and part of the overall school

community due to the fact that they are labeled and considered different. Due to the adverse effects of labeling and stigma, Fetah expressed that he would categorically reject special education services if they were offered for one of his children. This perception has been echoed in the current body of research; there is ample evidence of the adverse effects that might be induced by being labeled and placed in special education. The negative impact of labeling could lead children with disability to experience bullying, stereotyping, separation (group exclusion based on the feeling of otherness), status loss, negative self-concept, stereotyping, and reduced life opportunities (Green et al., 2005; Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007; Thomson, 2012). Fetah said,

> If my child has a disability I will let them have a normal education and not put them in a different group . . . and putting kids in different group creates more problems. I would want my child to feel normal and not different.

Bullying

The findings of this study are in tandem with previous research on the topic of disability and bullying in the way that bullying can lead children with disability to be emotionally harmed by others (Thomson, 2012). Parents in this study spoke of the susceptibility of children with disability to being bullied by peers and classmates. One of the issues is that bullying is at times subtle and difficult to see when it is committed by peers who are also in special education. However, the negative effects are the same. The latter encompass low-esteem, negative self-concept, and disliking school as well as learning and could lead to social withdrawal. The findings of this study showed that bullying covers multiple dimensions. That is to say that bullying could relate to being perceived as less intelligent, as culturally different, and as belonging to a less esteemed group. Relatedly, Fatima articulated,

> I have to always observe his [her son with disability] behavior because he is not getting what the teacher is saying or maybe the kid will pick on him and he's been complaining about that. They pick on him, they think he doesn't understand what the teacher is saying. Sometimes even the kids of some of our friends who come here to the mosque, they pick on him. Like tell him, "You don't know what multiplication is."

Ibrahim and Driss both opted to move their children to different schools due to bullying. In Driss' case, the bullying stemmed from the negative treatment that his children received due to a perceived lack of status. In Ibrahim's case, the bullying related to the shaming and teasing of his daughter due to her disability.

Importance of Meaningful Relationships Between Parents and Special Education Service Providers

All of the participants in the group of parents with children in special education underscored the importance of having a good relationship with both the general education and the special education service providers (i.e., special education teacher, speech language pathologist). The importance of this relationship is also amplified due to the fact that these parents reported their extensive involvement in their children's education. They emphasized the crucial role that the communication process plays in the collaboration and cooperation between them and the teachers. While parents from both groups articulated their satisfaction with the communication process with the general education teachers, parents with children in special education put more importance on their relationship with the special education service provider (i.e., special education teacher, speech language pathologist). Parents from this group expressed that they value the services that the special education teachers provide to their children. The importance of the relationship also hinges on the fact that the parents want to be constantly

informed and be part of the educational support system. When the parents felt that the quality and clarity of communication was lagging, they started to question the services. Nawal said,

> I have no idea [about the services], but when I asked my son he said just that they are playing with words like scramble game like they rearrange the word and pronounce it. It's just like a game with other students who have the same problem. I don't know. I just heard about the process from my eight-year-old son.

All of the parents of children in special education reported their satisfaction with the progress that their children made thanks to special education. However, some parents with children in special education reported concerns related to the difference between the intensity and even quality of services provided in the early grades as compared to later grades where it appeared to them that the services reach a plateau. Both Fatima and Nawal expressed their desire to have a two-sided communication process with the special education providers. They shared that the initiating and continuity of the communications should be mutual as the goal is to make sure the child is learning and progressing toward the IEP goals.

The Role of Special Education in Promoting Parental Awareness and Knowledge About Disability

All of the parents of children in special education reported that their level of knowledge and awareness about disability changed gradually and incrementally. Donovan's (2013) findings showed that the participants expressed a lack of knowledge about special education prior to their children's identification. The majority of participants from the group of parents without children in special education in this study lacked knowledge about special education in general, while three out of the seven parents had some background knowledge due to the fact that they worked in the field of education. Even Fatima and Ibrahim, who are both educators and had some

experience with special education, expressed that their level of understanding and awareness about what it meant to have a child with disability is much higher today than it was before the identification. All of the participants expressed that their perception about disability changed through their exposure to the procedures of evaluation, eligibility, and continuous services programming and provision. This could also be due to the participants' level of acculturation and adaptation to American norms related to education in general and special education in particular. With regard to the process of acculturation, Arab Americans generally assimilate quickly to the host culture due to the fact that the majority of Arab Americans are educated and experience economic prosperity (Sue & Sue, 2016).

The participants agreed that if their children were living in their countries of origin, they would not be getting any support or help. The participants shared that they are grateful to the fact that support in the U.S. is a right and not a privilege like is the case in their countries of origin. Samir said that he did not know anything about special education or how to help his daughter when they lived in Saudi Arabia. All of the participants articulated that they have become increasingly more familiar with IEPs and with their rights to request needed services, approve educational plans, and the way their children's disabilities adversely affect their learning and school performance. Participants from both groups agreed that part of the lack of awareness about disability in their countries of origin is the attribution of helplessness due to the lack of support. They related the societal perception of disability to the availability of resources and prospect of educational, professional, and personal success. The participants spoke of how society in the U.S. encourages individuals with disability to get educated, work, and use their strengths to become productive members of society. This educated outlook toward disability

stems from the societal view of equity toward individuals with disability as opposed to the attribution of pity and helplessness that permeates Arab countries.

The participants expressed that they have now become advocates for their children as they have learned that all children can learn and progress at their own level and pace. Along these lines, Fatima, Khalid, and Ibrahim highlighted the need to match educational planning to the levels and strengths of the children with disability. Ibrahim and Fatima shared that they worry that there is more emphasis on aligning IEPs with educational standards rather than with their children's levels of performance. They also communicated the need to put more importance into identifying the students' strengths and promoting them as opposed to expecting them to somehow fit into society in their own way. The participants emphasized the importance of early identification in supporting academic growth of children with disability. Salwa, Ibrahim, Fatima, and Samir attributed the progress that their children achieved in their adaptive living, social, and academic skills to the fact that they were identified at an early age. They also articulated that they had to keep their expectations realistic due to severity of their children's disabilities.

The Pre-Referral Process

Parents from both groups expressed their satisfaction with the overall educational services available in the U.S. This included English as a Second Language services (mainly for the children born abroad), academic and behavioral interventions in the general education classroom, and communication by the school in relation to attendance and school performance. With regard to the evaluation for the special education pre-referral process, Ibrahim requested testing following the family physician's recommendation. Nawal said that her son's teacher initiated the request for the evaluation as she was worried about her son's articulation. Salwa's

daughter was evaluated and identified through the early childhood First Steps program. Samir's daughter was immediately referred by the school for an evaluation due to the visibility and significance of her disability and needs in Tennessee. Fatima discussed her concerns about her son with the preschool program to conduct the evaluation. Fatima said that she knew something was different about her son, and that he was slow at processing. As for Khalid, he described the experience as being out of his control. Khalid was opposed to the testing of his son, but his wife was in agreement with the school's opinion. Khalid expressed his surprise and unhappiness that the school proposed testing and suggested the use of medication. All of the participants with the exception of Khalid either initiated the request for their child's evaluation or agreed and collaborated with the school's proposal for an evaluation. None of the participants' children went through a multi-tiered support system for reading, mathematics, or writing, prior to their referral due to the fact that they were identified at an early age and also that the type of the suspected disabilities was significant. It appears that the participants in this study had a relationship based on trust and collaboration with their schools. Ibrahim, Samir, Fatima, and Salwa expressed their satisfaction with the responsiveness of the school to conduct the evaluations and the effectiveness of the communication throughout the process. Fatima expressed some reservation with regard to the length of the evaluation process, but she said that it was worth the wait as her son was going to receive the help he needed.

Frame of Reference for Working With Muslim Arab American Parents

It is very important for school psychologists and educators in general to have a practical framework to help them know the best approach to working with parents from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The following are guidelines meant to provide some guidance to school psychologists and educators about specific aspects to consider while working with

Muslim Arab American parents. Some of these guidelines could also be used as reference (when appropriate and when culture-specific differences are considered) when working with parents from other culturally and linguistically diverse groups. The following bullet points are a byproduct of the analysis and findings of this study as well as the sum of the available research that tackled the topic of working with Muslim Arab American parents (Donovan, 2013; Goforth et al., 2016). The recommendations provided below are the product of the findings of this study as well as the previous studies conducted on the topic of special education and working with Muslim Arab American parents (Donovan, 2013; Goforth, 2011; Goforth et al., 2016; Haboush, 2007). The following framework is aimed at empowering parental involvement and collaboration between the schools and the parents.

Cultural Competence and Sensitivity

As the findings of the current study indicated, some Muslim Arab American parents strive and emphasize the importance of feeling that they are accepted and part of their school community. Many Muslim Arab parents know that the quality of education at the public schools is mostly better than at private schools, but the importance of the sense of belonging and acceptance of their cultural heritage makes them at time choose to enroll their children at Islamic private schools. Accordingly, it is crucial for public schools to provide an environment that promotes and encourages multiculturalism and diversity. Perhaps public schools should designate diversity celebration days throughout the school year that accentuate and bring to light the specific sub-cultures that make up the fabric of their students' demographics. Additionally, public schools could consider having out-reach programs that have a goal of making sure that students and parents from culturally diverse groups feel accepted and part of the school community.

Importance of Privacy

The findings of this study indicated that privacy is very important to Muslim American parents with children who receive special education services. The stressing of privacy was found to be connected to the feelings of shame and avoidance of the attribution of pity. Ibrahim, Naima, and Fatima discussed how many Muslim Arab American parents opt to hide their children's disability out of shame and avoidance of attributed pity. Nawal said, "We still have people hide their children because they don't want to be judged and get others' pity. They don't want that." In this case, it appears that shame and attributed pity could play a role in the fear of loss of status by the parents as well. Goforth (2011) discussed the importance of keeping all information related to disability private when working with Arab Americans as it is directly connected to the family's preservation of honor. When I was recruiting participants, many asked if their names were going to be cited in the study, whereas others asserted that they just did not want to discuss the disability of their child because is it strongly perceived as their personal life matter. Fatima's husband shared with me that he spoke with a couple of parents of children with disability who were interested in the study but did not feel comfortable discussing their experiences out of worry that somehow they would be identified. These findings echo Donovan's (2013) experience in relation to Muslim Arab American parents' emphasis on confidentiality when it comes to their children's disability.

Timely and Proactive Communication

Fatima, Khalid, and Nawal expressed how important it is for them as parents of children with disability to be kept informed about their children's educational progress and planning. The participants in this study underscored the need for two-way communication that is interactive and proactive as opposed to only reactive. With this, it appears that one of the key aspects to

guaranteeing the satisfaction of Muslim Arab American parents is that educators make sure to keep communicating with parents on a regular basis. In reference to her dissatisfaction with the flow of communication, Fatima stated, "I was informed, yes, but communication-wise not at the level like I wanted it to be. I usually see them at the conferences. If I need to know something I call them. There isn't much communication."

The Need for Educating Parents About Special Education

Participants in this study highlighted the need to educate Muslim Arab American parents of children with disabilities about special education in the U.S. Part of the reason some Muslim Arab parents opt to hide their children's disability is the fear of the negative perception that exists in their countries of origin. These parents need to realize that disability is perceived differently in the U.S., and that supporting children and individuals with disability is a right, not a privilege. Al Khateeb et al. (2015) discussed the devastating impact that having a child with a disability can have on Muslim Arab families due to the prominence of the traditional perception that they have from their countries of origin. The findings of this study indicated the need for training and education about laws and rights of children with disabilities. The findings also highlighted the importance of working with Muslim Arab American parents to help them shift the negative perceptions about disability. Nawal said, "We still have people who believe they [children with disability] are hopeless, and that they will just be until they die. There is no awareness about that especially with older people because we have older people who still have children."

School Personnel Reflecting Diversity

As part of the need of schools to embrace cultural diversity through proactive actions, it is recommended that schools make sure to hire and involve individuals from various cultural

backgrounds and culturally competent service providers. This runs parallel with Muslim Arab American parents' need to feel accepted and belong to the school community. Along these lines, Goforth (2011) called for the inclusion of cultural consultants during the assessment and also during the provision of services to the children of Arab American parents. The cultural consultants could be religious leaders or highly respected people in the Muslim Arab American community who would assist the school to implement culturally competent practices.

Linguistic Considerations When Working With Muslim Arab Americans

While reviewing the literature on Muslims and Arabs' experiences and perceptions regarding special education, this author noted that most research used English as the main language during data collection. Conveniently, most of the participants in those studies were college educated and many were born in the U.S. (Donovan, 2013). The nature of the recruitment process in the current study resulted in a sample covering several educational levels and English fluency levels, and while English fluency was a selection criterion, participants were also allowed to switch to Arabic if needed. Interestingly, some participants would switch to Arabic when they were trying to explain an emotionally meaningful experience. The tendency to code switch from one language to another during conversation seems to also be linked to the fact that the topic of discussion triggered strong emotions that could only be conveyed through the use of the participants' mother tongue. Some of the participants exerted effort trying to find the translation of some concepts or feelings that might interfere with me getting the essence of what they were trying to say. When that occurred in more than one instance, participants were encouraged to use any language that they would feel more comfortable speaking. This made me realize that English fluency does not equate to being able to express fully one's deep thoughts and feelings.

Practical Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the literature review, the following are additional recommendations to provide school psychologists and educators a frame of reference with regard to aspects to consider while working with Muslim Arab American parents:

- Build a relationship based on trust through maintaining effective communication with Muslim Arab American parents about their children's overall school functioning
- Learn about the parents' religious and cultural norms and values (through research and also through seeking information from parents)
- Encourage Muslim Arab American parents' school and community engagement activities (i.e., through outreach programs)
- Empower Muslim Arab American parents' sense of belonging to the school community through including persons from similar cultural and religious background.
- Be mindful of the effects of gratitude on limiting parents' expression of opinions and needs
- Be mindful of the communication styles related to cultural and religious considerations
- Encourage Muslim Arab American parents and students' involvement and cultural expression at school
- Make school's climate and environment reflective of acceptance of cultural diversity (i.e., use of banners and posters; social media; school website)
- Encourage school-wide culturally diverse activities and events
- Guarantee privacy and confidentiality of Muslim Arab parents with regard to their child(ren)'s disability

- Provide parents with information about support groups to help them cope with the emotional reaction to their children's disability as well as provide them with resources.
- Disclose and talk about disabilities with sensitivity (i.e., meeting alone with parents prior to meeting with the school team). Empathize and, as possible, provide support and community resources to help parents cope with their feelings (Donovan, 2013)
- Validate and recognize parents' feelings of grief and distress following the identification of their child(ren)
- Explicitly explain to Muslim Arab American parents their educational rights in their dominant language (use an interpreter when deemed needed)
- Respect parents' choices and beliefs regarding eligibility and medicating their child(ren); offer informative materials without pressuring the parents to accept the school's proposal
- Be mindful of being genuine and realistic when discussing strengths and weaknesses of children with disabilities; also, set educational goals based on students' levels of ability
- Invest and promote strengths in children with disabilities regardless of the significance of their impairment

Limitations

This study had five main limitations. The first limitation is related to the number of participants. While I only had 13 participants, this study did not represent all the demographic and ethnic variability that Muslim Arab American parents represent. While participants were from at least six Muslim Arab countries, as observed previously, there are 22 Muslim Arab countries in the world.

Recruitment Process

The second limitation pertained to the recruitment process. It is important for future researchers to consider the cultural and political stressors that Muslims Arabs are facing as they attempt to recruit. My recruitment experience was marked by the realization that the prevalent sentiment of hostility toward Muslims has led to an increase in caution and anxiety among the population (Sue & Sue, 2016). The implication of this heightened level of alertness and anxiety is that many of the Muslim Arab Americans that I approached at the recruitment site felt uncomfortable participating in a study in general even if it is about special education. It appeared to me that the mere fact that the participants were being asked to express their opinions and answer questions related to their experience with the education of their children caused them some anxiety. Some participants asked me why I was targeting Muslims in my study given the current social-political climate. On many occasions, I had to explain the reasoning behind choosing Muslim Arab American parents given my own background and given the fact that there is a scarcity of research on this population. Some individuals felt inclined to accept to participate at the site, perhaps out of a feeling of religious and moral obligation, but they would later on communicate that they were not interested or comfortable to participate. These participants seemed to feel more comfortable declining participation via phone than in person. Although my cultural background and mastery of Arabic helped me make initial contacts, it was evident that, a feeling of unease and worry permeated the overall situation in addition to the fact that having a child with disability itself triggered hesitation. I think that some of those I talked to may have thought that I was an informant for some government agency collecting information about Muslims' religious practices. In fact, I was told by many workers at the recruitment sites that people who I spoke with were asking them who I was and if what I told them was true.

After spending a couple of months going to the recruitment sites and having difficulty recruiting Muslim Arab American parents with children who receive special education services, I started relying on referrals from the parents that I had previously interviewed. The participants who were part of the study knew the challenges posed by the nature of the topic as well as the overall cautions from the Muslim Arab population and made a goal to help with the recruitment process.

Given the current circumstances, it could be very helpful for researchers to use key community individuals or religious leaders to help recruit Muslim Arab American individuals from different ages, occupations, educational levels, and backgrounds. A different option could be to rely on recruiting college-educated students, but in this case it would have limited the scope of the study and skewed the representation of the population.

Gender Considerations

The third limitation is related to the recruitment of participants of different genders. If I were the same gender, it is very likely that female interviewees would have been more comfortable during the interviews. Before conducting the interviews with the female participants, I offered and asked if they wanted me to contact their husbands to obtain their approval as this might be expected by some devout Muslims; none of them felt that they needed their husbands' approval. One of the things that helped remediate the gender considerations is that the location of the interview was mutually chosen and that I was very careful to show respect through my verbal and nonverbal communication with the female participants. Still, four out of the six female participants made sure to have either their husbands or some of their children nearby during the interviews.

Surprisingly, being a male researcher did not prove to be as big a barrier as anticipated when recruiting and working with Muslim Arab women. Having a clear purpose for the interaction, and being aware and sensitive to the particular gender considerations associated with Muslim Arabs, made the process less difficult. My background and interpersonal skills also helped. When approaching Muslim Arab mothers at the recruitment sites, I made sure that they were not alone but were with their husbands or with their children; when the mothers were with their husbands, I made sure to approach them as a group and include their husbands in the conversations. When the family appeared conservative, I made sure to ask the husbands' permission to speak first. The recruitment of college student mothers was done more freely as they are more likely to interact with men at school; however, I still offered to speak to their husbands before we had the interview. Similarly, Al-Krenawi and Graham (2000) discussed the importance of keeping some gender boundaries when working with female Muslim Arabs students. The researchers suggested maintaining minimal eye contact, appropriate physical proximity, and involving the family in the process (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000).

Interestingly, two of the mothers that I interviewed requested to bring some of their children with them, which was not an issue and did not interfere with the interview as the children were in a nearby area. I am not sure if the request was made because of the gender difference or just out of convenience. Another mother had her husband in the room next to the office where the interview was conducted. The college-educated mothers did not express any reservations regarding having the one-on-one interview with me and the interview locations were mutually agreed upon.

Interview Protocol

The fourth limitation is related to the interview protocol and the length of the interviews. My concern was that the questions included in the protocol would not allow me to capture thoroughly the participants' lived experiences and adequately address the essence of what I was intending to explore. What added to the redundancy is that most participants provided responses that went beyond the scope of the specific questions and ended up discussing things that were planned as coming later in the interview. With regard to the length of the interviews, I think that the manner by which the interview was conducted could have been a limitation to this study. I conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants and follow-up phone calls to confirm and validate some of the answers that were ambiguous or needed clarification. However, it would have been more beneficial to have two different interviews instead of only one. This would have allowed a better rapport building with the participants without the sense of urgency that was often experienced as we tried to cover a lot of ground in one interview. It would have also decreased the linguistic pressure that some participants may have felt when they were formulating their thoughts and opinions about their experiences and knowledge. From a different perspective, scheduling a second interview would have increased the challenge for some due to life and work obligations.

The Culture of Participating in Research

The final limitation relates to the culture of research. Throughout the recruitment process, multiple regular site-goers felt the need to provide me with some recommendations to make the study more appealing and more interesting as it was very likely going to be challenging to find participants, especially from the group of parents of children who receive special education services. These individuals' attempts came out of their willingness to help and out of

care. The given recommendations ranged from providing incentives such as gift cards, money, complete the interviews on the spot (as opposed to scheduling a time and place for the interview), to involving an influential community leader who would motivate people to participate in my study. When asked about their rationale behind it, they articulated the following ideas:

- People would not want to commit because it would require them to change their plans/schedules
- People with children with disabilities put more importance on hiding the disability
- There needs to be an incentive (something in exchange) to motivate people to participate because enriching the literature is not that appealing
- The lack of interest in the culture of research
- People are not comfortable having their opinions put in a study that would become public (in relation to the social and political context)

I do not believe that providing a monetary incentive would have made a difference with this group of parents as what made the recruitment challenging was partly the fear of status loss, stigma, and anxiety about expressing views in the current social and political climate; monetary incentives were unlikely to override their concerns. On the other hand, the snowball sampling and referral effect were very effective in recruiting parents from this group. It appeared that the fact that someone they knew was willing to participate in a study made them feel less in the spotlight.

Interestingly, many individuals who participated in my study did it out of interest and out of a moral need to help a fellow Arab Muslim complete his doctorate. Of the many persons approached for participation, some were too anxious to take part in any studies; some wanted to

confirm my identity and the purpose of my study with someone they knew; some who felt a moral inclination to help me in any way they could; some wanted their voices to be heard, and some did not want to be involved due to worry about stigma and loss of status. Some of the participants in the study did not feel comfortable signing the consent form with their real name out of worry of backlash related to sharing their opinions. Once I explained in detail to them the process and how it worked, they felt more comfortable.

Given the information discussed in this section, it is very important to be sensitive to the cultural and social considerations relating to Muslim Arab Americans. Some of the main variables that could play a role in motivating Muslim Arab Americans to participate in studies are level of education, trust, not feeling targeted by the topic of the study, and using the snowball sampling method as much as possible.

Researcher-as-Instrument

I am a 35-year-old Muslim Arab male who is pursuing a doctoral degree in school psychology. I am an immigrant from a North African country where Islam is the main religion. As a result of my cultural assimilation into the U.S., I was able to observe the shift in my perceptions and attitudes toward several topics, especially special education and disability. As a result, this sparked a desire in me to explore if individuals who share a similar background go through the same process of changing their perceptions and attitudes. In addition, my background as a school psychologist kindled my desire to know how perceptions and beliefs shape the attitudes of Muslim Arab American parents toward the special education system and their children's education in the U.S. Accordingly, choosing to explore this topic made me aware of some potential preconceptions that I needed to be mindful of as I conducted this study.

The first concern that I needed to be continually aware of relates to my humanistic orientation, which is the idea that individuals have an inborn need to reach their full potentials and know their unique needs. Each individual has a unique interpretation of experience, and it should be respected as such. Regarding this, I was concerned that I may not fully grasp the participants' unique lived experience as actually perceived by them.

The second concern was related to my potential biases and expectations of this study based on the fact that my background is similar to that of the participants. Being born and raised as a Muslim Arab myself, I have many values, beliefs, and knowledge of the Arab and Muslim culture. This could have had both a positive and a negative influence. I needed to make sure that I was aware of how my background could have affected my understanding and interpretation of the participants' stories. With regard to this concern, it was unavoidable to be affected by the feelings of anxiety that permeated my interaction with individuals at the recruitment sites as well as during some of the interviews. At the beginning of the study, I did not pay too much attention to the sociopolitical context and its negative impact on Muslim Arab Americans in general. Throughout my visits to the sites and my interactions with individuals who were very cautious and alarmed to be approached by a stranger who wanted to ask them about their opinions and experiences even about such a neutral topic as special education. At the beginning of the study, I found the overall atmosphere at the sites interesting, as I generally like challenges that lead to great research. However, the more I got exposed to individuals who were questioning the reasons behind me approaching them to see if they would be willing to participate in the study, the more I started to hesitate and feel uncomfortable. Things got even more emotionally challenging to me after I was harassed by an individual, who expressed interest in participating in my study via text messages while I was trying to reach him to schedule an interview. The

most significant realization to me was to become cognizant that I started to get affected by the state of unease and profound caution that I felt at the recruitment sites. One time, I was standing outside of one of the recruitment sites and saw an individual in his truck driving by. He had the confederate flag and a small banner that read "I am an armed infidel," and I feared for my safety. I started to be gradually more and more uneasy and cautious every time I visited the sites. At the end of some of the interviews, I noticed that when I asked some of the participants about whether they had any other comments to add, they would ask to speak without being recorded and talk about how things have changed and that they really wished that things would go back to normal (in reference to the overall socio-political atmosphere of hostility against Muslims). At times, I did not know what to do with the information but I empathized with the participants and expressed that I understood. It was very helpful that the participants felt, to some degree, that I could empathize with how they felt given the shared background.

My third concern was in regard to a hidden assumption of my role as a researcher in which I found myself facing a dilemma. I feared that in the researcher role, I might have been perceived as an authority figure, which might have affected my relationship with the participants. Specifically, I am concerned that such a hierarchy could have resulted in the participants changing their answers based on what they think I want to hear or their desire to be validated by the researcher (Slife & Williams, 1995). Finally, as perceptions and attitudes shape individuals' actions, the current study explored the extent to which the religious, cultural, and social background of Muslim Arab American parents affected their knowledge, attitudes, and actions regarding special education in the U.S. Relatedly, I postulated that my study could reveal that Muslim Arab American parents share traditional Arab perceptions toward disabilities and therefore refuse or avoid the special education system and services. I also postulated that the

level of cultural assimilation would impact Muslim Arab American parents' perceptions, assuming that a higher level of assimilation would be associated with a higher level of engagement and openness toward accepting special education services in the U.S.

Summary and Implications of the Study

The findings of this study shed light on several aspects pertaining to Muslim Arab American parents' perceptions, knowledge, and actions regarding special education. Results discussed by Donovan (2013) and Goforth et al. (2016) are consistent with the findings of this study with regard to the role of culture and religion in shaping some of the perceptions and attitudes of the Muslim Arab American parents toward disability. Religious coping and locus of control (unconditional acceptance God's will for disability) were present among all of the participants regardless of their level of acculturation, religiosity, education, or occupation. With regard to knowledge, the findings of this study showed that knowledge relates and correlates with personal experiences with disability (i.e., as in the case of having a family member with disability or knowing of someone with disability). Additionally, the amplitude of knowledge about special education was found to have an incremental progression among Muslim Arab American parents following their children's identification. All of the participants who had child(ren) with disability had a favorable view of special education services as it provides the help that their children need to learn and progress. Nevertheless, some reservations were expressed as to whether being labeled as a child in special education could have adverse effects on their social-emotional well-being including self-esteem, self-concept, social inclusion, potentially affecting their life opportunities. Muslim Arab American parents in this study expressed (with the exception of Fetah) their willingness to accept special education services when they are deemed needed by the school. This openness and favorable attitude hinged on the

trust and gratitude that the participants feel toward having special education services as a right as opposed to being a privilege as it is the case in their countries of origin.

It was shown through this study that home-school collaboration plays a cardinal role when it comes to parental satisfaction with special education services in particular and with services in general. Home-school collaboration was also found to relate and increase the level of parental involvement. In such a way, public schools should attempt to provide a cultural and a social climate that is welcoming to Muslim Arab American parents. This includes being culturally competent and acknowledging the linguistic and cultural variations among Muslim Arab Americans (Sue & Sue, 2016).

More importantly, participants from both groups in this study provided some recommendation to improve the quality of services and education for their children. These recommendations included: (a) aligning IEP goals with students' actual level of performance rather than academic standards, (b) making learning more engaging and motivating to students, (c) schools showing more cultural sensitivity and awareness, (d) promoting the parents' and students' sense of belonging and community, (e) introducing vocational training as part of the curriculum, (f) and providing more monitoring of students' social and emotional well-being.

Correspondingly, this study also revealed several considerations that educators need to keep in mind when working with Muslim Arab American parents. These considerations ranged from the need that Muslim Arab American parents have for a sense of belonging and community at schools, the prevalence of feelings of repression of opinions and cultural identities due to the current negative perception about Islam and Muslims, the need of parent education about disability, the significance of early identification and inclusion, the need for prevention of social-emotional struggles of children with disabilities (in relation to bullying, stigma, and limited life

opportunities), the importance of an effective and proactive communication, the parents' need for a meaningful relationship with special education services providers, to the need of schools to be aware of the importance of discretion (privacy and confidentiality) and cultural sensitivity when it comes to children's disability.

Muslim Arab American parents become strong advocates for their children and for other children from similar backgrounds. Donovan (2013) spoke of how the parents in her study reported attempting to change other parents' attitudes toward disability and special education. This study's findings indicated similar results where some parents of students in special education reported that they try to explain to other Muslim Arab American parents that the perception of disability and the support that exists in the U.S. are different from what is prevalent in their countries of origin.

Muslim Arab American parents with children in special education experience various feelings ranging from shock and anger to guilt and disbelief (Donovan, 2013). The feelings of guilt never dissipate following the acceptance of disability, but the parents learn how to manage them through religious coping, advocacy, and through being more involved in their children's educational journey. Donovan (2013) reached a similar conclusion with regard to Muslim Arab American parents' advocacy toward their children's educational needs. This advocacy encompasses the call to emphasize strengths while acknowledging the weaknesses and monitoring the implementation as well as the quality of their child(ren)'s IEP. This study was marked by the participants' reflection on their experiences and quality of life in their countries of origin and to compare it to what is available for them as parents and for their children. This was observed across both groups of parents in this study. Relatedly, the feeling of gratitude and the restrained communication style renders the parent very cautious about expressing negative views

of dissatisfaction with the special education services in the U.S. The parents from both groups vehemently and repetitively articulated that they are thankful for the support and services that their children receive in the U.S. This sentiment of gratitude is rooted in the thought that the participants know if their children were in their countries of origin they would not have access to any help, and their future life opportunities would have been stifled.

Future research could attempt to tackle the topic of cultural identity development challenges among Muslim Arab American students, the process of pre-referral for an initial evaluation for special education, and the stigma toward Muslim Arab American parents and its effects on their feeling of freedom of expression. Additionally, the body of knowledge on this topic would benefit from more research that would examine the relationship between Muslim Arab American parents' feelings of gratitude for having a better quality of life (including school services) in the U.S. and its effect on their reported versus actual expressed satisfaction.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A. Background information

1. Age
2. Educational level
3. Marital status
4. What is your country of origin?
5. Do you consider yourself a religious person?
6. How religious or spiritual do you consider yourself?
7. Were you born in the U.S.? If no, under what circumstances did you come to the U.S.?
8. How long have you been living in the U.S.?
9. How many child(ren) do you have?
10. How old is/are your child(ren)?
11. In what grade(s) are your child(ren)?
12. Has your child(ren) ever struggled at school? If yes, what type of struggles?
13. Has your child(ren) ever received any school services (i.e., English Language Learners support, Interventions, etc..)?
14. Have any of your child(ren) ever been tested (evaluated) for placement in special education ?
15. Is your child(ren) currently receiving special education services? (if yes, use questions for parents with child(ren) in special education placement).

16. Have you ever attended or participated in any activities or events at your child(ren) school ? If so, what type of activities, and how frequently?

17. How often does your child(ren) school contact you or communicate with you? If yes, how do they communicate and about what topic?

B. Parent's knowledge regarding special education

18. Please, tell me what you know about special education in the U.S.?

19. When did you first hear or learn about special education?

20. Do you know the different types of disabilities students may have in order to qualify for special education services? If yes, tell me what they are.

21. Tell me about special education in your country of origin.

22. How are the needs of children with disabilities addressed at schools in your country of origin?

C. Perceptions and beliefs regarding disabilities and special education

23. In your opinion, what causes disabilities?

24. What do you believe are the common struggles for children with disabilities?

25. What do you think about special education? How can it help students with special needs?

26. What are the benefits of having special education services at schools? What are the difficulties associated with receiving special education services?

27. What do you think about the way special education services are implemented in the U.S.?

28. What do you think about the way special education services are implemented in your country of origin?

29. Do you think special education provides students with special needs with the support they need?