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# Shifting Perspectives On Intimate Partner Violence? Perceptions Of 2nd Generation Arab American Women

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**SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES ON INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE?  
PERCEPTIONS OF 2<sup>ND</sup> GENERATION ARAB AMERICAN WOMEN**

by

**SALAM ABOULHASSAN**

**THESIS**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

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MAJOR: SOCIOLOGY

Approved By:

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Advisor

Date

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To my graduate advisor, Dr. Krista Brumley, I want to say thank you. Planning for this study started on my first day of my first semester of graduate school when you emailed your students to submit an abstract due the first day of class. I panicked, wondering what I had gotten myself into, wrote an abstract, picking a topic that I had always been passionate about and a few weeks later, you took me on as one of your students. My first two years of graduate school would not have been the same without your guidance. I would also like to thank Dr. Heather Dillaway and Dr. David Merolla for giving their time to review my work and serve on my committee.

To my family and friends, who heard me say “I’m working on my paper” more times than anyone should hear in their lifetime, I say I’m sorry and thank you for putting up with it.

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On May 6, 2015, a domestic dispute within the Arab American community in Dearborn, Michigan left a young woman and her husband dead of an apparent murder-suicide, stunning a community and influencing the direction of my interviews for this study, as participants continuously spoke about the victim and her children. I pay my dearest respects to this young woman, for she remained on my mind throughout the remainder of my research and became a driving force in its completion.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*Honestly, I feel like in every (Arab) family, the woman carries so much more of the burden of the entire family than the man ever will...in every way...it's always about the woman. We carry the burden of the culture. ~Manal*

The National Violence against Women Survey reports that 4.8 million incidents of violence against women occur every year in the U.S. These incidents include physical and sexual assaults perpetuated by men who are closely connected to the victim (Harding and Helweg-Larsen 2009). Intimate partner violence is the main form of violence against women, with 64 percent of victims reporting rape or physical assault by a husband, boyfriend, or cohabitating partner (Tjaden and Theonnes 2000). Individual representations of intimate partner violence have opened the public's eyes to the severity of intimate partner abuse and advocates in the U.S. have been successful in campaigning for victims, leading to mandatory arrest legislation and specialized intimate partner violence courts. These initiatives have led to new methods in the processing of intimate partner violence cases. Specialized courts have effectively dealt with intimate partner violence by holding abusers' accountable, challenging patriarchal systems, and negating the responsibility of women for the actions of her abuser (Mirchandani 2006).

Although the U.S. is diverse, a dominant cultural narrative exists with reference to language, values, and norms that women and men are expected to adhere to. Cultural narratives are descriptions of experiences influenced by the dominant culture, religion, and national ideologies. The cultural narrative of women in the U.S. suggests that women are more independent, are able to choose who they marry, and have greater access to education and employment opportunities. In addition, the history of activism and women's rights group have paved the way for women to stand on new platforms and be heard while critically addressing gender issues, including intimate partner violence.

In the Arab world, statistics on intimate partner violence have been scarce, but national surveys and recent research provide an overview of the social issue: More than 50% of Palestinian women surveyed reported abuse by their spouse in a 12 month period and 1 in 3 Egyptian women surveyed reported abuse by their spouse during marriage. In some Arab countries, specific penal codes define rape as forcible sex with someone other than a spouse, ignoring spousal rape as a crime against women (Obeid, Chang, and Ginges 2010). Cultural narratives in the Arab world are framed by rigid gender roles that have historically restricted women to the roles of housewife and mother as they aim to maintain their family's reputation and honor through self-sacrifice and obedience (Obeid, Chang, and Ginges 2010). Arab women's narratives are influenced by these forms of gender inequities. IPV is framed as a personal problem, compounded by the fact that the family unit is a sacred social institution that is private and protective, highlighting why IPV is given little attention (Douki et. al. 2003, Obeid, Chang, and Ginges 2010). Patriarchal structures are deeply interwoven into the fabric of Arabic culture, within the household and other social institutions. Feminist literature suggests that these patriarchal structures have been the main source of women's oppression. IPV is a coercive side effect of such patriarchal structures. The patriarchal system, a conservative culture that emphasizes a tight knit society and advocates for sexual segregation, and the social institution of families provide conditions that justify intimate partner abuse when women fail to comply with gendered expectations (Dabbagh 2012, Obeid, Chang, and Ginges 2010).

Arab women in the U.S. are more likely to join the workforce and pursue higher levels of education than their counterparts living in the Arab World. Forms of assimilation may occur as the women are surrounded by a culture that stresses independence, two income families, and less rigid gender roles. However, many immigrant women live within two cultural narratives,

complicating their perceptions on intimate partner violence. Manal's quote at the beginning of this study illustrates how ethnicity and culture play a more prominent role than gender in the shaping of social and cultural identities of Arab American women. Whereas Arab American women experience new cultural norms, research has shown that when multiple identities compete, ethnicity and race tend to trump gender interests, especially among minority women. Loyalties to ethnic and racial groups are reinforced when facing marginalized identities in larger societies (Marshall and Read 2003). When considering intimate partner violence, Arab and Arab American women are facing internalized cultural wars that create discord as they attempt to challenge intimate partner violence from a gender standpoint while invoking traditional cultural systems that may be the underlying causes of spousal abuse among Arab women. The perception of intimate partner violence among Arab American women is a considerable case worthy of discussion when accounting for multiple self-identities and cross cultural narratives.

Arab women, as immigrants, face cultural predispositions that put them at high risk of violence, exposing them to similar situations found in the Arab World. Migration can be a stressful experience and can lead to depression, social isolation, identity confusion and anxiety (Amer and Hovey 2007). Arab American women may confront contradicting cultural narratives as they experience forms of acculturation in U.S. society. Loyalties to ethnic or religious identities may influence how these women address intimate partner violence, using common Arab narratives, regardless of access to new outlets that allow them to confront gender inequities. Women may also frame intimate partner violence using the dominant culture to form a new identity that is based on social location and norms and their marginalized presence within it, offering new accounts of intimate partner violence that differ from women in the Arab world.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how Arab American women perceive intimate partner violence. Focusing on second generation women, I examine how women navigate two cultural narratives to show how different cultures shape their views on intimate partner violence. In particular, I explore how Arab American women's perceptions of intimate partner violence draw on traditional gendered narratives common in the Arab world, familial narratives of secrecy and reputation, their marginalized location in U.S. society, and how their views have changed as a result of acculturation into the United States.

I address the following three research questions:

1. How do Arab American women redefine the gendered descriptions of Arab women and men based on their social location in the U.S.?
2. How do Arab American women speak about intimate partner violence within an Arabic cultural context?
3. How do Arab American women's perceptions on intimate partner violence shift when they think about it within the U.S. cultural context and their location within it among a marginalized, ethnic community?

Drawing on a feminist framework, I examine how Arab American women describe intimate partner violence in two distinct cultures. This study provides insight into how cross-cultural narratives shape women's views on intimate partner violence and shed light on a group that is marginalized and cloaked in secrecy and mystery. Whereas individual stories form the basis of intimate partner violence interpretation in the U.S., these stories are hidden in the Arab world. Struggling to tell the stories of victims overshadows discussion of structural inequities that engender such violence in Arab culture. The literature shows that individual perceptions on intimate partner violence correlate with incidents of violence (Harding and Helweg-Larson 2009;

Jones 1992; Nabors, Dietz and Jasinski 2006). Understanding how Arab Americans perceive intimate partner violence and how their silence may be fueled by their own perceptions on privacy, reputation, and culture can help shape public policy and outreach programs.

This study contributes theoretically and empirically to feminist scholarship on intimate partner violence and immigrant groups. Theorizing Arab American women's perceptions on intimate partner violence may offer new insights to the feminist framework concerning intimate partner violence, patriarchal structures, and the intersections of ethnicity and gender. Arab American's unique experiences may prevent or help them to seek aid when confronted with situations of violence. The empirical results of this study may provide insight for researchers and advocates on immigrant women and help them with future policy considerations.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention defines intimate partner violence as “physical violence, sexual violence, stalking and psychological aggression (including coercive acts) by a current or former intimate partner”. Intimate partners are characterized by regular contact, physical contact, emotional connections and identifying as a couple (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Feminist movements and activists began drawing attention to forms of intimate partner violence and its impact on U.S. society as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, initially seeking criminal punishment and reformation of divorce laws to help victims. Feminists would later refocus their attention on the institutional nature of violence, attacking gender norms, the private/public sphere, and victim blaming (Pleck 1989 and Mills 1999). Feminist writers argue that gender and power structures are at the root of intimate partner violence issues (Anderson, 1997) and identify the roles of women, the categorization of the home as a safe haven, women’s inferior position in society, and patriarchal structures as central factors (Madriz 1997; Yount and Li 2010). Feminist theories suggest that the public/private dichotomy is a form of social control over women, creating misunderstandings of who the victims and perpetrators of violence actually are. The home has become a backdrop to gender politics and power struggles and representations of it as a “safe haven” of women distorts the seriousness of spousal abuse and sees victims as those who have broken gender rules (Madriz 1997).

In addition to the home as the main sphere of intimate partner violence incidents, studies also show that women sustain more injuries than men when accounting for violence between men and women (Harding and Helweg-Larsen 2009). The historical description of IPV in the U.S. provides a backdrop into how violence against women is now seen as a socially destructive behavior vs. a socially acceptable method of control over women. Current research on IPV

shows how the conceptualization of the types and dimensions of gendered violence, from street harassment to physical battering, vary across race and ethnic groups, impacting social policy in the United States, (Erez et al. 2009) and drawing attention to cultural factors that shape and potentially perpetuate forms of violence. Broadly, research demonstrates that there are two sets of causes of IPV: women's individual attributes such as family background and socioeconomic status and societal influences in terms of patriarchy and gender beliefs.

### PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES AND GENDER BELIEFS

Feminist scholarship also identifies patriarchy and gender beliefs on the roles of women in society as factors that shape intimate partner violence (Madriz 1997; Yount and Li 2010). Patriarchal structures exist from micro-contexts like the home to macro levels such as governmental institutions and policies. Feminists criticize governments as patriarchal by leaving little room for women's interests and lacking sensitivity to the women's movement by restricting women's goals to that of housewife, mother and caregiver, perpetuating the idea the women are dependent and passive (Mirchandani 2006). Examples can be found in welfare reform and numerous forms of social services provided to women by the state. In the context of the family, men use violence as a way to punish women who do not meet their normative gendered expectations, sexually, emotionally, or physically (Anderson and Umberson 2001).

Some feminists refer to violence among couples as patriarchal terrorism. Johnson defines the term as "a product of patriarchal traditions of men's right to control 'their' women, a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands that involves the systematic use of not only violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation, and other control tactics" (Johnson 1995:284). Social practices construct differences in genders by considering how masculinity is defined by notions of ambition, toughness, employment, and breadwinning responsibility;

femininity is the opposite – weak, emotional, and subordinate of men (Anderson 1997). Societal expectations assume that women should have both lower incomes and statuses than their husband, legitimizing power structures within the family. Gender norms that are established in a larger society engender patriarchal terrorism, a term that keeps in mind the larger, systematic nature of this type of violence (Anderson 1997; Johnson 1995).

Studies on intimate partner violence in the U.S. also focus on perceptions of abuse. Research on perceptions of IPV in the U.S. show strong correlations exist between positive views on IPV and higher rates of incidents that occur. The perception of risk is also related to future rates of violence. Women who feel like they are at risk of violence experience higher levels of violence against them. Such studies are linked heavily to individuals' beliefs not just about IPV but also gender roles (Harding and Helweg-Larson 2009; Nabors, Dietz and Jasinski 2006). Perceptions are also linked to explanations of abuse – victims' alcoholism or bouts of unemployment are the main causes of violent acts. Further, societal perceptions related to the motivations behind abuse explain the reasons victims stay in violent relationships (Jones 1992).

#### INDIVIDUAL ATTRIBUTES AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Scholarship extensively explains the relationship between individual attributes and incidents of violence between intimate couples. Employment/socio-economic status of women, childhood experiences, race/ethnicity, and most recently, immigration status have been attributed to spousal abuse. Theories related to resources, power and status provide links between patterns of spousal abuse and incompatible power structures in the home. Power theories suggest that low income and/or unemployment are likened as the primary contributors of intimate partner violence, while feminist theories use patriarchy to explain these power imbalances (Locke and Richman 1999). Women who are primarily homemakers are more likely to be victimized by their



spouse and are less likely to perpetuate violence, when compared to women who work outside the home. Women who are less educated are more likely to be victimized by their spouses. Men who experience bouts of unemployment and overall economic vulnerability are more likely to become violent within their marriages, with incidents escalating in severity when the resources or earning power of women becomes greater than their spouses (McCloskey 1996 and Anderson 1997). Similarly, women who experience higher rates of economic dependency are more likely to return or stay in violent relationships. Studies analyzing intimate partner violence and welfare reform show that roughly 60% of women who are welfare recipients have reported past abuse (Caetano, Vaeth and Ramisetty-Mikler 2008). Economic subordination is one method used by abusers to isolate, threaten and control their victims.

Studies conducted in support of social learning theories indicate that women who witness violence as children experience higher rates of violence in adulthood, impacting their adult lives more significantly when compared to men who witness violence as children (Huang 2001).

Violent family environments affect children by potentially weakening their inhibitions toward violence, encouraging them to repeat similar behaviors and create new patterns of behaviors. When children witness aggression or violence as a method to deal with stress or frustrations, they are at greater risk of handling their situations similarly in adulthood. Social learning studies have also found that forms of physical and emotional violence by a father are more likely to have a direct effect on children's behaviors in adulthood (Huang 2001).

Incidents of violence are more likely to occur among Hispanic and Black couples (Caetano, Vaeth and Ramisetty-Mikler 2008). Over the years, structural inequalities and racism have left African Americans struggling with high levels of unemployment, urban sprawl that limits access to opportunity, the breakdown of the family, extreme poverty, and social

isolation in urban ghettos, creating environments that are more tolerant of violence (Benson et al 2004). A 1995 study on intimate partner violence among African Americans demonstrates that the majority of African American men arrested for spousal abuse are unmarried, had experienced forms violence as children, and had incomes less than \$20,000/year (Huang 2001). Women of color in the U.S. are more likely to experience intimate partner violence and are more willing to perceive incidents of violence as “normal” or “acceptable” (Nabors, Dietz and Jasinski 2006). Studies on perceptions of race and intimate partner violence show that individuals are more sympathetic towards victims of violence from their own race or ethnic group and that individuals are more likely to sympathize when the abuser is white, suggesting that black men are expected to be violent, leading to forms of victim blaming (Locke and Richman 1999).

#### MINORITY AND IMMIGRANT WOMEN

Feminist scholars emphasize gender as the key factor in their research on intimate partner violence, but the research rarely includes the experiences of ethnic women, even though minority women have higher rates of abuse than their white counterparts (Abraham 1995). Similarly, spousal abuse is one the most common forms of violence against immigrant women. Studies show that immigration hinders a woman’s ability to effectively deal with IPV, preventing them from challenging violence or leaving their spouses. Distance from family, barriers to social networks, legal dependency on spouses and economic instability isolate immigrant women, leaving them vulnerable to abuse (Erez, Adelman, and Gregory 2009, Abraham 2000). Survey research sheds some light on Latina immigrants, but this research remains inconclusive, as most of these studies have been policy or intervention-based. Further, research has grouped all Latina women into a larger Hispanic category and does not take into account the legal status of these women, which may account for differences (Menjivar and Salcido 2002).

The Arab world is a vast geographic region, covering countries in both Africa and Asia. Arab American women predominately trace their roots to the Middle East and are classified as white in most official statistics, further masking their experiences in larger context. Studies describe the increasing number of immigrant women into the U.S., document their participation in the labor force, and describe the characteristics of immigrant communities (Menjivar and Salcido 2002). Yet, the discussion on immigrants and intimate partner violence is still relatively new, with existing research providing partial knowledge given the sensitive nature of the subject and access to marginalized immigrant groups. The literature dedicated to the intersection of ethnicity and intimate partner violence demonstrates that the experiences of immigrants are different from citizens in the United States and focus on the challenges that immigration poses versus examining the effects of assimilation (Erez, Adelman and Gregory 2009).

Descriptions of the traditional family unit and marital expectations in Arab countries are used as a context in understanding intimate partner violence. The narratives surrounding women in the Arab world dictate women get married at younger ages, bear and raise children, commit to maintaining kinship ties, and value obedience and self-sacrifice, while patriarchal and patrilineal structures dictate men are head of the households and support the moral and physical control of women by their husbands, brothers, and sons (Dabbagh 2012 and Obeid et al. 2010). The family unit is a sacred social institution that is extremely protective of its reputation, avoiding outside aid to resolve family problems, including governmental assistance (Douki, et al. 2003). Family honor is central to the structure of Arab families and involve ideas surrounding the purity of women, the strength of men and forms of selflessness when it comes to family (Kulwicki 2002). Violations of expected behaviors threaten family honor and reputation, justifying abuse as a way to correct deviant behavior (Obeid, Chang, and Ginges 2010). In childhood, girls learn quickly

that boys are revered and that their fathers are in charge and cannot be challenged. Cultural narratives play a role in all facets of social experiences and encounters (Keddie 1990). These types of social learning experiences can impact the perceptions on intimate partner violence, as such opinions that relate to rigid gender norms and patriarchal structures.

A further complexity to understanding Arab women is Islam. Most Arabs adhere to or identify with the Islamic faith and are Muslim. Islam has for many years been a driving force in influencing Arabic culture and social life, including family and gender relationships. Gender interactions outside of the family are largely based on marriage, which are regulated by Islamic law, with the roles of wife and mother being one of the most valued (Obeid, Chang, and Ginges 2010). Islamic law is considered when accounting for family affairs, including but not limited to marriage, dowry rights, inheritance, custody and divorce. Islamic law also supports women's access to education and employment but biased interpretations of religious laws over emphasize the role of mother and wife as one that negates the importance of education and employment and link cultural and patriarchal customs to religious doctrine when dealing with intimate partner abuse (Obeid, Chang, and Ginges 2010). The ability of a woman to divorce her husband may be hindered by cultural customs that are unjustly attached to Islamic law, preventing her from escaping a violent relationship. Islam and its laws cannot explain incidents of intimate partner violence but can provide an overview of how state power functions with regard to IPV and the potential limitations the state encounters as a result of Islamic law (Hajjar 2004).

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FEMINISM

Feminism encompasses a vast body of thought that addresses the place of women in society by taking into account the personal, lived experiences of women. Feminism identifies gender as an organizing mechanism for society that produces inequities between women and

men. Feminist theories offer different explanations of this inequality by identifying distinct sources of women's oppression. There are different perspectives of the root of women's oppression and the solutions to those causes, but there is one central tenet – the oppression and subordination of women exists. Feminist theories provide an overarching framework to understand how Arab and Arab American women describe their cultural understanding of intimate partner violence.

### *Arab and Arab American Feminisms*

Unlike the West, where the women's movement is dominated by feminist issues, in the West Bank, the concerns and activities of Palestinian women are directed within the political framework of the struggle for Palestinian rights and national self-determination (Tucker 1993).

Although this quote is focused on Palestinian women, it resonates across the Arab world, as the climate in many parts of the Arab region is plagued by political instability. Women in the Arab world have rejected the notion that feminism is exclusive to the West. Arab feminists speak on the soul of Arab women who struggle to flee war, struggle to understand the preferential treatment of her brother, or the need to marry so young (Darraj 2003). In addition, Arab feminists struggle against Western depictions of women's lives, articulating the advances they have made on their own, outside of Western influences. With Arab and Arab American feminists writings on experiences that stem from political conditions, and American feminism indirectly perpetuating hegemonic scholarship based on one type of women, the space for intimate partner violence and feminism among Arab American women is limited at best.

Arab American feminisms are based on their distinct experiences that confront Arab women in the U.S. These experiences are rooted in oppressive contexts and are based on political, national, or cultural ideologies. Their experiences speak on similar forms of gender oppression that is shared by other U.S. feminist, but the intersection of ethnicity is what sets

them apart (Abdulhadi, Alsultany and Naber 2011). Research for Arab American feminists took a change of direction after the events of September 11, 2001. As a result of the attacks and the war on terror discussions, Arab and Muslim women have found themselves objectified as victims of Islamic societies and in need of liberation (Abdulhadi, Alsultany, and Naber 2011). Prior to September 11, 2001, the feminist agenda for Arab women had revolved around how Arab and Muslim women were defined in a degraded way by American feminists. Arab American feminists have had to deal with issues surrounding religion, specifically the *hijab*, the headscarf Muslim women choose to wear. The political circumstances continue to influence how they construct their social world and are manifested in their writings.

In the case of Arab women in the U.S., research primarily focuses on immigrant women who have not experienced high levels of assimilation. These studies place immigrant women at higher risks of violence due to stressful life-experiences related to cultural conditions and immigration (Kulwicki et al. 2010). Case studies also discuss social services agencies and the considerations that they must make when accounting for immigrant women and the cultural sensitivities that may hinder their ability to seek help (Abraham 1995). Much research on intimate partner violence in the Arab world focuses heavily on cultural manifestations of violence, such as genital mutilation, femicide, and honor crimes (Kulwicki et al. 2010). These studies are usually conducted using focus groups and in depth interviews to assess *experiences* of Arab women and not necessarily perceptions. Research on intimate partner violence among Arab women has been limited, but extant research on intimate partner violence overall provides foundational understanding of the topic. Research based on feminist perspectives focuses on specific factors that result in intimate partner abuse between men and women, with men as the main perpetrators of violent acts (Johnson, 1995). One main argument that feminist scholars

articulate is that intimate partner violence is rooted in power structures and gender. Men attempt to maintain control over women through the use of both subtle and distinct patriarchal systems that include forms of violence and discrimination against women (Anderson 1997; Berns 2001).

I draw on a feminist framework to interpret the themes that arise when I hear the stories, ideas, and opinions of women who participate in this study. I argue that gender oppression is socially and historically contingent. In the Arab world, the husband assumes an authoritarian role and it is his responsibility to maintain the family structure in whatever way he sees possible, with violence as an option (Douki et al. 2003; Yount and Li 2010). Arab women are not expected to contest to such arrangements, and are encouraged to portray identities of selflessness, where they sacrifice their own personal feelings for those of their husbands, making them vulnerable, both emotionally and physically (Haj-Yahia 1998). So while patriarchal structures exist in both Arab and U.S. contexts like men's dominance in both home environments as well as in their respective legal, social and political institutions, there are differences in the lives of Arab women and American women. In fact, outside the Arab American community and the Arab world, research on minority women has provided a new approach known as the ethno-gender approach to intimate partner violence. The perspective argues there is an intersection of ethnicity and gender. Gender is a social construct that evaluates role performance, behaviors and personalities; ethnicity is a social construct which encompasses distinct customs, beliefs and values that is manifested in specific social contexts (Abraham 1995). By adding the voices of Arab American women, this thesis aims to make more visible how sociopolitical and cultural contexts can distinctly shape women's perceptions on intimate partner violence.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Scholars who study intimate partner violence primarily use national surveys, focusing on relationships between violence and age, unemployment, socioeconomic status, and relationship status to describe the causes of intimate partner violence (Anderson 1997). Critics of these methods argue they ignore issues of gender and power, obscuring the context within which violence occurs (Anderson 1997). In the attempt to give women voice and provide their perspective in sociological inquiry, many feminist scholars focus on understanding women's social experiences. For example, some feminist scholars conduct victimization research that describes the nature of violent acts against women, drawing from interpretation of victims' stories and experiences. This type of feminist inquiry demonstrates "knowledge is and should be situated in people's diverse social locations" and that "it is grounded in both the social location and the social biography of the observer and the observed" (Mann and Kelley 1997:392).

This project is an exploratory, qualitative interview study that seeks to understand the attitudes and beliefs of second generation Arab American women in the U.S. about intimate partner violence. A qualitative approach is essential to gain access to deeper layers of information from participants. Qualitative research is based on the idea that reality is constructed by individuals who are interacting daily with their social worlds, and this approach was the best way to explore the attitudes of Arab American women. I used a feminist epistemological approach that allowed me to remain sensitive to existing gender and power dynamics that exist within women's social worlds. The approach allowed me to reflect on these dynamics within a cultural context that is unique to Arab American women. Feminist scholarship analyzes intimate partner violence using gender and power concepts that emphasize social constructions of masculinity and femininity that allow men to use force to maintain control over women (Hester,



Donovan and Fahmy 2010). By using a feminist lens, I considered how the women's knowledge and perceptions were socially situated and constructed (Cook and Fonow 2007).

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

There are at least 3.5 million Americans in the U.S. of Arab descent. Roughly 2/3 of them reside in ten specific states and one third live in Michigan, California and New York. Metro Detroit, including Dearborn, is one of the top six metro areas with the largest concentration of Arab Americans. Between 2000 and 2010, there was a 72% increase in the number of individuals who reported having Arabic-speaking ancestry (Arab American Institute).

The local Arab American community of Dearborn Michigan was the main focal point for recruitment of participants. The ethnic community has a long history, settling in the area as early as the 1920's, with larger numbers settling in the 1970's and 1980's. Dearborn is also home to the largest concentration of Arab Americans in the U.S., with a high proportion of Arab residents identifying as foreign born (Arab American Institute). Michigan has the second largest population of Arabs in the U.S. There has been a 26% increase in the population of Arabs in Michigan between 2000 and 2010. Although Southeast Michigan is where Arabs are largely concentrated, the statewide population is reported roughly at 191,000 but after adjusting for underreporting, estimates are roughly around 500,000 (Arab American Institute). Dearborn, Michigan is known as one of the cultural epicenters of Arabic culture in the U.S. It also has one of the largest communities of foreign-born immigrants in the country. The city is attractive for immigrants in that it hosts a long list of Arab-owned restaurants, grocery stores, and social institutions that cater to Arabic speaking populations. The community allows for easy access to participants who live within two cultural narratives. Participants from this community could account for an upbringing infused with Arabic culture while living within U.S. society. Choosing

from a participant pool specific to Dearborn Michigan presents a limitation as Arab American women live across all states in the U.S. and vary in their upbringing and cultural attachments.

## DATA SOURCES

I conducted in-depth interviews with 20 second generation Arab American women between April 30 and June 5, 2015. Interviews lasted between 90 minutes to 120 minutes. The women I interviewed selected the location of the interview. Eleven participants elected to be interviewed at their homes, seven were interviewed at local restaurants and coffee shops, and one asked to be interviewed at my personal residence, requesting complete privacy. I developed the interview guide with open-ended questions to encourage a conversation (See Appendix A). Prior to each interview I gave the participants an overview of the interview themes. I explained informed consent to all participants and obtained written consent on two consent forms, keeping one and leaving one with the participant. Consent forms detailed the procedures, benefits/risks, confidentiality and voluntary participation. At the end of each interview I had women complete a sociodemographic sheet and provided them with a flier that provided information about domestic violence aid agencies (See Appendix B). I audiotaped all interviews on a digital recording device and transferred to a hard drive for temporary storage. I transcribed the interviews in their entirety for data analysis, using pseudonyms to protect the women's identity, as well as all family names and friends' names mentioned during the interviews. All participant responses were transcribed verbatim including any Arabic words, which I translated.

## SAMPLING: INCLUSION CRITERIA AND RECRUITMENT

I recruited Arab American women who were between the ages of 25 and 35 and who lived or grew up in the city of Dearborn (see, Table 1 below). Eighteen participants resided within the City of Dearborn or within 2 miles of the city, in neighboring cities. The other two

relocated within 20 miles of Dearborn, but frequented the city often. The youngest participant was 26 and nine were under the age of 30. The remaining 11 were 30 or older. Women had to be either second generation immigrants or 1.5 or 1.75 generation immigrants, arriving to the U.S. before the age of 10. Sixteen women were 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant women who were born in the U.S. to immigrant parents. 1.75 generation women were born overseas and arrived in the U.S. before school age. 1.5 generation immigrant women were foreign born and arrived after school age (Montazer and Wheaton 2011). Four were born outside the U.S. and were all under age 7 when they arrived. None of the women identified as immigrants, opting for the phrase, 1<sup>st</sup> generation American, when explaining their immigration status. I originally decided to select participants whose families immigrated here from Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Jordan, or Iraq, with no requirement to recruit a certain number from each country. Although the Arab world consists of 22 Arab countries, culture can vary across the region. These five countries are geographically located close to one another and individuals may share a very similar cultural upbringing. Lebanese immigrants were some of the first to settle in Dearborn, whereas Iraqi immigrants settled more recently. I was unable to recruit Iraqi women that met the above criteria. This could be because the population has not been in the U.S. long, or grew up in other parts of Southeast Michigan prior to moving to Dearborn. Of the 20 participants, 14 were Lebanese, 2 were mixed nationalities from Syria and Lebanon, 2 were Jordanian and 2 were Palestinian. Three of the women identified as Christian, the remaining women identified as Muslim.

I recruited the women using two techniques: purposeful and snowball sampling. Based on the criteria above, I used purposive sampling to find initial samples. I consulted with members of ACCESS, a large social services agency located in Dearborn that caters to the Arab population and was able to recruit 3 participants. Because of my social location within the city, I

recruited 5 participants from various friends, colleagues, and family members who were familiar with my study. I used snowball sampling to recruit from initial pool of respondents, using their social circles. Snowball sampling is a critical tool in this study because this research focuses on “specific individuals, groups or experiences which are not validated by society” (Browne 2005). After I interviewed the first 8 women, participants eagerly offered names of women who they thought would be willing to contribute to the study. The remaining 12 participants were based on snowball sampling, 10 of which I contacted directly. 2 participants found me directly using Facebook. They had heard about my study and were interested in participating and contacted me after obtaining my name from interviewed participants and finding me on Facebook. They sent me private messages on Facebook asking to be involved and scheduled interviews.

**Table One: Participants and Selected Demographics**

Name	Age	Employed	Victim of IPV	Marital Status	Children	Native Born
Mina	26	Y	N	Single	N	Y
Cristina	27	Y	N	Single	N	Y
Grace	28	N	N	Married	Y	Y
Hanan	28	Y	N	Single	N	Y
Fay	28	Y	N	Single	N	Y
Nuha	28	N	N	Married	Y	Y
Lama	29	N	Y	Married	Y	Y
Eman	29	Y	Y	Divorced	Y	Y
Aminah	29	N	N	Married	Y	N
Leila	30	Y	N	Single	N	Y
Manal	32	Y	N	Married	Y	N
Aya	32	Y	N	Married	Y	Y
Andrea	33	Y	N	Remarried	Y	Y
Suzan	34	Y	Y	Remarried	Y	N
Tina	34	Y	N	Divorced	Y	Y
Zahra	34	N	Y	Married	Y	Y
Joanna	35	Y	Y	Remarried	Y	Y
Sarah	35	N	N	Married	Y	N
Yara	35	Y	N	Divorced	Y	Y
Randa	35	N	N	Married	Y	Y

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

The interview guide was semi-structured and consisted of open-ended questions. Participants selected the location and time of the interview. Because of the individual, unique stories shared, this interview method was best to establish a flow of inquiry, capturing the in-depth nature of individual experiences and beliefs. I used open ended questions focused on the topic, but gave participants a chance to define the content of the discussion. I used silent probing or affirmative responses to dig deeper, but overall, participants had the flexibility to focus on specific topics freely and steered the direction of the interview.

There were three sections of the interview guide: family background/immigration, family dynamics and community, and intimate partner violence. Questions explored cultural beliefs that participants had on intimate partner violence, comparing views of their home country to the U.S. I originally developed the interview guide to answer the three following questions: 1.) How do Arab American women speak about intimate partner violence within an Arabic cultural context? 2.) How do Arab American women's perceptions on intimate partner violence shift when they think about it within the U.S. cultural context? 3.) How do these perceptions vary based on differences among the women's background (e.g. family structure, language and culture).

However, after completing the first five interviews, my research questions evolved as women's responses focused on gendered narratives that were specific to Arab women and used these narratives as a foundation when they spoke about intimate partner violence. As a result, my analysis reflects how the data emerged during the interview process. My first research question became: 1.) How do Arab American women redefine the gendered descriptions of Arab women and men based on their social location in the U.S.? The second research question remained unchanged: 2.) How do Arab American women speak about intimate partner violence within an

Arabic cultural context? The women emphasized their social location and unique experiences within an ethnic community as a basis of comparison between themselves and women in the Arab World and non-Arab women. Thus, the third research question evolved to include their unique location in Dearborn, Michigan: 3.) How do Arab American women's perceptions on intimate partner violence shift when they think about it within the U.S. cultural context and their location within it among a marginalized, ethnic community?

#### *Family background/Immigration*

I began the interview by asking about the women's family background and the story behind their immigration. These included questions that explored where the participants came from, reasons behind immigration, information about family members in the Arab world, and how they grew up in comparison to family overseas, using gender roles, education, family life, employment and religion as comparisons. These questions provided a foundation in understanding gendered descriptions of Arab women by providing their own beliefs about women in the Arab world and whether they included themselves in the descriptions.

#### *Family Dynamics/Cultural Connections*

These questions explored the family dynamics that the respondent grew up with and how these changed over time, examining connections they retained to their Arabic culture, and new traditions they partook in, patriarchy, and gender roles. The first set of questions in this section assessed how participants engaged in cultural traditions common to the Arab world and how often they engaged in customs and traditions found in the U.S. For this section, I encouraged dialogue about what Arabic culture and U.S. culture meant to them and how they employed various cultural traditions. Questions addressed forms of acculturation as I asked women about differences that existed between themselves and their Arab counterparts in the Arab World as

well as differences between themselves and non-Arab women in the U.S. These questions specifically dealt with cultural ideas related to social life, reputation, secrecy, gossip, dating and relationships. These questions allowed women to discuss violence within an Arabic cultural context, using reputation and secrecy as driving points to begin discussions. Questions also focused on their unique location in their ethnic community and addressed if and how living in Dearborn encouraged cultural retention, providing initial findings that would lead to narratives surrounding intimate partner violence and their location within a marginalized community.

The next set of questions on family dynamics focused on how patriarchy existed within family structures. These questions explored how gender manifested in their everyday family lives and examined if and how women redefined gendered descriptions of Arab men and women. Questions assessed whether a participant lived with her parents and the roles her parents played in her life in terms of decision making and support. Questions also explored the father's and mother's role in the decision making process in the household and the type of reliance on the father or husband. Patriarchal structures common in the Arab world indicate that most women use their fathers or husbands as financial support, go to them in cases of emergency and rely on their advice when making decisions based on education, marriage and employment. Questions also addressed common cultural beliefs related to the reverence of sons, treatment of daughters and daughter in laws, beliefs about divorce and their views on their own daughters if applicable. I also noted any form of tension felt when faced with situations that defied the patriarch, including feelings or actions of sadness if a patriarch was not happy with a decision.

#### *Attitudes on Intimate Partner Violence*

I explored six concepts related to attitudes on intimate partner violence: (1) the definition of intimate partner violence, (2) the causes of intimate partner violence, (3) perceptions towards

victims and perpetrators of intimate partner violence, (4) solutions for intimate partner violence, (5) stereotypes surrounding Arab Americans and their connection to intimate partner violence and (6) thoughts about the men within their own family who may act as perpetrators of intimate partner violence. I decided to separate the intimate partner violence questions with reference to the Arab World from these same questions focused on the U.S. I explored these six concepts on intimate partner violence with reference to the Arab World following the questions on family background. I returned to the conversation on their perceptions of intimate partner violence in the U.S. after the section on family dynamics. I initially believed that separating the conversation on the Arab world from the U.S. would allow me to more clearly explore how the women shifted their views on intimate partner violence in Arabic culture and the Arab world versus their general views on intimate partner violence. Although women provided differing accounts between the two cultures, new questions emerged that addressed their social location within the Arab community in Dearborn and how their own accounts of intimate partner violence differed from both those in the Arab world and Americans outside of their ethnic community.

When accounting for attitudes on intimate partner violence, questions addressed how spousal abuse was situated as a personal family issue and a social dilemma. Questions also addressed the extent to how participants' perceived intimate partner violence as a mode of violence. Other questions focused on the importance of the reputation of a family and whether bouts of intimate partner violence and police intervention tarnished that reputation. In addition, discussions surrounding social policy and intervention explored how participants reacted either positively or negatively to outside aid and what they viewed as the 'proper' solutions to intimate partner violence. Accounts of government intervention shed light on the attitudes towards stereotypes and how participants engaged in dialogue that stressed the fears of perpetuating



stereotypes of their people. This came to light more clearly early on in the interview process when a case of intimate partner violence within the community led to the death of a young mother. Women used the story to explain how their community feared negative portrayals and sheltered their culture. When women spoke on how Arabs are consistently portrayed as violent, or how Arabs should work collectively to solve issues, or how Arab women should shelter the violent actions of men to protect the culture, it suggests that stereotypes influence reporting incidents of intimate partner violence. The local headline surrounding the death of the young woman became a main topic of conversation during the interviews, but was not addressed within the study given the sensitive nature of the event. Participants indicated that the story not be included, emphasizing the need to protect the image of the women, her family and the community. Although the focus of the interview is not on religious doctrine, I anticipated that Islam played a significant role in shaping perceptions of Arab American women. It is critical to understand the influence of religion when hearing the stories and beliefs of participants.

#### ISSUES IN DATA COLLECTION

The willingness of the women to participate in the study was overwhelming and unexpected. Women were un-phased by the topic and were eager to share their views. In most interviews, issues involved ‘silencing’ the women as they spoke easily about personal topics such as their marriage, incidents of violence, and community members.

#### *Research Bias*

Reflectivity is one of the core characteristics of qualitative research that allows a researcher to ensure validity (Creswell 2009). As an Arab American who was born and raised in the City of Dearborn, I knew early on that I had to self-reflect about my interpretations of the findings. Going into this project, I knew I had preconceived ideas about what I would find and

how women were going to answer my questions. To avoid biases, I constructed methods that would allow me to question women on the most basic of ideas when it came to cultural narratives or community norms. Women would often answer questions with *“well, you know how it is in our community”*, *“you know how Arabic guys are”*, or *“you know how Arabs think.”* As a researcher I had to constantly ask for elaboration after these statements were made. At times, I would provide different viewpoints to get more substantive answers from the participants. This was done often when discussing the community of Dearborn and descriptions of the community as a “bubble”. I would make statements such as *“well, some people say it’s just like any other Arab ethnic city in the U.S., there is no difference”*, in order for them to provide substantial details on what makes Dearborn unique. Without offering counter arguments, I would be left with an ethnic city that housed Arab Americans and their culture, vs. detailed descriptions of how community members refuse to detach from the culture, how everyone was connected, and gendered stories of growing up in the ethnic community. Following up with ‘Why’s’ became an important tool throughout the interview process. Social realities such as reputation were hard to explain for many participants, especially when met with ‘why’ follow up’s. They had a difficult time addressing reputation as a social construct. When they were unable to answer these questions, I redirected and asked questions about what made it hard to answer and where they thought their difficulty was coming from. This helped participants self-reflect and consider their own beliefs to dig deep to understand how they internalized ideas surrounding reputation and secrecy. Taking notes or jotting down initial thoughts helped me as a researcher to revisit themes after more in depth conversation occurred. This allowed me to distance myself from my own preconceived ideas and helped me guide participants to explain in their own words.

*Insider/Outsider Dilemma*

I was also confronted with the reality that I was known as a community member by all of the participants. Participants will always view researchers using language, gender, race and ethnicity to uniquely position them. This could potentially affect the collection and interpretation of data (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). My position as an outsider/insider impacted how I was able to relate to participants. My college education made me an outsider as women questioned my intentions for doing the study, hesitating to participate in the study or answer certain questions. It was my position as an insider that helped me overcome these issues. I was known as an insider from the community which allowed me to build trust with the women. They were more at ease with the process when I was able to express my personal knowledge about the community, reputation, and keeping information confidential. Dearborn, Michigan may be a large community with an Arab population close to about 40,000, but based on the selection criteria, I realized that participants were in my cohort of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Arab immigrants from the city. I fit the age range, the national identity, and the community background. Conversations always started with finding connections between the participant and the researcher, questions that are common among Arab individuals. Questions such as “what village are you from?”, “What’s your last name?” and about family members they may know always occurred. On the same note, I was met with participants who would not share as much or stopped themselves from saying certain things if they felt like I knew about a story from the community. The only way I was able to deal with this issue was to speak very broadly about certain events without referencing any knowledge that I had, whether I did or not. If a participant spoke about a victim of violence and asked if I knew the victim based on my age and background, I would make general statements such as “I recognize the name, but there are so many people with that name, I don’t really

know.” If they didn’t mention a name and started with “you probably know this story”, I would ask them to keep names out or to speak broadly, indicating that I valued the privacy of others, allowing them to become more comfortable with speaking to me about certain experiences. As an insider, I had to be constantly aware of my own social location throughout the process, careful not to interpret ideas or themes based on my own ethnic lens. I remained aware of my status as I developed my interview guide, conducted interviews, wrote memos and made interpretations.

Last, given the nature of hospitality within the Arab culture, I had the opportunity after interviews to sit and chat with participants regarding topics related to education, background, marriage and social gossips. During one instance, I had just finished an interview with a participant and afterwards the participant that had referred her came by for a visit. Both had interviewed for the study. During some small talk, the visiting participant commented that she thought the study would make Arabs look bad and had mentioned it to the two participants she had referred to me. Although I will never know if her comments influenced the participant’s responses, I did notice that responses were shorter and quite different from the other participants. I cannot assume that was the case, but became aware of the issues that could occur in data collection by such circumstances. As a result, I learned early on in the process that I had to revisit questions and ask for clarification to double check information and ensure validity.

#### *A Note on Pausing*

Early on in the interview process I realized that pausing recordings was going to happen quite often due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Women who were victimized by violence were constantly asking me to pause for clarification on privacy and confidentiality. Women also tended to pause and speak off the record because they didn’t want to say a certain name or were unsure of how they were speaking about their family and community. In many instances,

statements and ideas were left unexplained. During these pausing breaks, I had to jot down notes about what was being said, because participants did not want the information recorded on tape. I had to also ensure that statements that were made during pausing moments were described within the text using no names, not even pseudonyms at the request of the participant.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of transcripts/field notes included dividing data into the three main categories related to the interview guide: family background, family dynamics/gender roles, and attitudes on intimate partner violence. The process of transcribing interviews can be quite transparent and feminist researchers are aware of the importance of listening and looking for hidden meanings (Hessy-Biber and Leavy 2010). I jotted down field notes to capture physical reactions or demeanors that cannot be captured by a voice recorder and was alert to pauses or phrases that indicated a deeper understanding of the way respondents saw the world around them. I wrote descriptive memos after each interview, creating broad categories that were useful as the interviews continued. I re-reviewed the transcribed interviews with the audiotapes for accuracy. Initially, I applied open codes to the data to pull out descriptions, allowing the data to create patterns for me. Open-coding allows a researcher to remain open to ideas, themes or patterns that emerge from the data vs. searching for specific themes (Warren and Karner 2005). From this point, I reviewed coded data and began developing into key concepts using focused coding. Focused coding allowed me to construct theoretical concepts such as reputation, shame, and secrecy, blame, and self-sacrifice using significant statements from participants to drive textual descriptions of the larger concepts. Using focused coding, I was able to explore connections and contradictions between themes, creating larger categories such as reputation and sub categories that followed (e.g. reputation of children, stigma of divorce). Other large themes that emerged

included positive and negative burdens of Arab culture, followed by sub categories that included self-sacrifice, hospitality, reverence of sons, and secrecy. Smaller themes based on material and economic success led to contradictory patterns, allowing me to comparatively analyze views of participants when comparing U.S. society and Arab society. Although questions related to family background provided relevant information, they went beyond the scope of the study for this thesis. However, I continue to consider these questions for future analysis for peer-reviewed journal articles. Based on emergent themes, I divided the analysis into three chapters: the burdens Arab women experience in Arabic culture, the social manifestation of reputation and the experiences and perceptions that arise from living in an ethnic community within the U.S.

#### LIMITATIONS

My goal in this research was to provide a descriptive account of the perceptions of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Arab American women in Dearborn, Michigan. I was aware that the women I interviewed were all from the tight knit community of Dearborn, Michigan. Participants from this community could account for an upbringing that was infused with Arabic culture while living within U.S. society. Choosing from a participant pool specific to Dearborn Michigan presents a limitation as Arab American women live across all states in the U.S. and vary in their upbringing and cultural attachments. My aim was not to create generalizable findings, but to explore and understand how Arab American women construct their own meanings of gender and intimate partner violence using their personal lives and their social conditions as the context to interpreting violence. My insider position was also a limitation, as the ethnic lens that I carried threatened to misrepresent the stories of the women. My awareness of my position throughout the process forced me to continuously review my methods and my epistemological approach, ensuring that I remained unbiased and objective to the data that was collected.

## CHAPTER 4: CARRYING THE BURDENS OF A CULTURE

When Manal stated that women carry the burden of Arabic culture, the negative connotation indicated was that the culture stressed the oppression of women. This portrayal was not the only way women presented Arabic cultural representations. Most women agreed the culture was carried by women, but reframed it providing positive narratives. However, even positive framings were indicative of the overwhelming pressure Arab women dealt with knowing that the foundation of an entire culture rested upon their shoulders. The women I interviewed constructed culture symbolically, with women as the foundation of Arabic culture. Narratives of culture explained how women maintained kinship ties with nuclear and extended family members. They spoke of hospitality by referencing how guests were provided with food and comfort by the women of the house. Men and women in Arab society were socialized differently from young ages, with women taught to be emotional, peacekeepers, and maintainers of cultural identities. Men were taught to be protectors, dictators of behavior, and financial providers (Kayyali 2006). The women's cultural descriptions of Arabic culture were gendered and held women to a standard of maintaining cultural norms, a perceived reality described accurately as a burden. Any deviations from norms were seen as unnecessary, and lacking in proper upbringing.

This analysis chapter explains the women's reflections about their culture and their position as women within it. First, women describe how they maintained cultural identities as symbols of strength, role models of hospitality and generosity, beloved daughters, and respected equals in marriage. The second part of the chapter emphasizes similar cultural expectations but with reference to intimate partner violence as women discussed the burdens of shame, secrecy, and self-sacrifice and how intimate partner violence played out within Arab families. The positive and negative framings of the culture were salient to understand the women's views on

intimate partner violence (analysis chapter two). In fact, it was the continued emphasis on self-sacrifice, shame, and secrecy that reinforced the social construction of reputation. Reputation was rejected by women personally but accepted as a larger custom that they indirectly abided by, influencing how incidents of violence were handled. It is not just the gendered roles of women and men within Arabic culture that influenced how intimate partner violence was handled. It was the internalized gendered beliefs that these women held personally and of the larger group that influenced how they explained violence in the home.

### THE POSITIVE BURDENS

When asked about their culture without referencing intimate partner violence, women provided gendered narratives of their culture. For many, culture was tied to beliefs about marriage and children, with women instinctively gendering explanations of the culture. This was partly because of their gender position and identity within the culture, but narratives were largely expressed under the context that women represented the foundation of Arabic culture. Women mostly framed positive accounts about Arab culture as pure, family-oriented, generous, and religious, yet within their accounts, women held themselves and other women to standards that in some ways reshaped gendered narratives and in other ways perpetuated gendered norms. When Leila explained her affinity to her culture she used terms related to the expected pristine and pure nature of women in the Arab world to drive explanations of the larger culture:

I love the cleanliness of the culture. I feel like people in our culture are clean...as in actually clean, but also, not tainted type of thing. That's how I think about it...clean in a sense of pure. When you meet an Arabic guy or Arabic girl, you know you aren't meeting someone dirty...I just know they are clean.

Leila's description of remaining pure and clean is indicative of the continued standard of women to remain virgins. She also assigned a physical purity to her ethnic group when referencing dating and marriage. Purity within the Arabic culture has long been an expectation of women as



society dictates women refrain from sexual encounters until they marry. Although Leila referred to men and women in her descriptions, when asked if men were expected to refrain from sexual intercourse, she expressed that to her it was equal, that both men and women should, reshaping her cultural ideas about virginity but without dismissing them. Leila's explanations initially revolved around marriage and dating but also included descriptions of hospitality provided by women in their homes and her happiness when she served others:

They serve you food, desserts, drinks. It's not the same at houses when they aren't Arab. I always take something with me to a guest's house...they never expect it, white people...and they love it. It's a great feeling. If I were to go to your house, I trust what you would give me...it's clean and the food is good. I just love it.

Arabic culture stressed the foundation of family as a safeguard from outsiders and social ills that plague society, with Leila indirectly indicating that the homes of Arabs were safe environments, where she could trust her hosts and what they provided. Her narratives of food and hospitality were filled with descriptions of women, using herself, her sisters and her mother as examples.

### *Marriage*

Most women addressed marriage, but in ways that elevated the status of daughters as potential wives. Pressure to steer women into marriage was not the viewpoint of all women as many made clear choices of who they were going to marry and when. However, when describing culture, marriage and women's roles in the family was an immediate focus, as Grace suggested:

Arabic culture is...asking for your hand in a certain way. My husband had to come and ask to marry me. My parents had to approve in a sense. Not that it was their decision, I already had made the decision, but he had to come....if they accepted him; they drank the coffee that was served as a way of saying we accept.

Although Grace acknowledged that the tradition was outdated, she stressed the importance of maintaining the culture out of respect to her parents, a narrative that will later made its way into discussions of violence. Grace also explained the position of women as sacred and protected:

Girls are more precious...they're more valuable. Men...have more responsibility and they're given more freedom because of that...the women are more like...it is kinda like a selling thing...they're kinda like a porcelain doll right. They can't be tarnished and you have to watch out for everything. When somebody does come to ask for her hand, they have to be perfect cuz she's perfect.

The image of women as “perfect” or “porcelain dolls” provided a sense of value to the lives of Arab women, one rarely understood outside the community. Fay described:

We aren't just given away (laughs) if anything, you treat an Arabic girl wrong, be careful, because everyone in her family will come after you. And not just her dad and brothers, her cousins and even friends.

Fay and Grace redefined the belief of marriage as necessary, but while providing status to women as decision makers in choosing who and when they will marry and by dismissing notions of women having no value within families. Fay reshaped gendered images by emphasizing the protection of women by men, but extended it to male friends and social networks.

When the women focused on how Arab women were family-oriented, the conversation centered on treatment of women in marriages; they described how women played equal, although separate roles from their spouses. This “equal, but separate” supported a common gendered framing of Arabic culture. Sarah pointed out that although she went to medical school, she put her career on the backburner to raise her children, noting that it was not because she was forced or steered in doing so, but it was the way she was raised and wanted to raise her family:

My husband has that Arabic mentality. My husband left it up to me but he said I prefer you don't work and worry about the kids right now and I appreciate that, because he gave me that option. And I wanted to be home with my kids. I want to teach them their culture. I'm the one who can do it. My mom did it for me.

Although Sarah stressed it was her decision stay home, her narrative was framed by her husband's preference, even if he gave her the “choice,” suggesting societal expectations may have driven her decision making. She reshaped cultural expectations by stating that force no longer prevents women from working, but choices. Her choice to stay at home and raise her kids

perpetuated common gender roles, but her choices were autonomous, a distinct characteristic that she marked as worthy of others to know. Furthermore, Sarah stressed that her husband was different from other Arab men, linking cultural norms to a larger community outside of her own family. It also suggested that only women can truly pass on the cultural teachings. These beliefs about family remained strong as women constructed their own social conditions against the backdrop of Arabic culture. Yara, a professional executive at a large financial firm explained the need to retain the structure of the family where women stay home and raise the children:

I didn't want to pay any more bills, I didn't want to work. I've always wanted to be at home. I don't know if that came from my mom but I never had aspirations of wanting to be...this business tycoon...I hated school. My biggest aspiration was to be a stay at home mom and to raise my children. That's what I wanted.

Yara also indicated the influence of her mother on her desire to stay home. However, Yara also acknowledged that traditional roles differed with older generations. She characterized her mother as obedient; arguing that staying home "back then" meant putting up with a lot:

Umm, my mom's a little bit more old-fashion in a sense, a little bit more traditional. You know, has her own traditional values of you know, Susie homemaker, you know, what a traditional wife should do and you know, cook and clean for her husband. And obedient, like, my mother will put up with a lot.

For Yara, this did not necessarily mean her mom was unequal or submissive in her relationship:

They wanna buy a house, he's not gonna unless she wants the house. Maybe it's his choice when...but she's gonna decide what house and where. And if she doesn't want to move, chances are they aren't gonna move.

Differences were attributed to financial conditions and changing times, yet Yara still believed that women should be primary caretakers but while voicing their opinions and challenging expectations of obedience. For most of the women, economic independence was an individual success, created outside of cultural customs that called for motherhood and marriage.

*Symbols of Strength*

Women also spoke about the strength of Arab women and their ability to maintain cultural expectations as mothers, wives, friends, daughters, and members of society. It was women who created nurturing environments in the face of economic and political hardship and unstable futures. Eman described the women in her family as symbols of strength:

I was just talking to my cousins yesterday, and I looked around and I seen like a bunch of strong women. I was like...we have the worst luck, us Khattab women but yet every single one of us...we're strong. We've been through so much.

She also explained that struggles and burdens that Arab women faced were not unique to Arabic culture. She argued that burdens of women, as women, were shared across time and space, but Arab women created social networks and environments that empowered them:

How do you get stronger physically? Like when you work out...don't you have to feel the muscles...if you can't run, and run and you're gonna be out of breath and you run more...that's your strength endurance, right? I don't think you can be strong without suffering. But that's how we deal with it, we take it, deal with it, become stronger, for us and everyone around us. They can't live without us.

Joanna described her mother as someone who kept her kids on the right track against all odds:

My dad died when I was six. My mom kept it all together. She's a tough one my mom, I don't know many people who could of done it alone with seven children. She did a damn good job. That lady deserves the damn noble peace prize. You think a man could've done that? Men get remarried cuz they can't handle it.

Randa described a similar narrative while discussing the loss of her own mother:

She was everything to me. I would fight with my husband, I would go to her and she'd be like, 'my daughters not coming home to you, no, no. She will stay here.' I was always able to go back to her. She's your mother, she held us all together.

All three women suggested the strength was an empowering characteristic of women, regardless of underlying causes of struggle. Four women had mothers who were educated and worked, but the rest came from households with stay at home mothers or mothers who were forced to work due to unforeseen circumstances. Most of the women redefined struggles that women faced as symbolic of the strength of Arab women and not ones that were a result of gendered

expectations. The women did not define Arab women in a manner that saw them as victims of oppression or subordination, but as strong, supportive members of the family that reinforced the collective structure and guided individuals in positive directions using cultural tools. They were defined as respected equals, valuable humans, and symbols of strength that carried their culture in a manner that ensured both retention and proper representation. However, these positive burdens of ensuring the purity and traditional roles of women in the family were juxtaposed with a set of negative burdens that women also discussed. It is these negative burdens that weaved into the discussions of violence as the positive frame of women began to dismantle when women explained incidents of abuse and how they were handled. Variations in their constructed meanings were clear when they considered intimate partner violence in Arabic culture.

#### THE NEGATIVE BURDENS

The women in this study spoke about how, in the Arab world, patriarchal structures and family-centered values regulated individual behavior that was rooted in gender, supporting gendered definitions and existing feminist research on intimate partner violence. When women considered IPV, they redirected their thoughts on Arabic culture, providing explanations based on regulated behavior and gendered division. They spoke of the negative burdens of carrying the culture – navigating violence, their status as women, and maintaining secrecy. Women bore the burden of ensuring these aspects of the culture, even if they personally had not been impacted.

#### *Intimate Partner Violence as Taboo*

Expectations of gendered definitions of intimate partner violence did not fail to deliver when I asked the women what intimate partner violence meant to them personally. The women's gendered ideas of abusers and victims were clearly visible in their constructed meanings: “a woman getting beat up by her husband,” “women are the victims,” “husbands beating their

wives”, and “A male to female. I don’t consider it female to male.” The women described forms of intimate partner violence as physical, mental, emotional, and verbal abuse. Physical forms of violence were the most common when women reflected on personal experiences, yet participants no longer defined violence in just physical terms and were critical in what constituted “physical.” They stressed the burden that Arab women faced when dealing with intimate partner violence and the severity of abuse. A slap being just a slap, a push just a push, grabbing your arms, or verbal abuse were not forms of violence that Arab women could struggle against. They existed, but because of their lack of severity, they were explained away as marital fights that could be easily resolved. A burden the women saw as incomprehensible but an “accepted” reality. Pushing, shoving, grabbing and slapping were admonished as violent and unacceptable by the women individually, but in a larger cultural context, were seen as permissible.

Aya reflected on how older generations saw such incidents as less worrisome, describing her refusal to accept any form of abuse while discussing an argument with her husband:

My own mother was like ‘where did he hit you, is there a mark?’ and I’m like ‘he grabbed my hand and he pinned me up against the wall’ and she’s like ‘cuz you’re going crazy, he’s trying to control you, you’re throwing groceries around the whole house.’ I was in the wrong that time, one hundred percent...but, you’re not gonna touch me, I don’t care if you’re just pinning me down, I don’t care.

Manal described violence as any form of hitting, indicating that her views and upbringing differed from individuals overseas because of shifting cultural norms:

I used to go overseas...I see other people and they treat it like it’s not that big of a deal...domestic violence altercations with their spouses. We just got into a fight, no big deal. It’s any physical altercation that is unnecessary...I don’t justify hitting ever! I fight with my husband...he’s never laid a hand on me...ever!

Similarly, women presented emotional abuse as something that historically had been put on the backburner to physical abuse, even though its social impact was just as severe. Aminah mentioned the reality of emotional and mental abuse: “Yeah, sometimes emotional abuse is even

worse than physical abuse. It doesn't heal as well as physical abuse." When considering emotional abuse, Manal acknowledged its existence but used her upbringing to explain the dismissal of emotional abuse as equally as serious as physical abuse:

I don't look at it that way, because I automatically assume domestic violence as...I don't know if it's because when you're a kid and you learned about domestic violence it was always like physical.

Nuha stressed how abusers would use emotional forms of abuse to prevent outsiders from getting involved as she discussed her sister's ongoing battle to escape her abusive relationship:

He didn't think that anyone would think that his emotional and mental abuse was anything bad. As long as he didn't hit her, he didn't cheat on her, and he wasn't cheap with her, then he was doing everything that he was supposed to be doing. And she was just crazy for wanting to leave him. And she struggled with it for a while. I mean, it's hard to see emotional abuse and say 'I'm being abused.'

Defining intimate partner violence involved battling the constant focus on physical abuse and within that form, the focus on more intense incidents within Arab communities.

Most women also referred to intimate partner violence as taboo within Arab society, leaving the burden of the physical and mental pain on victims. Reframing IPV as taboo moved it away from the silent, personal, and sensitive framing that Arabic culture has historically assigned it. IPV as taboo expressed urgency, creating new conditions in which violence was discussed and making visible the silent burden victims have carried. When asked about confronting the social dilemma of violence as a community, the topic was put under a larger umbrella of taboo topics including mental illness and sexual molestation. Manal talked about spousal violence, comparing it to the topic of molestation: "Why don't we talk about domestic violence? Same reason we don't talk when a man molests a girl. It shouldn't happen, therefore it doesn't." Although women explained the need to confront such issues, Tina acknowledged that the issues of mental illness and molestation required social structures and skilled professionals to help, but intimate partner

violence was a social ill that could be resolved by a collective unwillingness to accept intimate partner violence. She argued that the word ‘taboo’ was inaccurate, but a reality:

It’s sad that it’s seen as a taboo. I mean, it’s sad for any topic to be seen as taboo. We need to discuss mental illness. We can’t ignore it. But it’s a larger issue. With abuse, we just need to support victims when they leave. That’s it. Yet it’s taboo.

Reconstructed meanings of violence suggested that new generations of Arab Americans who report forms of violence may provide new dimensions that have previously been ignored. However, women continued to stress gendered control and inequality, indicating that their individual views may have changed, but not the larger views within the Arab community.

#### *Placing Blame/Revering our Sons*

When I asked women about their experiences or knowledge of intimate partner violence among friends or family members, all but five provided a story of violence that they knew of personally. Five were victims of violence, two had experienced forms of violence against their sisters, one witnessed violence occur against her mother, one against her mother in law and the remaining spoke of violence among close friends. The women’s narratives explained intimate partner violence by gendered power differences like age and men’s status in families.

Three women referred to age differences when explaining incidents of violence. Although Arabic culture does not necessarily call for larger age gaps when choosing a spouse, Arab women historically were encouraged to marry at younger ages. This has shifted, but a few abuse victims were quick to point out how social pressure from their parents led them to marry at younger ages. For instance, Suzan described, “my dad would tell me like, you’re eighteen now, you can’t wait to get married. This is what our community expects from you. You can’t keep waiting.” Graduating from high school catapulted Suzan into adulthood and her next step was marriage; her father convinced her to marry a suitor who would eventually abuse her. Suzan was



the only one who indicated that her father put direct pressure on her to get married at a young age, but the other women stated the cultural expectation had not dissipated. In fact, of the 15 women who were married at some point of their lives, 8 married before age 21. Narratives of abuse at times indicated the age difference as a primary reason for why abuse occurred. Aminah explained how a friend of hers was abused by her husband who was 11 years older than her:

As they got older...she didn't age but he did and it was insecurities on his end that caused animosity and sometimes led to physical abuse which then had stopped, but then later led to a lot of emotional abuse, verbal abuse and it wasn't anything that probably should have happened. She would reassure him, you know, everything is fine you know, you're my husband and blah blah blah...he just...he couldn't be secure enough with himself to believe it. He's had men who thought it was his daughter and had asked him for permission to date her.

Nuha provided a similar account:

I knew a friend, she got married young, her husband was...there was an age difference so he was older than her by like 15 years. And she umm, they didn't agree, because she wanted more freedom and he didn't allow her to have.

Others saw abuse as perpetuated by the status of sons in the Arabic culture. According to the women, patriarchal structures within families promoted beliefs that sons were valued more among families. Sons ensured patrilineal lines remained intact. Many women saw these ideas manifest themselves as men are put on undeserving pedestals that allowed them to exploit their positions. One woman, Leila, was the only one who denied the cultural norm of revering sons, stating that it may have happened years ago, but no longer occurred in the present. Leila was interviewed along with her sister, Yara, who provided a distinct narrative. She explained that her father spoiled her brother, the only boy in the family, even though she rejected the treatment personally and did not conform to behavior that put her brother on a pedestal.

During incidents of violence in the home, victims were confronted with family members defending their son's, who they saw as doing no wrong. The women's narratives explained that

they heard: “Their sons can do no wrong,” “Just stay away from him till he calms down,” “Why do you fight back when you know how he is?”, “Just be patient. You need to learn to be patient”, “Your daughter has a mouth on her.” Women also criticized how victims were told to return to their spouses and make it work. In many instances, blame was put on the victimized woman for not creating a stress free environment for her husband. Although all the women were vocal opponents to intimate partner violence, they continued to discuss incidents where the main goal of women was to be peacekeepers among their families, as Yara suggested:

We’re peacekeepers. We think it’s okay for a man to have a temper but it’s not okay for a woman. I think it’s ingrained in us to be peacekeepers. (Referencing violence) It’s because he had a temper and she didn’t allow him to calm down.

Although Yara was very clear in speaking out against IPV and attributed the blame on victims to older generations, she continued to stress that women were meant to be calmer and were the peacekeepers of families, regardless of abusive incidents. All the women agreed that women were calmer and were responsible for managing the peace in their homes, regardless of violence. For others, it was the reverence of sons that encouraged the victim blaming as Manal explained the contradictions that existed between sons and daughters, stressing how it was unfair:

We put them on pedestals that they never belonged on. Are families as excited about having a girl as having a boy? Never the same celebration. It dates back to ancient times and will never change. Your daughter’s your daughter for life; your son’s your son till he finds a wife. Now isn’t that messed up, because it’s true.

Joanna, a victim of violence, explained how her mother encouraged her to make it work with her husband and indicated that her attitude would continue to get her into trouble if she didn’t “calm down.” She also stressed how her in-laws just told her to “strengthen her patience” because he would eventually change. For Joanna, her ex-husband was revered regardless of the pain he inflicted on her and her daughter. Joanna remarried and has a son with her second husband. In speaking of the reverence of sons, she also admitted to her biased thoughts towards her son:

I love my daughter without a doubt. But that's my son. I can't explain it. Maybe it's because he's still a baby. I'm trying to think if I thought like that when my daughter was born. It's fucked up...it's wrong. What the hell is wrong with me?

Any shifts away from the norms were not necessarily met with hostility but rather a sad acceptance that women were blamed for not maintaining their family. Aminah stated:

In our culture, I feel like, the women are always blamed for everything. Even though the man is supposed to be like the man of the house, the one that kind of holds the family together, but when you really look at it, it's the women in our culture that hold the family together.

When contemplating her own divorce, Andrea spoke of the struggle of failing at what was supposed to be a cultural milestone for women:

When I got divorced, I was sad because I was responsible for holding it together. I was the glue. I don't know. I mean, I know it's not my fault, but I was supposed to keep it together and I felt like I should have tried harder.

These narratives set the stage for how women perceived marriage and marital issues, specifically concerning intimate partner violence as they first constructed the reasons women continued to stay in abusive relationships, the notions of strength among Arab American women, how the silent crisis was initially fed through the inability to even say it, and the blame game that continued to recreate men into the 'he can do no wrong' power figure within Arabic culture.

### *Secrecy, Shame, and Self-Sacrifice*

Regardless of the statistics that indicate the frequency of spousal abuse that occurs among Arab American families, studies on intimate partner violence within Arab American communities have stressed that it remains a 'silent crisis,' due to fear of negative portrayals of a community, beliefs systems involving honor and shame, and patriarchal systems that influence gendered behavior and expectations (Kulwicki et. al. 2010). In this study, negative portrayals and concerns of honor and shame were intertwined in the descriptions of intimate partner violence and community engagement. Among these 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant women, their critique of

violence did not diminish this silent crisis, but rather criticized it. Women rejected the notion of it as simply a silent crisis by referring to intimate partner violence as the taboo topic that was supported by larger social institutions, particularly the larger community.

Whether the discussion revolved around intimate partner violence or the daily lives of Arab women, a common theme that developed was that women constantly self-sacrificed. Children were the most common reason to sacrifice health, security, and happiness. Parents, extended families and their spouses were also included in explanations of sacrifice. In the Arab World, custody rights and laws differ from those that exist in U.S. society, with men granted custody of their children most often when divorce occurs. Yet, the same Arabic culture dictated that women were the primary caretaker of children, revealing one of many contradictions within the culture. When women reflected on Arabic culture, explanations revolved around the burden of losing their children, which prevented women from leaving marriages, including violent relationships, regardless of social location. Aminah explained the sacrifice held by women:

And even sometimes the men...don't get me wrong, even sometimes the men are put into that situation but I feel like in our culture, majority of the time, its women and they do, they do. They sacrifice a lot for their children.

Even in situations where men had custody rights of the children, women believed that the primary caretaker became the grandmothers, removing men from the same sacrificial burdens placed on women and shifting it to their mothers, sacrificing their golden years. Eman explained when asked about men as caretakers of children in the culture:

I can't say that for all men, but the majority of men that I know that are divorced, their mom takes care of their kids. Because they're the men. They shouldn't have to clean and cook and how are they gonna wipe their kids ass? When my daughter goes there (her dad's home), her dad doesn't take care of her, it's his mother.

For men, decisions of divorce did not involve the same sacrifices that women made. In the Arab world, custody benefited them; the sacrifices that would be made as a single father were

alleviated by the sacrifices of a grandmother who stepped in as a primary caretaker. Some of the women saw laws in the U.S. as catastrophic to cultural norms, insisting that men would use cultural norms to dissuade women from collecting child support or legally obtaining custody arrangements. Six of the women were divorced with children. Of the six, only two had court ordered custody arrangements and child support. Two received inconsistent financial and social support and the last two received no form of support. In the U.S., women may have greater advantages and possibly fear custody issues less, but sacrifices merely shifted from fear of losing their children to fear of their children growing up in broken homes. Aya discussed how children were important in the decision making process when contemplating divorce:

I made my marriage work from the beginning when it was miserable cuz my son. I would go to my parents' house and they'd be like, you have this kid and you can't give him this life. Then I would go back for my son and I feel like, like I said, I'm a totally different situation...it became so much better for me, like it's...I mean hamdillah (praise God), I can't complain, he's amazing you know?

Aya acknowledged that she was never confronted with abuse, but referenced children when she discussed her friend who was physically and emotionally abused by her husband:

She went back, with her daughters... I'm like 'okay, listen. You can't go back and question though. You're going back willingly. You're not gonna trust him. You're never gonna trust him...if you're going back because you're struggling and...for your kids, then you go back.' She didn't go back for love. She didn't.

Aminah explained reasons for staying in abusive relationships similarly as she spoke about her friend who was abused:

He apologized and that's what always seems to happen and women, because of their children say, I don't want to put them through this, they're too young, they have so much going on, they need us both there, that they end up doing that.

But for many women, self-sacrifice meant tarnishing their image and accepting divorce. Suzan, who was victimized by her ex-husband multiple times in front of her children, spoke of the fear she had in walking away and what it would do to her and her kids when she left:

He would tell me, who's going to take you with two kids. How was I gonna support myself. He made good money. I didn't know what to do...but it got so bad and he hit me in front of my kids and scared them. That day I said I don't care if I sleep in the street and everyone sees me, as long as I'm away from you.

Self-sacrifice also stemmed from the toll a divorce would have on parents. Joanna, abused by her husband before he finally left her, spoke about how she was concerned over her mother's health:

My sister witnessed a few times of him abusing me and I told her don't tell mom. I don't want my mom to be like...hurt, in the words of having a heart attack or something. So I told Maya, if you ever tell mom, I'll never talk to you again.

Joanna was willing to accept her fate and face the abuse rather than risk the adverse effects it would have had on her mother if she found out. Keeping violence a secret was a reality that most women acknowledged, indicating that shame and embarrassment prevented women from speaking up. However, it was not just secrecy, but the denial of family members and friends when they saw signs of abuse. Joanna discussed how she came from a family of seven siblings, but only one sister noticed the abuse; her mother ignored clear signs:

We were supposed to go to my sister's house. We didn't end up going, so she came over. My hair was all messed up, my shirt was ripped. And you can obviously...my face, I was crying. She didn't even ask me what was wrong. I don't know. I think she just really overlooked things, I really do and I told her 'mom, I think you overlook things'. She never even seen it. She never saw it.

Nuha explained the way individuals overlooked violence as denial within the community: "They're in denial about certain things. There's no such thing as depression, no such thing as anger management, no such thing as therapy." Nuha stressed that denying violence occurs because it's expected for men to be aggressive and the community just denied that it could ever escalate. Secrecy within intimate partner violence incidents was clearly shunned as women spoke about how individuals should speak up but at the same time continued to engage in the same cycle instinctively and without recognition. As Aminah finished telling a story of domestic

violence she was aware of, I asked if her friend still experienced abuse presently: “Verbally, yes. Physically, it hasn’t been mentioned in a very long time, so, I mean, I’m assuming it hasn’t.”

Although the women varied in their descriptions of Arabic culture, they all included narratives of self-sacrifice, marriage, hospitality, strength and personal responsibility. They redefined the gendered representations of Arab women, but without dismantling gender norms. Women described their lives in autonomous ways, reflecting that individual choices drove their own behavior and not social structures. However, when referring to others, they acknowledged social forces that influenced the decision making process for victims of intimate partner violence.

In this study, beliefs about honor were central in family structures in Arab society. Acts of selflessness, self-sacrifice, obedience, and forms of modesty all ensured that Arab women upheld the honor of themselves and their family. Any acts that deviated away from cultural expectations potentially tarnish the honor of a woman and her family. Family members feared the potential damage if community members were to have knowledge of deviant acts. Honor in Arab society was maintained when a woman was not vulnerable to public ridicule or a reputation (Abu-Zahra 1970). I now turn to my analysis of reputation, a social reality that was tied to almost every aspect of a woman’s life. Reputation was the women’s main focus when they discussed intimate partner violence and decisions women would have to make if they were victims.

## CHAPTER 5: REPUTATION

A man carries his reputation at the bottom of his feet. He can do what he wants. It doesn't matter. And then he gets married and he's good. –Eman

The women's narratives in this study illustrated the gendered nature of reputation in Arabic culture by focusing on gendered language, the obligation to maintain their reputation, women and men's reputation, familial reputation and the reputation of larger networks and communities. Although reputation as a social construct impacts the behavior of both men and women, the gendered nature of reputation reveals itself in discussions surrounding divorce and incidents of abuse as women stand to lose so much more if their reputation is damaged. Most women agreed that single and divorced women must carefully guard their reputation because it can prevent them from remarrying, still an important, if not most important goal for most women. This chapter focuses on reputation and how it is found in the everyday language, behavior, and decision making processes of the women. From individual reputations to those affecting larger families and villages, reputation as a social construct is a powerful mechanism that reinforces cultural norms and behaviors, impacting decisions surrounding abuse.

### GENDERED LANGUAGE

Social customs pertaining to modesty, behavior, dress code and social life all govern and reify the social construction of reputation (Hajj-Yahia 2002). Within the Arabic language, gendered words are used instinctively and without much forethought that indirectly perpetuates the importance of reputation, especially among women. One of the most insulting statements you can attack a man with does not involve emasculating him by referring to him as a woman, but rather pertains to the women in his family and their womanhood, using their biological genitalia to insult him. Women in the Arab world are not typically referred to as a *mara*, (woman), but a *sit*, (lady), which emphasizes her social standing and not her biological makeup. To refer to a



woman as *mara* strips her of her social standing; referring to her female organs is to state that someone is worthy of little to no respect (Abu-Zahra 1970). Honor and reputation become a shared experience by all members of a family, but upheld mostly by women. The burden of responsibility may also fall on men, but mainly as social protectors and dictators of women's behaviors. In this study, all the women expressed this view.

### *Emphasis on Women*

Eman's use of the word (*'ard*) is an example of how discussions between individuals continue to recreate reputation. Eman described this word when talking about the care of women in Arabic culture when her father remarried and why she remained with her grandmother:

I wasn't theirs in a sense. To my grandmother I was like fragile cargo because I was someone else's *'ard* (responsibility). *'Ard* is like...like I'm a female, that fragile cargo to help get to the point of getting married. Not just social, but religious. I am a *'ard*, you are a *'ard*, my daughter is my *'ard*. You have to steer women....you have to steer men too, but the term doesn't mean that.

When asked for the meaning of the word, Eman struggled to define it, but attributed it to women and young girls and those who were responsible for them. The Arabic term literally means 'to expose something' or to 'bring attention to,' best articulating Eman's descriptions of protecting ones (*'ard*). Eman explained that only women were described in this manner emphasizing how families guarded women as objects of honor. Exposing them meant exposing the family. Variations of the term can be found across the Arab region. In Egypt, the term (*'ard*) refers to the modesty of women. In Tunisia, the term stresses the honorable reputation of both men and women, even though women shoulder the responsibility of family honor (Abu-Zahra 1970).

Zahra used the term *satr* when describing the reputation guarded by women: "She was being so loud, I told her 'go, *satr halek, khalseeni minak*, go get married' ...I was being loud with her (laughing)." The term *satr* means 'concealment of scandals' (Abu-Zahra, 1970) and *halek*

means you. The context that Zahra used it in involved a woman with an outspoken personality and indicates the social responsibility of others over her behavior when she states, '*khalseeni minak* (let me be done with you).' Although the example she used was not serious, she implied the guardianship individuals had over women and the risk they ran when not behaving in appropriate manners. When Joanna was asked to define the word, she described it by referencing dress code and personality and not necessarily illicit, sexual, or immoral behavior:

When I tell you to *satr halek*...cover up. If your chest is showing or you're wearing booty shorts...cover up. It also means settle down if you're being too wild, acting all crazy, showing off. It means get it together, settle down.

Yara saw the term as specific to just dress code:

In the way we use it, our slang, it's just dress code. Telling a man to put a shirt on, or telling a girl to cover up. It's always dress. We don't use it about scandal.

Even though she became aware that the term meant concealment of scandal, she dismissed it as an inaccurate portrayal of how it is used. Other women suggested that behavior which necessitated using that word hindered the possibility of marriage, a good reputation, and future. Although *satr* can be used to address immoral behavior of both men and women, women were quick to explain the differences as Mina describes what immoral behavior can do for a woman:

It can prevent a girl from getting married to somebody that might treat her right, but to others who don't care about a girl's reputation...like...players. Staying out till two in the morning, you're the only girl that's still out. Leaving your house in the middle of the night... everybody would know...it embarrasses the parents.

Eman explained when considering the term *satr* and its emphasis on men:

We tell men '*satr 'ala 'ardak*', keep your girls in their honor. Don't act in a way that ruins their honor. For girls, it's for their own honor. It's different for guys and girls. I told you, he carries his reputation on his foot.

*Emphasis on Men*

The context in which reputation was discussed among participants primarily related to women, but the reputation of men was discussed, albeit in gendered terms that articulated the link between reputation and women. The reputation of men involved the impact it would have on the women in their family, and how men are perceived when they are victimized by violence and as abusers. When asked about the reputation of men who were victims, the term primarily used was ‘pussy.’ Cultural expectations refused to accept conditions in which men were physically abused, as women stated that these types of situations could happen, but were rarely spoken about due to the embarrassment as Aya explained:

Come on, we barely talk about women getting abused, we are gonna talk about a man getting hit. They will laugh at him. Are you serious? Your letting your wife hit you and you don’t know what to do? You’re not a man.

Manal expressed similar sentiments about men and their reputation when he was hit by his wife by finding it comical and less serious:

I know women that have gone at it on their husbands...punked him out and popped him in the face (laughs). It’s not funny...I shouldn’t be laughing....ok, but it’s not like he didn’t deserve it. He hit first. Good for her (laughs).

All women acknowledged that men were laughed at when seen as victims, seen as a sissy, a pussy or less of a man. All but one woman stated that they believed abuse could happen with a woman as an abuser and stressed that it could be just as serious, but their laughter and facial expressions were indicative of gendered expectations. Just as Aya implied above, men were almost expected to hit back if their wives hit them. When asked if a woman should also hit back, all the women agreed, but hitting back was never a topic that was stressed when discussing victims who were women, as it was when discussing a man getting hit.

Cultural beliefs about reputation were largely attributed to the larger community by most women. But when women discussed the reputation of a man as an abuser, mixed feelings were

met when considering the larger culture. When discussing men as abusers, individual opinions were expressed and not larger cultural ones. Women were critical in their expressions of reputation of men who hit, claiming things have changed and men cannot get away with being an abuser and still marry, calling them “cowards” and “evil” for their behaviors. When asked about the larger cultural context that shape opinions and reputations of abusers, women varied, with some stating that an abusive man will always get by, regardless of what is said about him and others indicating that men will be unable to marry again if he’s known as an abuser.

The remainder of this chapter shows how Arab American women construct reputation as a burden of obligation and how it manifests in many forms as they considered expectations of women during marriage, divorce, and intimate partner violence. With IPV seen as taboo, and forms of therapy dismissed by community, the only option for victims was divorce. Yet it is mainly divorce that drives the severest forms of reputation, leaving victims of violence to choose between abuse and reputation, a social stigma that weaves its way into their daily lives.

#### THE FAMILY AND THE OBLIGATION TO BEHAVE

The kinship structures within Arab families extend beyond the nuclear family. Uncles, aunts, in-laws, cousins, nieces and nephews are bonded together to form larger family units that support each other and are stressed as a collective. For all women in this study, relocation to the U.S. did not disrupt the interdependence within family units. Eman, born in the United States, emphasized the collective nature of her family as she spoke of her family’s immigration story:

My grandmother’s sister was here back in the 40’s. So she bought us originally down...she was the main reason we all came here. But it was my great uncle, my grandmothers brother, that bought us down...that bought them down...I know, I keep saying us. I don’t know. I think I just incorporated myself with them.

Sarah explained the dependency on larger kinship structures, especially parents: “If my mom was home, I’d be working. It’s me or my mom that raises my children, no one else.” The collective

nature of Arab families, and the maintenance of kinship ties impacted the decision making process of individuals regarding education, work, marriage, where to live, divorce, children, death, and intimate partner violence incidents. All women gave example of how decisions were made that considered collective family units. Andrea described purchasing a home across the street from her parents because they did not want her living alone. Hanan described taking financial responsibility of her mother when she lost her job, allowing her brother to go away to school. Suzan described staying in her marriage to lessen the financial burden on her parents, who would also bear the financial burden if she lived as a single mother.

Collective decisions were also rooted in immigration stories. For many, the decision to immigrate to America included the social location of extended families as Aminah described:

It's not like we moved here for a better life or anything, just my mom's family was all here and she wanted to be close...she'd been away from them for long.

Kinship support can be found within stories of immigration and settling in the U.S.

When we moved here, the family had a house. It was one of my uncle's parents' homes, I guess. Or his father in law's home and he had passed and the family kept the house. It's one of those...kind of like when someone moves here...that would just be the house available to them to live in until they get situated.-Aminah

The power of family systems were reified as women tried removing themselves from the burdens of owing anyone. Personal burdens associated with such obligations were dismissed by discrediting family support and removing individuals from larger family obligations. Aminah justified her family's position when they arrived and created a sense of self sufficiency that removed them from the obligations of extended kinship structures:

We were financially stable, we really didn't need to stay there much longer. We found a house right away. We started going to school.... when we came, we came with cash. So we came with enough money to buy a home, to get our lives situated, to start a business and to kind of get...to get our lives started.

Her insistence that her nuclear family was self-sufficient and did not rely on extended help removed the burden of obligation from extended families and communities and redefined them around nuclear families. Aminah continued:

I just know I don't owe anyone anything but my parents and my husband and my son, no one else. No one really did anything for me, I don't owe them anything. My mother in law tries to impose rules on me, what did you ever do for me?

Joanna also tried to provide new accounts of who mattered when it came to obligation, but ended up recommitting to the larger collective unit:

I only have to answer to my mom. Did anybody else help me when I got divorced? So I have to answer to them? No thanks. But my mom always said, you live among them...my family...you have to listen to what they are saying when you don't like it. I owe everyone everything...damn.

Family units also provided support and encouragement of a marriage between two individuals. The reputation of a family was considered when women or men were chosen as potential spouses. Families provided a foundation for women to stand on as they entered marriage, but expected women to behave in a manner that positively reflects their family. These narratives remained important to the women, especially those who were mothers. Mothers discussed how their own lives shape their children's future, as Lama stated: "My daughter will marry someone who knows her father and mother are good people and she's a good person, so he better be one." Although women tried to disconnect from larger family structures, most stressed the importance of family units, with some reshaping who they were obligated towards.

It is these beliefs and the collective structure of Arab families that have reified the concept of reputation, a concept that shaped the views of women across time and space, albeit in new forms and expressions. The remainder of the chapter explains how reputation remained a pervasive social phenomenon within Arab American communities as women addressed individual reputations, the reputation of their children, their parents, their family name, their

village, their community and their religion and how each ultimately influenced a victim of intimate partner violence as she tried to escape a violent relationship.

## REPUTATION OF WOMEN

I couldn't say woman. You're not a woman. My grandmother put it in my head. I called my aunt a woman and she yelled at me. Because she didn't get married till she was older. "I'm not a woman, I'm still a virgin!" The word woman was attached to virginity. Like if you were a woman when you became a non-virgin. And you were a *bint*, a girl, while you were a virgin. –Eman

The construction of reputation was clearly attributed to the larger Arabic culture that impacted the daily lives of the participants living in the U.S. In any discussion of passing judgments or being held to particular standards, women expressed views in gendered terms. Ideas of reputation and the images of "bad" community members primarily involved sexual experiences and divorce. Even in the discussion of culture, it referenced the images of women and judgements passed on them, with many referring to judgments placed on them because they were "American", too modern, or too independent, making them unfit to be good choices for wives. Ideas of reputation have evolved within U.S. culture, but have not disappeared. Tina explained that her family decided to move away from the Dearborn community when she was older, but they restricted her in fear of becoming too American. Additionally she explained the emotional stress she faced when she married an African American man:

My mom didn't talk to me for years. Oh my God, she married a black guy. Can you imagine the reputation I would have. Then I divorced him (laughs). Now my reputation is I married a black guy and I got divorced. Imagine how I feel.

Aminah discussed the influence of U.S. culture on reputation:

The world has opened up to everything, the women are free with their bodies, are free with everything. If we marry a guy that hasn't done it, we worry that he's gonna wanna do it...have his fun. Now the women are living that role too, like oh, I'm gonna do it all now. The guy doesn't think like that now, the guy thinks she's gonna be raising my kids, how am I gonna go to work and trust her...I want a girl that respects herself...and this is what girls aren't thinking about.

In all the interviews, when women discussed reputation they all used gendered language indicating how reputation was a social concern for women. For instance, Manal stressed:

Men have never been up for judgment. That's never been the issue. Men have never been the issue. When did you ever look at a group of girls sitting around calling a guy a whore? It doesn't happen.

Similarly, Aminah argued that men do not face the same pressure to live up to reputation expectations. Rather, men contributed to the social manifestation of reputation in Arabic culture:

It's not that she's been touched, or she's garbage, it's just that guys have a vision. The first woman in their life is their mother...respectful, she's all theirs, so they want their wives to be the same. It is Arabic, because Americans are not like that.

Most women were adamant, if not argumentative, that reputation held little importance to them personally, but admitted it was a community issue. Cristina explained she was not concerned about her reputation growing up, but emphasized self-respect when making choices:

I never cared about reputation. My brothers always trusted me to do the right things. I cared about what I was doing for myself and not for what others think of me. I mean if I did something, I did it with respect for myself. I would never do anything that would take away from my self-respect.

However, there is a contradiction in these reflections. She clearly stated that reputation meant nothing to her, but simultaneously suggested that her brothers played a role in shaping her behavior, as she redefines decisions around her behavior. In this way, the women used positive terms such as self-respect instead of reputation, dismissing language that overshadowed consequences in decision making. So while women acknowledged that beliefs of reputation did not sit right with them because it was a judgement imposed, they still explained how women confronted reputation when dealing with divorce. They all believed divorce was more common place today, but the stigma associated with divorce was still prominent. Aminah articulated:

They feel like there's a shame that's brought to the family by a woman getting a divorce. Like, it's shameful to get a divorce. If you're a divorced woman, like,



what other man is gonna look at you, who's gonna want you, especially if you're a woman with children, then it's kind of like, who's gonna want the burden of your children, no one's gonna wanna raise your kids for you.

Although women stated that reputation was not something they considered in their personal lives, they accepted it as a social reality that could not be escaped. Like the other women, Aminah provided such examples but disconnected personally from forming such judgments on women. Some admitted to contributing to idle gossip that fueled reputation, but most denied contributing to the social manifestation of reputation.

The women most critical of the impact of reputation were those who experienced divorce. It was not just the shame, but the realities these women faced when other community members were entitled to provide opinions in such personal matters. Seven participants were divorced and all discussed the struggles they faced in the community as divorced women. Four of them were victims of abuse in their previous marriage. Divorced women expressed beliefs that they were better off after their divorce, especially those who were victims, but still feared the consequences of social stigma. Joanna, an abuse victim, explained how she handled her divorce:

What were people gonna say? This girl is out on the street, single with a daughter, she's easy now. I had to go live with my mom. And I was hit. He hit me. I should have left...like seriously, what is wrong with us? Why didn't I leave...I don't know. I was scared. It's scary...I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy.

Eman, also an abuse victim, shared how the stigma of divorce impacted the potential to move on.

Within Arabic culture, moving on was about getting remarried:

I am living the stigma. That you have someone else's problems. That the husband, the new husband not only has to like step on eggshells around your child, but also has to deal with it...it's not his burden to deal with. I'm living the stigma.

Women's identity and reputations were still framed by their marriage. Not living up to these community standards meant negative repercussions. Manal explained how gossip within the community and culture perpetuated these stigmas that women faced with divorce:

Everyone likes to talk. People are almost happy to hear others failed at their marriage. Maybe it's because we are pushing others to get married and marrying for the wrong reasons. Maybe the social pressure during their divorces were too much and hearing about it...makes us feel less lonely. It's fucked up.

Victims of violence faced these same cultural beliefs of shame, gossip, and reputation. Beliefs of divorce seemed to emotionally trump the harsh realities of violence initially. The social stigma associated with divorce was far more severe than being viewed by community members as a victim of violence. Victims of violence were adamant in how divorce was the best thing they ever did, but acknowledged the fear and anxiety they faced from divorce over how they coped with abusive relationships. Other divorced women shared the same sentiments, and expressed sadness at the added hardships victims of violence had to face on top of dealing with divorce. These women stressed that it was not just the stigma and reputation they faced as individuals, but the reputations of their families, including their kids, parents and extended family members.

#### THE IMPACT OF REPUTATION ON FAMILY

Most women I interviewed were critical of reputation, their tone and language varied when they addressed the impact reputation had on other family members. They all believed women can do what they wanted and should not fear what others say, except when discussions revolved around the impact a reputation could have on other family members. Women changed their views when it came to children, reiterating beliefs of self-sacrifice and behavior that contributed to the future and security of other family members. Victims of abuse and divorced women, who all happened to be mothers, described how their behaviors reflected on their children. For all women, it is the fear of reputation, which has evolved, leaving its mark on other family members that prevent women from walking away from abusive relationships. When women were asked why people stay in abusive relationships, the fear of divorce and reputation

was always addressed. The following narratives show, how that fear extends to the reputation of their children and parents.

It was not uncommon to hear the four women who were abused discuss their children when addressing their rationale for staying in relationships. This study adds a new element in which women fear the reputation of their children if women chose divorce. This occurred in two ways. First, girls raised without a father figure encouraged ideas of promiscuity and forms of independence that are uncommon in Arab culture. Second, children who came from broken homes were perceived to have a harder time finding a partner to marry. For instance, Joanna, a victim of abuse, discussed her anxiety for her young daughter because there was no father figure:

I feel like she's naïve and impressionable. She follows what people tell her to do. And doesn't have a father to help her, to show her how men are...to defend her. People will take advantage of that. And people will have an idea about her because they have an idea about me as divorced. And I know it's wrong to care about those judgments, but I don't want people to think that way about her.

Likewise, Zahra, a victim of abuse, expressed the reality of coming from a broken family and the impact it had on her. She was unwilling to do the same to her children:

I am a product of a divorced family. I went through a very dark phase in my life. I became very careless. I had no morals. I went out a lot, I dated a lot, I slept around a lot, I drank a lot. I didn't care. The only thing I had...I had a decent job that I used to wake up to every single day, that's it. Other than that, I had nothing.

Aya explained that her mother-in-law was victim of abuse but returned to her husband for her children's sake. Aya explained that when her husband wanted to marry her, her parents rejected the idea since he came from a broken home. Her parents assumed the pattern of behavior within her in-laws marriage would be repeated in her own. As a result, Aya's mother-in-law returned to her abusive relationship so her son could get married to Aya:

They ended up getting back together...one week and then the following week they came TOGETHER to our house and asked for my hand. She came back

because she realized, in our society, or you know, in our culture, people are gonna look at it and like, my daughter's gonna wanna get married one day.

Cultural expectations meant women must endure even abusive relationships to properly manage the reputation of their children's lives. Women considered the damage to their children's reputation when making decisions about divorce to deal with abuse. The mothers I interviewed were careful to not dismiss reputation when considering their child, particularly for their daughters. They desired to raise their daughters so that they respected themselves and did not have to worry about reputation, but this was not a dismissal of the impact reputation has in shaping lives. Those who were victims of violence discussed their abusive relationships in ways that protected the reputation of their children. For them, abuse became another form of self-sacrifice, viewing the ramifications of divorce as far more severe on their children.

Reputation also extended to parents and the family name. Given the solidarity, real or perceived, of Arab families and emphasis on mutual support, responsibility, and privacy, the family unit was expected to provide aid at times of personal distress. Family members are responsible for maintaining the social and personal conditions of all members, refusing outside help (Haj-Yahia 2002). The women I interviewed explained that if victims sought help, they went to her family, confirming dictates of Arab family structures. Incidents of violence and discussions of divorce not only threaten the image and reputation of the individual woman, but her immediate and extended family. Family provided the needed support, albeit for some, it was not in ways that helped to empower the women, expecting the woman to maintain a respectable image without giving them a bad name. When confronted with ideas of divorce, women understood that their personal failure to keep a marriage together was also a reflection on their mothers, who failed to educate daughters properly on being a "proper housewife," even in the face of abuse. Joanna, an abuse victim discussed the image of her mother when she divorced:

My mom couldn't just let me live on the streets. It's not like I was gonna be homeless, saying we live on the streets is like we are out there as women, alone. Imagine what they would say about my mom. Look how she's letting her daughter live. Men are probably coming in and out of her house.

The women articulated that intimate partner violence created additional tensions as the family faced a reputation of failing to properly support their daughters. Suzan stated:

My dad struggled with it. He pressured me to marry him because he thought it was the right thing for me. It ended badly and he struggled with it. *Haram* (pity), look how her dad's choices messed up her life. He struggled with it a lot.

Families were not only responsible for providing aid and support to women in times of marriage and divorce, but were impacted emotionally by the stigmas of reputation since behaviors were based on proper upbringings.

#### REPUTATION OF FRIENDS/SOCIAL SUPPORT IN CASES OF VIOLENCE

The women in this study condemned intimate partner violence, but they also revealed how reputation extended to individuals who tried to help. They women agreed victims should be helped, but stressed how others, would fear the negative repercussions on their reputation. Women were clear that their friends and family would try to dissuade them. Women expressed that the social stigma related to divorce was strong and helping someone would only hurt you.

I knew this girl...she tried to help her friend...her husband was cheating, verbally abusing her, all of it. Told her to leave, bought her PROOF that he was cheating. The girl stayed with him. He found out what the friend was saying. He got angry...she's trying to break up our marriage! She's a homewrecker! All this stuff about her. They don't talk any more. Best friends. -Aya

Women explained how individuals who tried to help were told to 'stay out of it', were considered "troublemakers" and were "breaking up families." This was common even in cases of violence. The pressure to remain neutral was a reality for all women, regardless of the circumstances. The social stigma related to encouraging divorce was equivalent to getting divorced, even if women were victims of abuse. Andrea described:

My parents would tell me to not get involved. It isn't anyone's business. I can't imagine being responsible for the breakup of two people...I guess when they are hit...maybe, but you just don't involve yourself, cuz what if she wants to stay.

All women expressed that friends played an important role in helping victims of violence and those who wanted to get divorced, but only if the victim asked. Asking was essential for anyone to commit to helping. Single women and married women who were never divorced were more likely to state that when a victimized friend asks for help, it removed the burden of responsibility off of them. The fear of destroying a marriage and garnering a reputation for it was removed when help was requested. Other than that, emotional support was the extent of help without damaging images among community members. Women who were victims maintained that asking for help was embarrassing as they feared their own reputation. All women agreed that it was this type of convoluted situation that prevented victims of violence from getting the help they needed. Only one participant expressed her direct willingness to help victims. In doing so, Yara, a divorced woman, challenged beliefs of reputation:

I don't care what others say. I've been divorced. I would help. He's hitting you, get out. I will pick you up and get you out. I will call the cops for you. I don't care. No one should care. I'll call the cops if he comes near me too. I don't get scared of their talk. What are they doing to help?

Mina explained how social agencies in the community that were established to help victims of domestic violence now had a reputation of breaking up families:

It's not like they go out and actively search for victims. The victims come to them for help. And I'm sure it's the family of the abuser and the abuser who is starting the gossip about them breaking up families. But it's not right. They are actually helping and these ideas hurt their ability to help victims.

Women were unwilling to state that they conformed to ideas of reputation but their narratives prove otherwise, as they discuss children, parents and support of friends who are abused. They

did acknowledge the social construct as pressing issue for victims of violence. They were aware of how it impacted both victims and those who tried to help them.

How reputation manifested in the social lives of women did not begin and end with personal behavior. Although women began discussing reputation by describing deviant behavior (e.g. promiscuity, and dating numerous individuals), it would later extended beyond individual behavior. Women discussed the gendered language that reiterated the stress on women to maintain their honor, the obligations to extended families to maintain that honor, and the coercive side effects a woman's reputation can have on children and family members. Using the social stigma of divorce as the driving example of how reputation impacted women, their narratives provided the social constraints victims of violence face when they attempt to leave abusive relationships. Those who attempted to help victims also threaten their own reputation as women explained it was safer to remain uninvolved. All the women articulated their personal desires to rid themselves of the social construct of reputation, but their narratives of social structures, the larger community, reflected that they saw it as beyond their control. Reputation as a cultural belief and construct followed the women across time and space. Acculturation and social location helped women criticize forms of reputation, but failed to dismantle it.

## CHAPTER 6: THE U.S. VS. “MY COUNTRY”

When I originally proposed this study, my intention was to examine how women’s views on intimate partner violence were shaped by varying levels of assimilation. I planned to address assimilation with questions revolving around decision making processes with regard to their relationship with their fathers and husbands, household chores and celebration of cultural holidays such as Christmas or Ramadan. However, as the interviews took place, assimilation revealed itself in the perceptions women had of their ethnic identity in the Arab world, in U.S. culture, and within their own community. Women had varying opinions on the Arab world and in how they explained differences between themselves and individuals overseas. These ideas created new ways in which women perceived IPV, especially when socially locating individuals.

Many participants were quick to describe families/individuals in the Arab world as “simple” and “family oriented”. Their lack of resources and social conditions allowed them to remain traditional and unhinged by mass consumption and materialism. Aminah explained differences between families in the U.S. and families in the Arab world based on material possession, stating they struggled to pay for education, work and secure better futures, using U.S. culture to describe success by consumption, luxury lives and materialism. In contrast, Joanna saw her counterparts in the Arab world as more materialist and shallow who constantly watched what she wore and how she looked:

In Lebanon, I would wake up and keep my pajama pants on with a T-shirt to go get coffee and I would just sit on the balcony and everyone else had a damn full face on. Makeup, hair, everything. I was like what the hell. And when I would get dressed they would ask me for the name brand. Seriously. I don’t care.

It is these contrasting opinions about the Arab world and U.S. society that shaped how women saw intimate partner violence in the Arab world. Those who visited the Arab world



frequently and saw social conditions directly were more likely to address these conditions when accounting for IPV. Lama stated that women in the Arab world had nowhere to turn or go:

Their families are poor, they can't take them in. They don't work. They can't support themselves. They're gonna lose their kids. They have nowhere to go. They have to just deal with it. Seriously, it's not like their families don't want to help, but sometimes they can't. They aren't rich, they get by.

These same women, like Aminah, critically stated that intimate partner violence was now discussed on a larger media platform as families have begun to speak out about the injustices their daughters faced, regardless of being well connected. Money, political, and social connections no longer posed a threat to victims of violence, as men once used these connections to stay out of jail and remain unpunished for violent behaviors. Men now faced the consequences and the old method of sweeping it under the rug seemed less prevalent. Big name celebrities and politicians now addressed the issue in similar manners that could be found in U.S. society. Although Aminah could not recall any specific programs, she indicated that specific news shows in Lebanon addressed violence. Women who visited the Arab world frequently were more likely to address economic conditions of women in the Arab World when discussing violence, using the conditions to explain how violence in the Arab world is difficult to confront.

In contrast, Randa, Yara and Leila made no claims on the impact of violence in the Arab world, citing that they simply did not know enough to speak on the matter. All three women had families that had lived in the U.S. for many years and had very little connection to their families back in Lebanon. Yara also addressed her concern that the study was making Arabs look bad, potentially triggering her lack of response when considering Arab society. These women were likely to discuss intimate partner violence more broadly, referring to it as a global issue that impacts many cultures and not just Arab culture. It did not change their views on beliefs of

reputation, secrecy or shame and how they impacted violence in a marriage, but they refused to make definitive statements about Arab society and IPV.

When discussing U.S. culture, women's reconciliations of the two cultures varied. The family as a social structure in the Arab world is partly defined by worldviews and society that exists outside of kinship structures, including amoral and unreliable institutions (Abraham and Shyrock, 2000). Independence, individual interests, relationships with non-kin that are common ideas within the dominant white, middle-class U.S. culture, are discouraged. Women also struggled to explain U.S. culture, many using terms such as "no culture" or a culture of "doing what you want, when you want." Some used descriptions of freedom and independence while others provided examples of sexual encounters, alcohol, and partying. Others described U.S. culture as the entrance to mass consumption, money, and greed. It was these beliefs about U.S. culture that drove perceptions on intimate partner violence, with most of the women claiming that non-Arab, American women were more likely to call the cops on abusive husbands because they were disconnected from their families and led very independent lives. They all saw themselves as different from non-Arab women in U.S. society, indicative in the language used to describe non-Arab Americans as 'American'. When referring to non-Arabs, all the women used the term 'American', separating the two groups. It wasn't about their ties to their ethnic group that caused them to do it, but the constant need to prove their ethnicity and ties by distancing themselves from what made them different.

Women recognized that U.S. culture allowed women to get support from laws that helped them escape violent situations. They believed that women were no longer facing fears of losing their children, even though these women still carried the burden of finding someone else that would be willing to 'put up with' raising her children, reaffirming that women's identity is tied

to men. They also admitted that women in the U.S. who were not Arab were more likely to call the cops than Arab American women. For many, calling the cops was not necessarily out of the question, but it was difficult to answer the questions when it related to their own kin. Randa admitted that she would not be upset if the cops were called on her son, but would not provide direct support: “I’m not gonna go dial for her or stand by her in court, no. But I would get it.”

#### ACCULTURATION AND SINGLE FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS

Four women in this study grew up in single parent households, none of which experienced any form of co-parenting. Lama and Joanna lost their fathers while they were both under the age of 10. Zahra’s parents divorced when she was 2 years old and she did not maintain a relationship with her father. Eman’s parents divorced when she was 9 months old. Her mother returned to live in Egypt, leaving Eman to be raised by her paternal grandmother. All four women experienced varying forms of violence within their previous marriages or relationships.

There was a connection to how exposed their parents were to U.S. culture and their subsequent upbringing that manifested in how they dealt with violence. Lama’s mother was younger when she immigrated to the U.S. and had also lost her own mother at a young age. Fluent in English, she worked for most of her life after her husband died. Her ability to live independently allowed her to provide strong support to her daughter especially during an incident of violence that Lama experienced with a man who wanted to marry her:

My mom literally went to his parent’s house with me and said ‘no thanks, it’s not gonna work out with my daughter and your son...he won’t put his hands on her.’ And it was done for me. My mom would never allow it. Maybe it’s because she’s been through so much and she was able to do it on her own.

Lama’s experience differed from the other three women in her refusal to accept any form of violence, exiting the relationship without further thought. Zahra’s mother was divorced twice and lived most of her life in the U.S. She also spoke fluent English, but was not the role model Zahra

envisioned for herself and her siblings, failing to provide the emotional support and forms of love that Zahra desired. Zahra explained that she married and wanted stability in her life and wanted to be the mother that she never had. She described her incident with violence:

I die on my husband. But don't touch me. I won't leave because of my kids. I won't do to them what my mom did to me. But you hit me, I hit back. I won't go down without a fight. They had to pull us off each other. YOU WANT TO TOUCH ME! Ok, let's see how this works, at least I'll go down getting one hit.

Zahra insisted that her upbringing made her fight back, and allowed her to survive. She knew she could do it on her own but did not want to, allowing her to fight back as needed. She admitted that her mom's upbringing and background were a reflection on how she behaved even though she wished her mom had more traditional values when it came to raising her children.

Joanna's mom arrived in the U.S. later in life with four of her children born in Lebanon and three here in the U.S. Her mother spoke no English and was forced to work after her husband died. Her struggles as a single parent reinforced traditional values related to reputation and gendered expectations, as it was the breakdown of her family that led to struggles. Although she encouraged her children to go to school and play sports, she also raised her daughters to conform to rigid gender norms that including obedience and respect towards their husbands. Joanna insisted that she grew up very independent and strong, using her sports background as the context of driving her motivations and behaviors. Her husband was physically and emotionally abusive and Joanna refused to leave fearing the impact on her family and life:

I already came from a single home. My father wasn't around. My mom did it on her own. My brothers moved out of state. He hit me, hit me, hit me and I couldn't leave. I couldn't. My mom kept telling me to work it out for my daughter. I don't think she wanted me to struggle financially like she did.

Joanna insisted that because her mother was a single parent, she knew the difficulties single mothers faced in the community. She referenced her mother's struggle as context in her own

decision making when she faced abuse, regardless of the fact that she was fluent in English, educated, and had worked in professional settings, unlike her mother.

Eman was raised by her maternal grandmother after her mom moved overseas when Eman was 9 months old. A lack of a mother figure meant that much of Eman's life was dictated by her father and her grandmother who never assimilated into U.S. society. Her grandmother spoke no English, never worked, was extremely strict, and spent most of her life as a housewife. Eman's experience with violence was physical, verbal and emotional. She admitted that she was not only abused by her ex-husband, but by his parents and brother. She indicated that lack of guidance from her own mother caused her to remain in the abusive relationship for so long. Her decision to leave was based on social networks she made later in life that helped her. The four women all experienced violence in different ways, confronting it based on their upbringing and the role of their own mothers. The more assimilated their mother was, based on employment and English fluency, the more likely women fought against violence.

By explaining differences between the Arab World and U.S. society in various ways, the women showed how varying social experiences, conditions, and potential misconceptions can impact women's perception of violence across two distinctly different cultures. Descriptions of both societies suggested that Arab American women view themselves outside of Arab society and American society, conforming to specific cultural standards from each region that fits their needs while analyzing the other against those standards. This was seen in descriptions of abuse, as women were willing to use custody and child support laws but refused to involve law enforcement in domestic disputes. Forms of acculturation and personal experiences were most vivid in descriptions of victims who came from single parent household, providing insight into how individual actions and reactions to violence are influenced by forms of acculturation.

## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine how women navigated through two distinct cultural narratives to shape their views on intimate partner violence. I wanted to explore if acculturation allowed women to redefine gendered descriptions that were rooted in Arabic culture and how these descriptions contributed to their understanding of intimate partner violence. Using Arabic culture as the main context, I argued that Arab American women continued to recreate rigid cultural norms by stressing cultural forces related to family, honor, and reputation that are beyond their control. At the same time, women emphasized their autonomous position within U.S. society to criticize those same social forces, creating conditions that reshaped how they dealt with violence and gender norms, but without dismantling the larger social structures.

Contradictory beliefs and behaviors were found as women stressed their independence in decision making while conforming when considering their families and community. Critical changes in behaviors were individually based, with larger structural norms remaining intact. Their individual ideas and behaviors contradicted common narratives surrounding women in the Arab World while their conformity to gendered behaviors when accounting for larger communities and families reified rigid gender descriptions. Addressing intimate partner violence forced women to confront larger cultural structures that shape women's lives. Women who were not victimized by violence struggled to make sense of these cultural forces, but reverted to them to explain violence. The women saw themselves as individuals who were independent of the influence of cultural norms, but could only explain violence using cultural norms. It was women who were victims of violence that acknowledged the same forces without hesitation. They stressed that forces were beyond their control and in order to create change, cultural norms had to be dismantled. These women did not offer solutions, but were reflective in their own role in

perpetuating beliefs concerning self-sacrifice, reputation and secrecy. By analyzing gendered depictions of Arabic culture and the social construct of reputation, this study contributes to feminist studies in three ways.

First, the examination of Arabic culture and the burden Arab women carry to maintain the culture adds to the scholarship on patriarchy and gender beliefs when accounting for intimate partner violence. Patriarchal structures restrict women in society to roles as housewife and mother and emphasize their passive and dependent nature and use the home as the platform for power struggles and maintenance of rigid gender norms, creating conditions that justify violence to maintain oppression. Descriptions of hospitality, the symbolic nature of women in Arab culture, and narratives of self-sacrifice, struggle, marriage, and motherhood unveil the ways in which Arab American women reinforce patriarchal structures.

Second, this study contributes to scholarship on intimate partner violence that addresses individual attributes and immigrant women. Although this study does not account for immigration status, Arab American women shed light on stressful cultural conditions that ensure they remain Arab, maintaining a distance from what it means to be an American, adding a new dimension to studies on immigrant women. Arab Americans provide a critical example into how racial classifications hide the experiences of certain ethnic groups, shielding proper statistics.

Third, rather than being passive individuals that are constrained by cultural forces, Arab American women exercise agency that allows them to step away from cultural expectations and describe their conditions when discussing intimate partner violence, contributing to scholarship on Arab American feminisms by emphasizing the intersection of ethnicity and gender. These women show that ethnic identities remain intact, even as 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants, and need to be considered when accounting for IPV. Women rarely, if ever, discuss violence using just

gender as the causes of violence. Women are able to reconstruct gender issues that have changed over time as a result of immigration, acculturation and cultural forces.

This study contributes theoretically to feminist scholarship on intimate partner violence and immigrant groups. Arab American women's perceptions on IPV may offer new insights to the feminist framework concerning patriarchal structures, and the intersections of ethnicity and gender. The results of this study provide insight for researchers and advocates on immigrant women that could help them address violence among Arab American immigrant groups.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

This study has contributed to the understanding of Arab American women's perception of intimate partner violence by addressing the complexities of gender, reputation and perceptions of Arabic and U.S. culture. This study addressed the unique social location of these women as they described how the ethnic community allows them to retain cultural norms. Future research could include further analysis of data to understand how women think about intimate partner violence within a U.S. cultural context and how their marginalized position impacts how they deal with violence. Further research will be helpful to assess whether assimilation plays a central role in shifting attitudes or whether it is simply access to social services agencies, protection by certain laws and less rigid patriarchal structures that give rise to new attitudes. Similarly, stereotypes surrounding Arab Americans fueled conversations surrounding incidents of violence within Arab American communities and present direction for future research. A comparative analysis would be useful to describe the role of religion in the shaping of intimate partner violence incidents. Although I was unable to recruit enough Arab Christians to find emerging themes, those I did recruit discussed their religious identity as one that allowed them to break rigid gender norms that are common in the Arab world, describing Islam as the main source of gender oppression. In



contrast, Arab Muslim women indicated that Islam was a progressive, just faith when it came to the treatment of women and indicated that larger cultural structures reinforced gender rules. Last, comparisons across sociodemographic information could drive future articles, as data could be examined using education, income and employment, marital status and motherhood as comparative variables to examine perceptions.

## APPENDIX A

### *Interview Guide*

This interview guide is a part of a study I am conducting through Wayne State University to explore the perceptions of Arab American women in the city of Dearborn with regard to domestic violence. I believe your input will be valuable to this research as an Arab American woman who was raised by Arab immigrant parents in U.S. society. This interview should last approximately 1-2 hours. First, I will ask you some questions about your background. Then, we will speak about domestic violence with respect to the Arab world and the U.S. Throughout the interview, I will also ask about your family and the community you live in. This interview will be recorded. There are two copies of a consent form, one for you to look over and sign if everything looks good. I have signed both copies. The other copy is for you to retain in your records. Do you have any questions before we begin this interview?

### **Background**

*Before we talk about domestic violence, I was hoping to learn about your background and where you and your family come from.*

1. Can you tell me about yourself? Your family? Immigration story?
  - a. Were you born here? Who you live with? Can you tell me why your family came here?
2. Can you tell me about your extended family here? And in your native country?
3. How important is it for your family to stay in the U.S.? Why do they choose to stay here?
  - a. Probe: How important is it that they stay in Dearborn?
4. Can you speak about the person who is in charge of your family?
  - a. Probe: Who makes family decisions?
5. How does the structure of your family, when considering the decision maker or the person in charge, differ from families in the Arab World?

### **Domestic Violence/Arab World**

*I would like to talk about your opinion about domestic violence, generally and specifically with respect to your "home" country.*

6. When you think about domestic violence, what does it mean to you?
  - a. Probe: What kinds of situations do you think represent domestic violence?
  - b. Do you know anyone who has ever been a victim of domestic violence? Could you tell me about that situation? What happened?
7. When you think about your home country, how is domestic violence dealt with?
  - a. Personal family issue? Larger social concern?

8. Tell me about situations of domestic violence in the Arab world? Who is the victim? Who is to blame? Why?
9. How do you think ideas about women's and men's roles in society are connected to domestic violence in the Arab world?
10. How does Arabic culture/society explain domestic violence and what role does it play in perpetuating violence?
11. How is religion involved?
  - a. Can you explain to me the difference between Arabic culture and religion?
  - b. What role does Islam play in perpetuating or stopping violence?
12. Why do you think women primarily go to family for help? In what ways do you believe family helps?
  - a. Which family member does she usually go to and why?
  - b. When is she allowed to seek help outside her family?
13. In what ways do you think domestic violence impacts a family's reputation, if others know about it?
14. How does secrecy apply within culture when considering domestic violence?
15. How do you think people in the U.S. view domestic violence within the Arab world?

### **Family Dynamics**

*Before we continue our discussion on domestic violence, I want to shift and talk about your own family*

16. In what ways does your family try to keep the cultural norms that are common to families in the Arab world?
  - a. Probe: Holidays? American holidays? How have things changed?
17. Can you describe the different kinds of responsibilities and tasks your family members had as you were growing up?
  - a. Probe: For example, who was typically responsible for making the meals? Breadwinner? Chores?
  - b. How did your chores differ from your brother?
18. When you think about growing up, what kinds of rules did you have to abide by?
  - a. Who enforced the rules? How were they enforced? What happened if you broke a rule?
19. How did the rules change as you grew up?
  - a. When you think about forming your own family, how do you think everyday tasks and rules will be similar? How might they be different?
20. How does Arabic culture influence these roles in the U.S.?
  - a. In what ways do you think your family responsibilities and tasks and the way you live would have been different if you lived in your native country?
  - b. How do you think things have changed since your family moved to the U.S.?

21. In what ways do you feel like your family or friends or even coworkers have experienced discrimination or stereotyping or the U.S.?
  - a. Can you provide an example?
22. In what ways do you think Arab Americans stereotype other Arab Americans?
  - a. How do think these experiences differ for men and women?

### **Domestic Violence/U.S.**

*We talked earlier about domestic violence in the Arab World. I want to shift now and speak about it again but with respect to U.S. society.*

23. Can you tell me about situations of domestic violence in the U.S.? How is it explained?
  - a. Probe: Who is victim? Who is to blame? Who is source of help?
  - b. How is that different from victims in the Arab world?
24. At what point do you think the police should be involved? Could you describe any incidents that you personally know or have heard about when the police became involved in a domestic dispute?
25. How do you think growing up as a woman in the U.S. is different than in the Arab world?
26. In what way do you think women's and men's expected roles in the U.S. is tied to violence in the U.S.?
27. How has growing up in the U.S. changed the way your culture/religion has shaped the discussion on domestic violence?
28. Can you talk about a time where an experience of domestic violence was talked about between friends or peers?
  - a. How was the exchange different from conversations that would possibly happen in the Arab world?
  - b. Is it seen as worrisome? In what way?
29. We talked earlier about discrimination and stereotypes. In what ways do stereotypes influence domestic violence and the way it is dealt with among Arab Americans?
  - a. Does reporting violence perpetuate stereotypes?
30. Are there any other issues Arab American victims of violence face that isn't shared by victims in the Arab world?
31. What would you do if a victim of violence was your relative?
32. How do you think a violent situation should be handled if it was your father/brother/son?
33. Given the narrative you provided about Arab women and domestic violence do you think that incidents of domestic violence have changed or ever change within the Arabic culture?

## APPENDIX B

**Sociodemographic Information**

Interview ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

The information you provide will be used for research purposes only. Your responses will remain confidential. You have the right to not answer any or all of the questions.

Year of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

**Marital Status:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Single	<input type="checkbox"/> Married	<input type="checkbox"/> Divorced	<input type="checkbox"/> Widowed	<input type="checkbox"/> Other specify: _____
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If married, please indicate the year you were married: \_\_\_\_\_

If divorced, please indicate the following: Year married: \_\_\_\_\_ Year divorced: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please indicate the primary language spoken at home:**

<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> Arabic	<input type="checkbox"/> Other specify: _____
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**Please indicate your fluency in speaking Arabic:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Proficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate	<input type="checkbox"/> Beginner	<input type="checkbox"/> Do not speak Arabic
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**Please indicate your fluency in reading/writing Arabic:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Proficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate	<input type="checkbox"/> Beginner	<input type="checkbox"/> Do not speak Arabic
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**Please indicate the primary language spoken by your parents:**

<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> Arabic	<input type="checkbox"/> Other specify: _____
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**Please indicate your mother's fluency in speaking English:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Proficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate	<input type="checkbox"/> Beginner	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not speak English
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**Please indicate your father's fluency in speaking English:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Proficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate	<input type="checkbox"/> Beginner	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not speak English
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*The following questions relate to your occupation (if applicable)*

Are you currently employed? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

What type of work do you do? \_\_\_\_\_

How many hours of paid employment do you work on average in a typical week (on average)?

<input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 20 hours	<input type="checkbox"/> 20-30	<input type="checkbox"/> 31-40
<input type="checkbox"/> 41-50	<input type="checkbox"/> 51-60	<input type="checkbox"/> 61-70	<input type="checkbox"/> 71+

What is your highest education completed?

<input type="checkbox"/> Some High School	<input type="checkbox"/> High School	<input type="checkbox"/> GED or Equivalent	<input type="checkbox"/> Some College	<input type="checkbox"/> Associate's Degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's Degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Master's Degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional Degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Doctorate Degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: Specify _____

Your income scale:

<input type="checkbox"/> No earned income outside of home	<input type="checkbox"/> Under \$9,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000-\$19,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20,000-\$29,999
<input type="checkbox"/> \$30,000-\$39,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$40,000-\$49,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000-\$59,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$60,000-\$69,000
<input type="checkbox"/> \$70,000-\$79,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$80,000-\$89,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$90,000-\$99,999	<input type="checkbox"/> Over \$100,000

The following questions are about your partner/spouse (if applicable):

How many hours a week does your partner/spouse work (on average)?

<input type="checkbox"/> 35-40	<input type="checkbox"/> 41-50	<input type="checkbox"/> 51-60	<input type="checkbox"/> 61-70	<input type="checkbox"/> 71-80	<input type="checkbox"/> 80+
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What is your partner's/spouse's highest education completed?

<input type="checkbox"/> Some High School	<input type="checkbox"/> High School	<input type="checkbox"/> GED or Equivalent	<input type="checkbox"/> Some College	<input type="checkbox"/> Associate's Degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's Degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Master's Degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional Degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Doctorate Degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)

Your partner's/spouse's income scale:

<input type="checkbox"/> No earned income outside of home	<input type="checkbox"/> Under \$9,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000-\$19,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20,000-\$29,999
<input type="checkbox"/> \$30,000-\$39,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$40,000-\$49,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000-\$59,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$60,000-\$69,000
<input type="checkbox"/> \$70,000-\$79,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$80,000-\$89,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$90,000-\$99,999	<input type="checkbox"/> Over \$100,000

Thank You!

## APPENDIX C

***Domestic Violence: Have Questions or Need Help?***

<b>National</b>	<b>Domestic</b>	<b>Violence</b>	<b>Hotline</b>
1-800-799-SAFE (7233)			

**Wayne County Crisis Line**  
(313)224-7000

**\*ACCESS Community Health & Research Center  
Domestic Violence Prevention Program**

ACCESS Schaefer Building

6450 Maple St.

Dearborn, MI 48126

(313)216-2202

[www.accesscommunity.org](http://www.accesscommunity.org)

[mkassim@accesscommunity.org](mailto:mkassim@accesscommunity.org)

**\*First Step**

**Peaceful Families • Safe Communities**

Plymouth Office: (734)416-1111

Wayne Office: (734)722-1772

Redford Office: (313)937-9791

[info@firststep-mi.org](mailto:info@firststep-mi.org)

[www.firststep-mi.org](http://www.firststep-mi.org)

24 hour help line: (888)453-5900

**Haven of Oakland County**

24 Hour Crisis Support: (248)334-1274

[www.haven-oakland.org](http://www.haven-oakland.org)

Live Chat available on Haven website

**Resources Available Include:**

- Domestic Violence Screening
- Shelter Placement
- Free Legal Aid/Legal Resources
- Case Management

- Emergency housing
- 24 hour on call assault response team
- Safety planning
- Support groups/Counseling
- Children's counseling and support groups
- First Step Offers Community Response Advocacy at Police Departments in: Dearborn, Inkster, Lincoln Park, Taylor, Westland and Redford police stations, 33<sup>rd</sup>/34<sup>th</sup>/25<sup>th</sup> District Courts.



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**ABSTRACT****SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES ON INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE?  
PERCEPTIONS OF 2<sup>ND</sup> GENERATION ARAB AMERICAN WOMEN**

by

**SALAM ABOULHASSAN****August 2015****Advisor:** Professor Krista M. Brumley**Major:** Sociology**Degree:** Master of Arts

In the Arab world, individual stories of intimate partner violence are often hidden and cultural narratives frame intimate partner violence as a personal problem to be solved by the family, an extremely private and protective unit. As second-generation immigrants, Arab American women experience new pathways to navigate gender inequalities within U.S. culture, creating new accounts and attitudes of intimate partner violence. This study adds to the conversation on intimate partner violence by including voices of a marginalized group and contributes a unique interpretation of intimate partner violence by uncovering how these women interpret their experiences.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I earned a B.S. in Urban and Regional Studies with a minor in Sociology from the University of Michigan-Dearborn. During my time as a student at Wayne State, I presented preliminary findings of my thesis at the Southern Sociological Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana and at the Wayne State Graduate School Master's Showcase. In 2015, I was awarded a government contract with the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. to work with Arab American youth and create six short videos about social issues in Metro Detroit. I also worked as an Americorps member with the Arab American Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, educating the public on Arab Americans and Arab culture. In reviewing the literature on Arab Americans and intimate partner violence for my thesis, I found a lack of women's voices, particularly with regard to gender and violence, with research focusing largely on political conditions and Islam, leading me to my thesis. In addition to gender and Arab American women, my other research interests include: intersectionality, immigration, ethnic communities and religion.