



Oral History Project Interview

Arab and Muslim Women's Research and Resource Institute (AMWRI)

Interview Number: JH 1.00

Date of Interview: 2/16/21

Gender: Female

Name: Maryam Siddiqui

Country of Origin: India

Year of Immigration: Born in the United States

Abstract: Maryam is a 20-year-old Indian American Muslim woman who was born and grew up in the United States. She lived in Hinsdale, IL for a brief time and then moved to Oakbrook, IL where she resides now. Islam has been a part of Maryam for her whole life. She is currently enrolled in an Islamic studies program through her local mosque. Maryam identifies her culture as a huge part of her life. From clothing to food, Maryam is able to incorporate her religious and cultural beliefs into her daily routine while living in the United States. She highlights the importance and anticipation of certain traditions like Eid and the celebration that comes with it. However, she does have to find balance between her culture and American culture. This is seen with her private and public education, cultural food, traditional clothing and other factors. Maryam also believes that there are many misconceptions of Muslims in the United States. Though she tries not to be affected by these misconceptions, she can't help but feel like her identity and personality has shifted as a result.

Key themes: education, culture, identity, family, clothing, religion, celebrations, holidays

Note: In the transcript, *I* refers to Interviewer, and *R* refers to Respondent/Interviewee.

I: Alright. Hi Maryam. I hope you are well. For some background, my name is Julia Hanley. I'm interviewing Maryam Siddiqui. She is allowing me to use her real name. Today is Tuesday, February 16th. We are doing this interview through FaceTime, not face to face. I am in Milwaukee, and Maryam is in Illinois. We are not related, we're just good friends that met through high school. And there is an option to remain anonymous, but Maryam has signed all the necessary consent forms and is fine with name, sound and photo release. Um, the sound recording will not be made public, but the transcript can be. This is something that you are fine with, right?

R: Yes.

I: Um, ok. So, to begin the actual interview, I'd like to start by asking some just like general questions about your background. And the next set of questions will just focus on that. Um, so what is your name, age and level of education? And when and where was it completed? You can also talk about your Islamic studies program because that is definitely part of education too.

R: Hm hmm. Alright so my name is Maryam Siddiqui. I love how I said that. I said that with an accent [laughter]. Ok, I'm Maryam Siddiqui. I am 20 and uh I finished high school in 2020. Um through Hinsdale Central High School. Um, yeah, I just- uh I- I graduated high school and I decided to take a gap year to do a religious studies program with my local mosque. Um, so I'm taking a religious studies intensive program right now and I'm planning on going back to college um with the end of this school year.

I: Uh so, the next question is actually kind of like the first one. So, when you were growing up- well you answered where did you go to school- so would you want to talk about like um the public school you went to, or did you go into any private schools at all?

R: Yeah, ok so, actually for the first like 5-6 years of my education, starting from like first grade to fifth grade, I actually went to a private school called um it was in an Islamic private school um. Its name is called is CPSA so college preparatory school of America. And I went there up till fifth grade and then I left there, and I went to Kindi Academy. It's like in Lisle (Illinois) somewhere. Um for my middle school and I went there only for like two grades and then after that I decided to leave like leave the Academy and I just- I joined the same Mosque I'm currently going to actually right now to memorize the Quran for 2 1/2 years. Um and while I was doing that, I was also like trying to keep up uh with doing my own schooling through K12 like the program. Um I actually think that, yeah, it's K12. Um that's the online school I was doing. Uh, I remember I'd have to drive out to Indiana to take like the various standardized tests that we set today.

I: Yeah.

R: [Laughter] so yeah and then after that um, I did so I think...so Kindi Academy and CPSA were both private schools. Um, Darussalam is also a private school. Uh, the K12 program, I do not think it counts as a private school, but it was like um accredited uh education program and then after um Darussalam which is the name of the mosque that I go to, I went to-I went back two grades and I went to um. One second, yeah. So, I went back two grades and I went to uh um

I'm trying to think... Hinsdale Middle School, HMS, for like a week or two before I moved, before my family moved. And then we went to and then I started going to Butler.

I: Oh, right, right yeah.

R: Yeah [laughter]. Yes, and I went there starting 7th grade, I did some of the 8th and then I graduated.

I: Mm hmm [laughter].

R: Graduated from there, quote unquote. I graduated from there to go to Hinsdale ah central and yeah that's where I finished off my high school.

I: Um, so, I mean you just kind of talked about this about like the places and buildings where you had to spend a lot of time because it's obviously it's school. But are there any other like places you spent a lot of time during your childhood and like one that you could remember very fondly? Or maybe not fondly?

R: [Laughter] um so, other than my, other than CPSA, I did spend a lot of time there as a kid. Um, because we lived pretty near the school and my parents are both working so I'd stay for the after-school program. I remember like hanging out in the library. It was a very quote unquote library because there were shelves of books that like no real like library.

I: [Laughter] yeah, yeah.

R: So, I remember like staying there for a while and I would stay after school until my parents could come pick me up or whatever.

I: Mm hmm.

R: And then, um, before Darussalam was actually built, it was actually built pretty recently, like the whole, the building and the current Mosque and everything. All that was built pretty recently. And then the construction for the new building really finalized last week.

I: Ok.

R: So, it's like very new.

I: Yeah.

R: Um, but before that, I used to, there is another local Mosque here called IFS, Islamic something... IFS. [Laughter] uh Islamic Foundation, there you go, Islamic Foundation. Um, and it's south because there is another one in the north. So, uh, so, this IFS, we used to go there all the time. There is a hill outside this, outside the mosque, and its um, I still remember like going with my aunt and uncle and we'd like run down the hill and they'd be holding my hands up and we would like swing.

I: Oh.

R: [Laughter] which is like a very cute memory.

I: Yeah!

R: But um, that and then uh we would do very deli-delinquent?

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: Delinquent behavior things where we would um, there, there was this perfect railing from the lady's side down to the main floor. Um, [laughter] and it's like a stair-stairway. And um, I actually tried last time I was there, but you sit on this railing and you just slide down.

I: Uh, yeah, I used to do that. Yeah.

R: Fun times, right?

I: Yeah.

R: And then you'd land, like did anyone see me? [Laughter] yeah. Um, so yeah those are some memories of the mosque I used to go to that are just like, this is like the main one because um it was like an actual established building and everything. There were other smaller mosques but like um, for example, the one I used to live-I used to live in, live in Lombard (Illinois), um and there used to be a mosque like-like this is very like it was very-like it was someone's house type of mosque.

I: Mm Hmm.

R: Like, it was like literally no one lived in there, but it was a house that someone owned, and they allowed people to use it like a mosque.

I: Yeah.

R: Now it's actually been replaced recently with a newer building. Like an actual mosque but um and it's like right next to a church, like a mosque and a church.

I: Yeah.

R: Literally in the same lot. [Laughter] um, but yeah, yeah so like, it wasn't like, it's like kind of smaller thing but like I spent a lot of time there because again it was kind of a smaller thing.

I: Yeah.

R: My dad, my family likes to stay close to religious centers. And were like very blessed to have those Islamic centers in like where we live.

I: Mm hmm.

R: Yeah.

I: Um, so when you're like in these different, I guess, buildings or like places, how did you feel about being like Muslim, like did you express it-your Muslim identity differently. Like maybe differently like at school versus like the mosque or something?

R: So, I guess we can just start with like Hinsdale Central like time because yeah. So, I'm not sure, I don't know how accurate this is but like um when I'm at like so basically when I started wearing the niqab which is like the veil. I started wearing that um around like 12 or 13 years old. Uh it was actually part of the uniform at Darussalam like when I used to-

I: Oh ok.

R: Um and then I would like to pull it off like the second I left the premises. [Laughter] and my mom was like "you know you can leave it on for like a second longer" and I was like "no" [laughter]. So, but then like I gradually just started wearing it because I was like-I don't know- I j-just started wearing it and like my classmates would also wear it and stuff and then we leave the campus and like obviously since we're on campus we don't need to wear it anymore but then I just gradually started wearing it and my mom has always worn the niqab during my like my lifetime. So, um like I had her as a model. So, but when I like wore my niqab versus like going to like almadrassa which is basically like the word for school in Arabic which is like all Islamic schools.

I: Yeah.

R: [Laughter] So when I wore the niqab um I like, so did my behavior, I know my behavior at almadrassa, at Darussalam was, it was very different well not very different, but it was different in the fact that like um as a niqabi as like especially as a niqabi and hijabi um, so like people basically people who wear a hijab and niqab.

I: Mm hmm.

R: There is a lot more pressure on you to be like a perfect representation of Islam. Like if you mess up even once people can tell who you like that you are in fact a Muslim. I mean most people. I have heard of people who are like what are you... and I'm like (pointing to hijab) hi... [laughter].

I: Oh.

R: Like pointing to my hijab, like hello.

I: Yeah.

R: Um, [laughter] which has been funny, but um.

I: Well that actually kind of leads me into another question. It was like how do you identify yourself? So that's where you were kind of going then like just continue, I just wanted to throw that in there [laughter].

R: Yeah [laughter]. Might as well, I'll, I'll fix this part up. So basically, like um yeah so, I do not like because of the pressure um I and then um because of the fact that um people look towards niqabi's and like hijabi's like Muslim women specifically like with a lot more scrutiny than they do with that which they do towards men. Which is obviously very, very are like-like typical of our society but anyway.

I: Yeah.

R: So [laughter] and then but also, it's the fact that um Islamophobia has been pretty prominent in like um wearing a niqab or wearing an abaya or hijab meant that um going out into public places you have to like kind of make this very innocent, loud, cheerful and bubbly personality that you're like completely innocent of all faults that could exist because you don't want to give the idea to anyone that you could potentially be a terrorist.

I: Mm hmm.

R: It's very Islamophobic. [Laughter] But it's like you have-like there's a certain way that you have to a-act. So, I know that when I go out into public, for the longest time, I-I'm not sure if I still do it now but like for the longest time like I would like when I go out in public I like make my voice high pitched a little bit more, little bit more high pitched very innocent and then like um, my mom would be like oh you don't like she would be like oh like stop like laughing and stuff like really loudly and stuff. I'm like you have to like show people.

I: Mm hmm.

R: You have to show people that you're not like sulking around you're not like not sulking around, you're not being like suspicious character.

I: Yeah.

R: You have to be very, very like hyper, like hyper-personified like person. You have to be very like elaborate like and like very like but not off-putting living very showy character of who you want because otherwise you get like stares and stuff and um any like- Islamophobia has not allowed for people to become comfortable with people wearing like abayas and niqabs which is very ironic considering the fact that now a days we all wear masks. Haha.

I: Yep. Oh my gosh yeah no you're totally right.

R: [Laughter] So yeah um but I do tend to try like bring it back to the original question, my usually I do try-like my identity I guess like my character my mannerisms and stuff are really more like just pronounced in public places, but I do think I try to stay true to my like own identity as like a person.

I: Yeah.

R: Like how I am. I don't think yeah but of course but like when you go to religious place you become like automatically more like aware [laughter] like what am I saying? Did I curse? any of that stuff.

I: Yeah. So, do you think like your identity of yourself almost like changes then like where you are in like which place you're at?

R: Mmmm... Wait can you say that again? Like I'm trying to uh-make sure...

I: Um, do you think the way you identify yourself just like changes um based on like which place you're at or like where you are? Cause you're talking about having to uh almost be someone else in public. I don't know if that makes sense...

R: Yeah.

I: But I just you know you know what I'm trying to say just like yeah kind of change yourself a little bit...

R: A little bit.

I: ...so people don't get the wrong like perception almost.

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: Ok, ok, uh.

R: Yeah, um maybe like uh maybe. I want to say it like that again like it's not like I'm a whole different person but I'm more exaggerated version of my persona. That's a good way, yeah. I'm a more exaggerated version of myself when I'm out in public and stuff. And like I think I-I-I'm actually I did talk about this in my college-I think my common app essay-but it was basically like I learn how to like to exaggerate like my laughs, my smiles, the way like I smiled, and you know normally I don't like I just like to smile like this- like you know how I smile. With my niqab, I have to like to make sure that exaggerates in that my eyes crinkle at the corners.

I: Ok.

R: Um, stuff like that. Um but like as for identity I'm not sure no I think I've always- like if people- I've always like thought of myself as like- I'm not trying- thinking like how do I think of myself- [laughter]. How do I think of myself? But I would say I'm like the Muslim and the niqab

part comes first. I'm a niqabi Muslim woman um person. I'm obviously a person of color but and uh I always include feminist in my personality [laughter].

I: Yeah.

R: I'm like ok-

I: No, I love that, I love that [laughter].

R: I'm like ok, I'm a niqabi woman. I'm a niqabi Muslim, feminist. And I'm like and I don't know, I try to do social activism.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: There you go!

I: I get that, yeah. So, like are there certain places then where you feel ok to express like your identity? Or like you know not this like different persona? Or you said it like very well like exaggerated like almost an exaggerated personality. Are there any places where you don't need to do that or like you feel comfortable not doing that? I mean- sorry, sorry you can go.

R: Wait no you froze so.

I: Oh, sorry no, yeah. I just- like maybe in your home or something?

R: Mm hmm, I would say with my friends. For example, now [laughter]. My friends, maybe even yeah but like in mosque and stuff like in religious places in like in like masjid's, in masjid, which is the plural for masjid, which is the word for mosque in Arabic. Um, I guess like yeah but like there is like a slightly altered version of myself I do present when I am in these religious spaces because you do have to automatically act a little bit more somber.

I: Hmm. Ok.

R: [Laughter] Yeah like that, I guess. But I think really at home or with my friends and like family. Not all family but family.

I: Yeah, Yeah [laughter]. So, what traditions do you practice then like you can touch on like maybe food recipes or restrictions or like what's your favorite food? You know just food in general, I guess!

R: [Laughter] Food in general, awesome! Perfect, I can do this [laughter]. I'm like, I'm like, this is my expertise, I got this. Um, so like Islamically or identify as an Indian Muslim? Like which field do I look at first?

I: I mean you could do both- I don't really- whatever you want to do honestly. Like are there any like food dishes that stand out to you more or that you just always have I guess with your family?

R: Ok, ok so um, I would say, ok so there's like a lot to choose from but something that I really like love is that- so our family has this tradition, so you know about Eid, um, right?

I: Yeah.

R: So yeah. So, each morning of Eid, like after we come back from prayer. As we come back from the Eid prayer and we have like hugged and kissed and like met like everyone and congratulated everyone on their, on Eid [laughter], uh we- my mom has made- my mom has always like we've always eaten khichdi, which is basically like lentil rice, I guess. It's like- it's yellow and it's very cheerful to look at. That and prima which is ground beef and cooked in sauces and stuff. And then that along with papad which are basically like-like fried like, I don't know what they are. They are like fried something.

I: Either way it probably tastes amazing.

R: That's very true, it does. Basically, it's kind of like eating chips.

I: Ok.

R: So, it's like fried chips with rice and um ground beef and tomato Curry.

I: Ok yeah, yeah.

R: Yeah, and then biryani of course. Biryani is a statement.

I: Yes, yes. So, this is obviously like um, this is a part of Eid, so I guess this next question also kind of goes off that. So in like what ways do you participate in cultural or religious activities? Or even community activities?

R: Ok so, um a large part of my identity revolves around, um, I guess like being part of these traditions. So, I mean, let's see. So, um discounting my prayers and stuff so um... so how do I participate, right basically?

I: Mm hmm.

R: So, for Eid, ok so basically there's two, ok so basically there's two Eid's which are the two days of celebration for Muslims. And on these days, it's like a day of joy and celebration and happiness. Um, and so I guess like so basically every morning, so there's two types of them the first one is after Ramadan and the second one is after um Hajj. So, after the Dhu al-Hijjah which is the month of Hajj, basically which is the migration to Mecca and Medina. Um so, there's like a whole journey... I'm really not going to explain the whole thing right now because it takes a while [laughter]. Um so yeah, so there's like so the first one- so after Ramadan after fasting for 30 days, um basically, so let's start actually let's start before that. So, in Ramadan there's a prayer called Taraweeh prayer which is uh which is done every night. Um It's 20 Rakat. So, that's like 20 different like basically ends with prostration. So, 20 of those and um split up into

two different like two different Rakat and then break, Rakat and then break. So, I can just low-key just send you um a thing of like how it all works. But, so yeah so, my brother for the past like since my brother memorized the Quran, h-he um actually led for like the past couple of years, h-he's been leading in our local Mosque's and he- and we would go there every night my brother would lead and so before that I would like listen to him and test him to make sure he was like doing good. If he had any mistakes, I put them out to him so he could revise them and then recite them in the prayer. So, basically before covid, every night we would go to the mosque pray 20 different Rakat's of prayer and then in in the mosque, there would be like our family friends like our friends, we made very close friends in our local mosque actually. And like it was just like it was just this general aura of like just like piety but also like just community because you were like surrounded by people who are coming for the same reason as you to pray in the same place as you to worship the same God as you and um like all of that and you stand for 20 like- at least like- so it's basically stretched out to be like an hour an hour and a half. Um so, yeah so it would be like this- like a very like just like a joyous kind of mood. I'm trying to look at very close like community mood. So, a-after- so this would happen for 30 nights on the 29th or 30th night of Ramadan, if the moon is seen, then Eid is announced for the next day. Um so, so in Eid- on the night of Eid, so, basically then the Taraweeh prayer is not held on that night if the moon is seen. And so, my family friends and I actually, so we all- my mom and I go over to one of our family friends' houses or whatever and all the all like are all like the womenfolk, I guess is like a weird was saying it but like friends like...

I: Yeah, I get it.

R: Yeah everything. We are all gathered, we sit there and we chit chat, we put on henna, we have snacks, and we have dinner and you like enjoy yourselves. And then after that we drive home, and we make, my mom and I make um seviyaan and (not sure about this word?) which is like a desert with like these sweet noodles basically. It's a weird way to say that but sweet semolina noodle but yeah. So, we eat those and so we prepare those for the next day and stuff and then the whole night like that whole night before Eid we prepare clothes for the next day because Eid is about looking good and meeting with great clothes.

I: Yeah!

R: [Laughter] And like our family actually since we have a pretty big house, Mashallah, our friends always come over to our house where we have to, we have big enough house to host both men and the women. So, we have like- so the night before we have like our dresses and everything. The guys have their clothes set out and then in the morning we wear the- so and then the whole night we pretty much stay up like almost all the night we stay up we're just doing worship general worship, praying (not sure about the word here?) because it's the last night of the month of mercy, which is what Ramadan is. Um and in doing that we like basically j-just ask for forgiveness, ask for good fortune, ask for like all these things that are important for the next year and stuff. Or for the upcoming- for the rest of the year in our lives. And then we basically- in the morning with my mom and I would like- we all like we go to sleep like a little bit and like after like- around 3 or 4am. We pray, we go to sleep, we wake up. Everyone showers, gets ready, wears new clothes and then we head off to the mosque for Fajr to pray in the morning which is like every day. We also pray the Eid prayer which is again only on Eid [laughter]. We go there

and then um the place my family and I like going is basically- one of our local mosques, they rent out um, I'm trying to remember the name of it- the place but basically, it's like Arko, something with an A. Um they rent out the place out and they have a bouncy house set up for the kids and we have samosas and everything to- like snacks and stuff to grab after we finish praying. And there's like there's a small like speech and then we pray and then after that for like turns and we greet each other with salaam which is basically peace be upon you. With each other we just say salaam we just like say (not sure about the word here?) and were hugging and like everyone is just like doing that and then after that we like head out to eat and stuff were just standing in circles and talking- it's such a- it's honestly like one of like it's like one of the best parts of the year.

I: Yeah.

R: And then after that, everyone is like exhausted. We go home, we eat food, and we crash for like a solid couple of hours [laughter] and then we get up and were like panicking cause our house needs to be clean.

I: Yeah.

R: The guests come over in 2 to 3 hours max [laughter]. So, we wake up after our nap, we clean, pray our next prayer and then pray the midday prayer and then after that the guests are coming over, so we have our party. So that's like one of the events. Similarly, um, Eid-al-Adha, which is um the Eid after, the Eid after Hajj. That Eid is basically similar.

I: Ok.

R: Except in the fact like, in the night before, the day before, we are not fasting basically.

I: Ok, ok.

R: The thing is-is that you can do voluntary fast which my family tend to do if we can.

I: Ok.

R: Um, but like yeah, so those are two events. Otherwise, it's just generally attending events in the community, events in the masjid. For example, Darussalam, even online, they host a lot of programs. So, example for tonight, there's going to be... my teacher actually is going to be doing and explanation of a chapter in the Quran called Surah Maryam, haha me [laughter]. So, um so he's going to be doing an explanation of the verses and the connections we can make to our society in our life right now.

I: Ok, yeah.

R: So, these types of events are always happening. Um, and we're blessed to be in a place where we can be benefitting and interacting with these people. So, I tried, before covid, I used to volunteer sometimes at the Darussalam events and like just be there. My friend and I actually-

like my friend actually did- would do face painting and stuff and I would do like ushering or just watching the babies in the room and like um do the babysitting room, something like that to generally help out in the running of the events.

I: Yeah, ok. Um ok so, you kind of touched on this already but do you like attend the mosque on a regular basis and where do you pray, and do you pray- I think- you pray daily right?

R: Five times a day.

I: Ok so, yeah do you just attend the mosque on a regular basis? I mean I know covid has obviously made some things hard-harder than others but, you know.

R: Yeah, ok so before covid, I can divide this up into two categories: pre-covid and now covid.

I: Yes.

R: So, pre-covid, I actually would be busy a lot with school and stuff so I would tend to stay at home and then during Ramadan I would head to the mosque/ masjid a lot because I had time- or I wouldn't have time, I would make time because it was Ramadan. Um, and then uh but otherwise I would go for like Eid and like stuff, but I wouldn't go on a regular basis, I would go if I like had the time, had a break from school. I still remember last year, I just had like- it was near winter break, um, and I just um headed over to the mosque for after school because our school ended early for some weird reason.

I: Yeah.

R: I don't remember why, Hinsdale Central just ended randomly, it just ended early weirdly.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: I was just like, oh, ok bye. Actually, I think it was a half day maybe, something like that. But we had that half day. Oh, it was one of those remote learning days. There you go.

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

R: But we had that half day and I headed over to the local mosque and met some of my favorite- some of our like friends and stuff because I hadn't seen them because I was just doing school.

I: Yeah, ok.

R: Our workload was a huge workload.

I: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah [laughter].

R: But ironically... but then all of Ramadan last year we couldn't go to the mosque at all because they were closed. So, my brother would lead prayer in our home, and we had two people come

over from the houses near us. Um, we would stay socially distant from them and everything, but they would come over to our house to also do- to perform- to pray behind my brother. Because he'd be leading Taraweeh. Um but other than that, like so, because of that, I would be staying at home, that and otherwise school and stuff, I didn't really have time to go to the mosque. And then women are lucky in that, in Islam, we don't have (not sure what word goes here?) it's not mandatory on us to go to the mosque all the time. It is on men, if they are so capable of doing so, they should be going to the mosque.

I: Mm hmm.

R: But women can pray at home so, I pray at home, I can pray behind my brother and I could still get the same reward as I would get from going to the mosque.

I: Ok yeah, I didn't know that! Ok.

R: [Laughter] So, and then that. Post covid, I've actually been heading over to my school which is also the mosque: Darussalam. So, I've been heading over to Darussalam like um because- and like so last week I was actually on campus because I had to give an exam and that I was there, and I was like oh might as well pray the Friday prayer. I stayed there and did that and then I like came home. Um I'm going to be- and uh when I was there, um, I was praying, I would just like pray 2 or 3 prayers and then I would like pray midday prayer, the afternoon prayer. Um, and then after that I'd head home because the time for the sunset prayer is like getting later on so, yeah.

I: Ok, um, so this kind of off topic but what language or languages do you speak? So, obviously you're speaking English right now [laughter] but, you speak Urdu, right?

R: I speak- ok so, this is- this is fun. I speak English, I speak Urdu, I speak some half Spanish.

I: Ok.

R: I'm learning Arabic right now. Do I know any other language? I'm like do I know any other language or no (said sarcastically) ... [Laughter] No so, I speak- I'm currently speaking like- oh what's it called, 3-3 ½ languages right now.

I: Ok yeah like trilingual?

R: Yeah [laughter].

I: Ok, so, these like next questions are going to be a little more political, I guess.

R: Oh!

I: Where do you get like your most of your um news and how has like certain political events um, I guess affected you or have affected you?

R: Ok so, so um. Where do I get my- let's answer like part of this question for a second. So where do I get most of my news from? so, um I do have the New York Times subscription but I'll low-key cancel that. Um, I have the New York Times subscription [laughing], and then I do get alerts from them every day and like in my email and if any news happens, I get that. And then I also get the morning and evening like the evening news which is nice. Um, so I get like not a majority but a lot my news from that. Other than that, very ironically, Tik Tok [laughing], you would not think but a very credible source is Tik Tok for news because, especially with a lot of the protests and stuff uh cannot trust the media to accurately report on that at all. So, Tik Tok, and then like Tumblr. I have some social media stuff like mostly from um outside of the US really though. For example, I was reading a thing just yesterday, or today actually about um the Indian farmers protests happening in India and the fact that the Indian government is trying to like cover it up and trying to like- just like- push it aside and the Muslim protests that were happening um. I'm not sure if you know but there's a lot of oppression going on in India.

I: Yeah, I heard about it.

R: Yeah, yeah. And my grandparents and my aunt and uncle and their like two kids are still there.

I: Yeah.

R: So, we're kind of like iffy, we're kind of like worried about that. So yeah, so that's like kind of the other sources I use. I don't really use Twitter for any news, but I have it. Um, like I mean I'm really only there to check out and follow behind my um, what's it called, political activists.

I: Yeah.

R: Um, and like uh justice reps like AOC, (she named other reps. but not sure who) stuff like that. Um but yeah, the second part of the question was what again?

I: We'll actually come back to that because there is a group of questions later like about political situations. So, you um, but how would you like describe, oh I guess you just answered this, you like political participation, and you said you keep up with the news (Maryam nods head). Ok yeah. Um, so, do you reg-regularly um vote, and do you vote in every election or is it just like presidential elections?

R: [Laughing] No, so, um when I got- do you remember outside the APUSH (AP United States History; Maryam and I took this class our junior year of high school together) classroom?

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: That day they had voter registration?

I: Yeah! You registered to vote.

R: And I like immediately registered?

I: Yeah!

R: So, I've been registered since then and basically every local election that comes around, I started voting in and participating in those. Um, and then I encourage my parents to actually go and participate in the November election. I mean, so I went with my mom.

I: Yeah.

R: I went with my mom to the presidential elections but also the ones, I can't remember- the primaries.

I: Yeah, uh yeah, the primaries.

R: Yeah so, I took- I made my parents go out and vote. Um then and then um and then before that even when I couldn't vote, I was actually like pushing my parents to go vote for these. I literally said to them, "vote for this person, this person, this person, this person." And they were like, ok. [Laughter] They were like fine I guess, and they just voted off for the people of our local elections.

I: Ok. Um so, if there was a candidate that is Muslim, would you, or how would that influence your voting behavior? Would you still like only vote for them based on you know their beliefs? More if their- I know you are technically a democrat, so if they were a democrat, would you vote for them?

R: Um, so no. Cause even though like yeah, we need Muslim representation, in uh governments and stuff, and we're getting like a small fraction of that representation right now and we're very happy to see it. Um, one of our local members, I'm not sure who but there was- say if there was if there was a Republican Muslim candidate, I would not vote for them in favor over the person over the non-Muslim Democratic candidate.

I: Ok.

R: And that's valid [laughter].

I: Yeah. No yeah, I get it yeah. Um, so this actually has to do with Black Lives Matter now...

R: Yay!

I: Yeah, so, how has your Mosque or just like your community um showed solidarity with Black Lives Matter? Um, yeah that's it actually so if you want to answer that [laughter].

R: Yeah, actually Darussalam did a very cool thing and I'm very proud of them for this. But they basically, so actually when the protests started, my teacher, so in my class, which basically is called tarbiyah which means etiquette or behavior. So, he actually, he actually spoke on these protests and said that its horrible people need to protest in the first place to get these rights. But

as Muslims, um it is our duty to support the underdog. Like not just the underdog but the people who are being oppressed.

I: Yeah.

R: Even if it's by Muslim government, Muslim people are being oppressed by a Muslim government, it is our responsibility and our duty to oppose the Muslim government to oppose the uh- to oppose the oppressors. So, my teacher actually spoke on this and he kind of gave like a-he went off. It was a very fun day [laughter]. I was sitting there like, yes! [Laughter]. So, when he like so, that was like, so this was just the thing- he's actually my teacher um (not sure what word goes here?) he's basically the vice president and co-president of the school. The principal sorry. Vice principal, co-principal of the school because his brother, his older brother (not sure what word goes here?) is the principal of the school.

I: Ok.

R: So, um (not sure what word goes here?). Darussalam had recently, well not recently but in December, winter, we had, so before this, so while Black Lives Matter protests were happening, um Darussalam had, one of the event nights, they changed it and they spoke just about this. About the Black Lives Matter protest, how they were correct and how the importance in the Muslim community is to make sure that we um act with anti-racism and then one- during the winter intensive, there was a week-long thing of just programs um about general life. Literally there was on Islamic financing. So, one of these events was on just like racial justice um and like society and how we should be reacting and how we should be acting and helping and elevating voices of color um especially those who are speaking out about any oppression they've experiences.

I: Ok yeah.

R: and stuff like that.

I: That's really good yeah. Um so, to shift back I guess, I mean we were just talking about politics but, um so I know you were just a baby when 9/11 happened (Maryam is 20 years old).

R: Yes, I was.

I: So, did your parents then- how did your parents feel like at the time of 9/11 and the time thereafter? And like, has their, or I guess your interactions ever change with anyone or with people who are non-Arab or non-Muslim? And if this question is just like too hard to answer, you don't have to answer it.

R: Yeah no, I can answer part of it.

I: Ok.

R: Part of it is that my parents don't really talk about this to us. Especially since the longest time we were like young, but my brother told us that when he was a kid um, cause he's actually four years older than me. Three years and some months/ four years. So, um my brother actually he told us that my mom would like tell him- so before he- so he actually stayed in India for like a year or something and then he came to America. But when he went to public school, he would The Madison Elementary school near us. Um, so he said that my parents actually were thinking about changing his name and told him to like- they took off- so there's a topi which is like a cap or a hat, it's like a felt like cloth. Um that men wear on their heads as well. And though- he'd wear that to school because he was used to doing that in India.

I: Yeah.

R: And when he came here, he was going to this school and 9/11 happened, my parents were like, he needs- they can't- he- they took it- they didn't let him wear that and then they basically like, they were worried about people or someone possibly attacking them or the family when- right after. Um, and then of course with all the experience, the whole thing of like going through airport security and then like, I'm sure you've heard about this but yeah going through airport security and being stopped for random searches. Literally last time it was an interesting experience. I was stopped for airport, at airport security random search. And they were like oh somethings on you and I was like there's nothing on me but ok.

I: Yeah.

R: Um, and they took back to a room and they patted me down and I was like I'm wearing very tight leggings underneath my abaya, what exactly are you hoping to find?

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: So, that was an experience but um yeah so, my parents don't really talk about like what and how it was for them after but my mom it was- actually my mom experienced- so when I was- we have this one file of imported documents and stuff in our family. And so, it has our birth certificates and stuff like that basically. I was looking through it one day and like a little while back and like-like recently alone. but like I was looking through it and I found this letter from my mom file towards the hospital that she was doing residency because she had experienced like racial discrimination at her place of work f-for refusing to take off her hijab. So, she was being filed with all these cases. She was being like- her supervisor was like kind of working against her and was very biased and anti-her. Um, and so when she filed this-they- I found a letter from the hospital to her and they were like hey what is instead of this, we sent you off with a good letter of recommendation to a different place. Umm she actually ended up thinking about it and stuff and she conferred with my dad and they decided to do that because you weren't sure they would win it.

I: Yeah, yeah, ok.

R: So that's just like one example.

I: No, thank you for sharing that. I know it can be so hard because people can just be like so uneducated and it's not like you know? They always say like a lot of the school shooters in America are white, but you don't associate them- you know you don't associate all white people with school shooters. But it's just you know- it's just like it just makes me so mad that's what I'm trying to say [laughter]. You know it's just like...

R: No, I get that, yeah. Especially- remember when they- just really quick segue but did you hear about how they tried for the for the rioters, the insurrectionists on Capitol Hill, they're trying to in Congress, they were trying to make basically like a new format- format and new category for these interactionists an instead of filing them under terrorist.

I: Oh, oh my god.

R: They were trying to make a new category. And so basically, that was rejected because they were like no you wanted to call these- they acted as terrorists would- terrorists because that's what they are. Not because their Muslim. Just because they are not Muslim doesn't mean they're not terrorists.

I: They are domestic terrorists. That's what they are. Yes.

R: Yeah.

I: Um ok I would like to shift topics now. The next set of questions are about marriage, but I will say some questions are more about like gender than marriage. Um so, the first question, in your culture how are women viewed are what is their typical role and what about men?

R: Hm, I like this one.

I: I know, I knew you were gonna like this one! [Laughter]

R: I was like this is a spicy question! So, ok so um culture and religion are two very different things here. Um and actually like just in general culture and religion are two very different things. So, my culture is very- how to put this- kind of misogynistic. Yeah um, as we know. Um, it's yeah, it's not yeah- women are seen like- so it's kind of funny but like basically in our community, it's women should get degrees, should become doctors or like the very like the very this is a very basic Desi way of looking at it being like they should be doctors or scientists or something you know? It's kind of funny because like in American like thing it's not like women should go into stem but an Indian and Arab culture it's that women should go into stem and it's like such a weird contrast, you would think. Um, but yeah but they should also be wives, they should be mothers, none of which is wrong. Um, the fault kind of comes in where it's the men should always be earning more, um and like generally just um, the husband says something, the wife should obey. Um, it's very Indian culture, this is kind of just like present across Indian, Desi culture and into Arab cultures and stuff. It's a very Asian like- it's very present in the Asian cultures as well. Um, s-so t-that's culture. Religion, however, is such a funny opposing contrast cause it's like the funniest thing um to realize this. But like in Islam, I-I was actually just talking about this with my dad yesterday, and in Islam like women they can also- here's the thing- is that

in Islam, it was the first religion to give women rights. Like so to own property, to divorce the right to have her own money, the right to work, the right to like do all these things. Uh, so in Islam women- so basically some- so let me just explain really quick. So, in Islam really quick, women at marriage, they're given a dowry.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: They're given- from their husbands a dowry. A woman has the right to choose any amount to set her dowry at because she is allowed to choose, allowed to use it as one of her criteria to marry someone. Um, arranged marriages are not the only thing one can do in Islam. Like (prophet?) and his first wife fell in love actually before they got married. So, they fell in love and then they got married. So, that's entirely possible. Um, there is a misconception because of Asian culture that the only marriages allowed would be arranged marriages but that's completely false. Anyway, so, so that's one of the things. A dowry a woman receives, she can make it anything she wants, she can make it whatever form she wants, any amount she wants. All that stuff is um her money. It's her money and you might have seen the little meme going around, it's very funny on Tik Tok. It's kind of like, so a man's money, the husband's money, must- has to be spent on his household. Um, has to be spent on the woman, whatever she wants. If she does not want to have- so back then it was like if she did not want to breast feed her child, um he would have to pay to find a nurse to breastfeed their child. If she did not want to clean their house, he would have to pay to find a house cleaner to clean their house. Um, if she did not want to- basically it's not- its only women have all the rights.

I: Yeah.

R: Um, so [laughter] when um a, so that's- that's religion. So, in Islam, women can work if they want.

I: Yeah.

R: They can um- and if a woman wants to work, any money she earns will be her money and only her money. Her husband is not allowed to touch that money. He's not allowed to spend it. Um, if he- if she chooses to spend it on her family, she gets double the reward she would get from just spending it on other people or giving it away. So, plus charity. So, from like giving charity. So, and then men are supposed to be the protectors in Islam of their woman. So, actually today in my class, one of my teachers were talking about this and he was saying that the last words (prophet?) said himself before he passed away were treat your women kindly. Um, then I was watching a Tik Tok yesterday and it was like please remember that (prophet?) did not say that treat your women kindly if or with a qualifier.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: He was- treat your woman kindly, treat the women kindly. Um, because he knew that, my teacher was saying this today, that he knew that men have a tendency to act in a very oppressive manner if they can. Um, so despite the fact that men can do good things, the most of the things that are done are horrible atrocities done in the world are done by the hands of men. So, yeah.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah, so again religion and culture are two very different things.

I: Yeah, you know, yeah.

R: Yeah, so, but the thing is now- I'm very happy to see this happening to that a lot of Muslim youths are seeing that um, the different between the two- they are recognizing what their culture says- especially in American and stuff and in Europe and stuff because people have a little bit more um freedom from the culture of the land that they're in. To, so, instead of like- people who are in India, Indian-Muslims have a lot more difficulty divorcing themselves from the culture and certain aspects of the culture than Indian Muslims, Indian American Muslims do live in the US. Um so, a lot of Muslim youths are waking up to the reality of what Islam is and what like our culture's um say are two very different things. And um I'm really happy to see this shift happening because it just means that people start acting in a more appropriate way- acting like better. Um, with their wives, with their husbands, with their families. Um, because this is kind of like a really important thing that people learn. And I think a lot of this is the lack of education, one, and that the fact of our biases from our culture have shifted and like kind of just like they have pervaded and corrupted religion that are completely opposite to what you think.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah, and it's kind of, it's kind of like a very regular thing for my classmates and I to ask our teachers, like hey is this a thing? Our parents told us this is a thing, is this a thing? And they were like, no this is not a thing [laughter].

I: Yeah.

R: It's not even remotely a thing. And we're like, are you sure? My parents said, their parents said this, and their parents told them that. It's like, no, no. It's just culture, it's just culture.

I: Yeah, ok, so, are you planning on having an arranged marriage or would your parents- or would your parents ever let you marry outside of your religion? Or is that...

R: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, so actually no. Outside of our religion is a no. Um, I personally would not- I actually wouldn't marry someone outside of my religion because although you can be friends with someone, I have seen a lot marriages, for example, my uncle. Actually, my uncle, he was married to someone who converted just for the sake of marrying him.

I: Yeah.

R: Um, cat (cat meows in background) [Laughter] but then they ended up getting divorced several years later because she did not actually believe in Islam. She didn't like actually be Muslim. That was not her identity as she claimed it as it. Um, and I know that not even just Islam but like I've seen like with other people like Hindu culture with like- so a lot of Hindus can

marry like non like people who are not Hindu and then they'll end up divorcing or having very better marriages because the lack of understanding. And then also, in Islam, it is forbidden for a wife like- so actually so, so, technically back then, it was allowed for men, Muslim men, to marry non-Muslim women because they would- they said that the influence like cause it would be that the influence of the wife- the husband upon his wife would be such that she would start to see like all the goodness of the way he acted that he that he was- that Islam was the correct religion to convert to and to be a Muslim. And, however, um, one of the reasons that women, Muslim women, are not allowed to marry non-Muslim men is because that in Sharia, Islam, the rights and privileges and the- the- the protections that are offered to women in marriage in the courts of Sharia in the words of Islam um would not be recognized by a non-Muslim man.

I: Ok. Ok.

R: So, if a woman, actually my mom and I were talking to a lady who called to ask for advice about marrying someone who was not Muslim.

I: Yeah.

R: My mom was talking to her and she was explaining these things and I was like giving her back up advice, like hey it sucks because of this too and this too. And so, um but like so if a Muslim man- if a non-Muslim man decided to marry a Muslim woman and she decided um- so this is kind of a very interesting thing- this is one of those things that's coming to my mind right now because it's going around Tik Tok. So basically, in Islam, if a man is not willing to sexually satisfy his partner, um, that is grounds for divorce.

I: Ok [laughter] I mean...

R: It's grounds for divorce because if a man does not- it's grounds to ask for a divorce, like a woman is allowed to ask for divorce because she is not getting sexual satisfaction.

I: Ok, I mean, yeah.

R: Yeah, so [laughter] So, basically so, so if a Muslim woman, yeah so if a Muslim woman married a non-Muslim man, um, he would not- like be able- he and the non-Muslim courts would not recognize that she is asking for divorce based on this thing which is completely allowed. And um, he would like- it wouldn't- that protection would not be given to her, that right she has would not be afforded to her.

I: Ok.

R: Um, but yeah. But nowadays also, it's very, very not recommended for Muslim men to marry non-Muslim women because it's not seen- it's not seen that the men will influence their wives or will show their wives the goodness of their actions that they will like- that Islam is the true religion and uh is the correct religion for them to come to and to also be like right. So, but rather that Muslim men are now more willing to act in the matter that's against that and are more

willing to be influenced by their wives because their faith is weak enough that they would be actually converting instead to a different religion. Rather than them being Muslim. Yeah

I: Right. Um so, the next set of questions I want to focus on are kind of about your parents and then your life growing up, I guess, with them. Uh, so, you did say with that you're technically trilingual so, you obviously have like so y-your parents taught you Urdu right as you were growing up?

R: Yes.

I: Ok um so how are like- what other aspects of- because they came from India, so, what other aspects of their culture did they like um incorporate into your childhood? I mean I know you touched on like Eid and prayer and you know but is there anything else or if not that's totally fine.

R: Wait- where- can you repeat the last part of the question. That parts of culture I think you said.

I: Yeah, So what aspects of your parents homeland culture did they keep as you like were growing up?

R: [Laughter] Oh god, everything. Pretty much everything.

I: Ok. You touched on a lot of it already, but I just had this question written down so.

R: Oh, everything. So yeah, so obviously we speak the language of us- my brothers and I go over we speak the language and then, so we speak more Urdu. My mom actually speaks very, like she speaks very like fancy formal Urdu as well. Like none of my brothers and I know it [laughter]. We speak the very casual, like just um (lingual?) speech of like the streets or whatever. Um, so yeah that's a thing. And so, then um, my parents speak like- they speak Urdu. Um, we actually used to go visit India for like, during our summer like for at least a month for like at least 3 or 4 years straight we did that. And then after that we just stopped going because stuff happening around us. Um, things like plane tickets were getting more expensive. But yeah, we like talk to our grandparents regularly and stuff. Um, so then my aunt and uncle live in India and they've come to visit us a couple of times with my um- sorry that was a burp- with my um cousins and stuff, so that's happened. So, we've kept a lot of it, I think. Obviously though we've discarded the parts, or we try like- they've tried to discard the parts that don't really like agree with Islam. I'm trying to think. So, like, ok so our parents will- so actually one of the things that our parents- so we call them like mama and baba, and we don't call them mom and dad or by their name or anything, we just- that's just their name like that's mom and dad in Urdu basically but I don't know why. Um, but we can them mama and baba and mama is my mom and baba is my dad and um, I'm trying to think. So basically, like most of our family friends' group. So, family friends are people my dad has met, and my mom became friends with their wives, or my mom made friends, like for example when she was doing um residency in this medical school in India, she made friends with a person and when they came here- uh when she came- when my parents came here- my mom's friends actually came here too.

I: Ok.

R: They met up and were like oh, so we still have those family friends and um pretty much or almost all our entire family friend group is some form of Desi. So, like um, we have a Bengali auntie, and uncle. So, most of it is like Indian or Desi like Desi in some form. Um, otherwise we do have Arab friends and stuff but yeah. Um, so we have that kind of because of that and like we stay, we mostly lived in um areas that are very high uh population, population percentage of um Indian-Muslims, Indian or Pakistani, Desi-Muslims. Um, so even like family friends, so parties we hold, all that stuff is like, we like have that culture, outfits, outfits are there. Um, the jewelry, like, I'm trying- like our food is all- like we literally can't do American food. We can do it for one night and then after that we're like no.

I: Oh yeah, yeah.

R: But like no, we have to eat like, like my dad literally he like could eat a whole thing of wings and he'd be like ok but where's the actual food.

I: [Laughter] yeah!

R: And my mom's like, I knew it and she pulls out the actual food. Like here let's eat this. Um, but yeah so, like the food, our clothing, the way that we talk, there's a lot of respect involved in Desi and Islamic culture. Like, in Islam especially, there's a lot of Desi- a lot of respect you need to give to your parents.

I: Yeah.

R: And so, um, this actually has influenced um Desi culture the other way around, so, uh, I Desi culture, in Arab culture, um, people will like- so there's a lot of respect to your parents, to your teachers, stuff like that. So that's- that's a thing that we have. Um, I- actually one of my teachers actually in my etiquette/ manners class um he was actually just talking about like how, someone asked, hey how can do (not sure of the word here?) is just like serving. How we can we serve others. Um, and so he was like telling us, he was like- he'd actually used to go and like and like would go help out at his teachers, like his teachers when he was in South Africa in his school. Like they would go, and they would walk-walk with their teachers to school. They would like wash their teachers car, stuff like that.

I: Yeah.

R: So, so there's a very high um respect towards your elders, to your parents, to your teachers, stuff like that. Um...

I: No yeah that was a really good answer, yeah.

R: Yeah, I'm trying to think like- but like- we do try to pull ourselves away from um... from being like- from having the culture influence the part of our lives that are- or parts of Islam that contradict Islam. So, yeah.

I: Um, so your parents actually... so, I know they um immigrated from India, but do you know when they did?

R: Um, so my brother was born in 1997. They moved, so like they came over a year, I think before is birth. So, my dad actually came first and then my mom came a full couple months after. My brother was born in LA so something like 1995 or 1996.

I: Ok, ok, perfect. And um, they both have college degrees, right?

R: Mm hmm!

I: Because your mom is a doctor, and your dad is an engineer?

R: Yeah! [Laughter] He is. The perfect Desi parents.

I: Perfect.

R: The two perfect complimentary subjects.

I: Yep.

R: Because you know, it's always be a doctor or be an engineer. My parents were like the most... (incoherent) [laughter].

I: They make good money then!

R: Yes, they do. But like um economy crash, horrible.

I: Yeah.

R: [Laughter] I'm like, horrible (said in a bit of a sarcastic tone). My mom actually owns her own practice.

I: Yeah!

R: A clinic, she's a pediatrician. So, she works in like Glendale Heights I think (said it like she was questioning herself).

I: Hmm... yeah?

R: It's always Glendale or Glendale Heights. The two, I can never remember which one it is.

I: Yeah, it's ok! It's something like that.

R: It's one of the places.

R: Yeah. So, she actually owns her own clinic. She co-owns it with another doctor and um yeah so that's- she owns her own clinic, and she works there. Um, she does some online stuff that she consults for one of the, a couple of the hospitals across country too. Um, where she like participates in this thing like and she works for this thing that's basically like reviewing cases in hospitals to make sure the patient are being kept and not unnecessarily being kept over. They're not being kept inpatient or outpatient. Um, so yeah, she does that, she runs her clinic. She does some stock trading right now. She's doing stocks.

I: Oh.

R: She's been doing it for a little bit. And she started this thing, she started the resin thing. She's a very artistic soul which is like funny because like for most of my life she hasn't really been doing art. She's- I think she's picked it up again because all of us are like kind of just like...

I: Yeah.

R: We (Maryam and her siblings) don't need much attention and stuff, so my mom has re-picked up resin and stuff.

I: Uh, that's so cool!

R: And people are asking to buy from her.

I: Yeah!

R: And I'm like, yeah mom, ok!

I: I love that! [laughter]. Ok so, you talked- so we're going to shift topics again. Um, you talked about this earlier because you are a niqabi. So, um, we are going to discuss cultural clothing. So, you do- so, I mean this is just a basic question that I do know the answer to [laughter] but I'm going to ask it anyways. Do you have any traditional clothing [laughter]?

R: So, yes, I do. I have Islamic clothing which is like abayas which are just like dresses. I wear hijabs and niqabs. Very colorful.

I: Yeah, yes!

R: As usual. Um, and as you can see (Maryam points to the hijab she was wearing) right here: red color with- I'm like- this one has red with white ink, something- like yeah.

I: You look great!

R: Thank you! Um, so I have these and um I have Islamic- or no- so like this is like Indian clothing, Indian/ Pakistani clothing. Um, which I am actually wearing right now too because these are comfortable and also, I'm cold and it's like long and warm. So, these are very comfortable. Um and so I wear literally nowadays um, I wear Indian clothing every single day. Um and then I wear my hijab every time there's a prayer or whatever or I'm going out. Um, but also, like um if there are parties I have like fancy like clothing like jewelry and dresses. Um, all this is like Indian and like I have some pants and like shirts like sleep shirts and stuff that are not Islamic or that are not what's it called... Indian or Desi clothing.

I: Yeah.

R: Like most of my wardrobe is cultural.

I: Mm hmm, ok! And um, would you want to pass them on to your children or if you ever have any children, or girls? You know.

R: Mm hmm um, I actually, my mom actually, she has a lot of clothing and stuff and she actually tries to pull these things out, so we send them in to India for my uncle to donate.

I: Oh, ok.

R: Um, but, or like we give to the organizations here um, who send it out to like places in need. And there are a lot of Muslim countries in need right now. Um, so, yeah, we like try to do that but I'm not sure. I have um, I have a sari that I've never worn that's this long cloth basically. So, it's formed with a long underskirt and a top like a bandeau type style. Like halter top, that kind of top. And so, I have that from my grandmother, and I have actually never worn it. But like maybe that. Maybe like, maybe items of- maybe clothing but at this point it's like, unless there's something like past down from mother to daughter before me...

I: Oh, I see.

R: ... probably not.

I: Ok, yeah.

R: Yeah.

I: Ok, um so now the next questions are actually about your perceptions and beliefs towards people with disabilities. Um, so generally speaking, do you think that there is a prejudice towards people with disabilities in your community and do you think a lot of families can be secretive about it, if a child has a disability?

R: Mm hmm. Oh, for sure, yeah. So, so, for the first part of the question; in my community, ideally it would be a no. But in like culturally and stuff there is definitely a bias and like- it's not discrimination- but like there's definitely a bias against people with disabilities. Um, even though

like religiously there, there isn't and there shouldn't be because like Allah made us like how we are and there's always a purpose for person in this world, you know?

I: Mm hmm.

R: So, this is seen- it's seen in some, several, examples of this are seen in like (not sure of the word here?) which is like history of the prophets (not sure of the word here?). Yeah, but definitely in communities, yes. Um, I think and I'm hoping that this is starting to be weeded out again um because of medication and because people are being exposed to more people around the world and that...

I: Yeah.

R: The next generation and these generations to come. So, these biases will erode and give way to actual, you know.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: So, yeah but then uh for people, so yes for secretiveness, yes. I actually grew up down the street, I still remember when um, because these were one of our family friends and I grew up down the street to a family with a son who had an intellectual disability. And, um, it wasn't like possible for them to ever really hide it but and it's always like when you go to a place and you see someone with an intellectual disability or some type of disability like people always say like oh like pray that you're not gonna be like them. Which is like ok but like say for example you like prayers of protection against like getting into accidents and stuff like some reason of misfortune befall someone you're supposed to say the prayer of protection to ask for protection that same misfortune befalling you. For example, like we literally pray every time we see someone getting stopped on the road by a cop. So, [laughter] this brings up- so a person can say that- but um, I just feel like I'm seeing people like pull away from the people with disabilities like as if it's like catchable is kind of wrong.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: So, yeah, um.

I: I mean do you think like females or males uh, or families who have disabled kids, do you think it's harder on them if they have a disabled child that a male or female? Do you think there's really a difference or is it kind of just like the same?

R: Um, actually I would say that- I don't know maybe? Maybe? Maybe like the same but I also don't know obviously again it may be skewed because haha (sarcastically) misogyny...

I: Hmm, yes.

R: ...where it's women so. Um, yeah but like I'm just thinking about like one of the girls like- or I've seen like a couple- well not a couple people- but I've seen people with disabilities on any

sort like intellectual or just general disabilities and they will come, like I will- I see them around places like Arab community centers or wherever. Um, it's kind of like a shock to see them because- not because it's like oh I'm shocked like their existing in public spaces but more of a shock that their families are like allowing women like, like to be out like, like oh like oh they're not hiding them away.

I: Mm hmm.

R: It's kind of like weird, it's very sad but yeah.

I: Ok yeah. Ok so now no I'm going to focus on more like present day, like covid obviously. Covid and what's going on. So, it's going to be like the impact on your personal well-being so, how is it like impacted you I guess financially, socially and like health situations? And you already talked about how it's impacted like when you go to the mosque, you had- you couldn't go for Ramadan or anything. So yeah, just like how has it impacted you generally I guess or like how is it impacted your family's well-being even you know and like we received like any help?

R: So, um so the thing is my family actually got covid so that actually impacted us all physically like health wise. mental house is honestly a question because it's like oh I'm so busy with like my schooling and stuff I don't have time to...

I: Aw, oh

R: Like, no I don't have time. I don't know.

I: Yeah, I get that.

R: But yeah. And then so I also like throughout the course of covid obviously- because it's a high stressor environment and everything totally valid for people to be gaining weight again. Yeah, I know I've gained weight. I was definitely lost a lot of the musculature that I had because I'm like, and I'm very annoying by that fact because um pre-covid I was actually like working out and like you and I would be like in the gym and stuff, and I was like increasing my weights and stuff and it was like fun. So, post-covid, but like during covid I'm not able to like workout as much and like I'm hoping to start like doing basic workouts as much as I can in my house and get myself back to like to increase my endurance and stamina. But I literally can't do five minutes for workout without like having to stop.

I: Yeah.

R: And it sucks.

I: Oh yeah. Yeah no, I get that, sadly. But, have your like religious leaders drawn on like any historical sources to help you and just like community members understand covid at all?

R: Mm hmm. Yeah, for sure. Yeah, so actually so one of the first things that was like being passed around during covid when like we heard that Chicago land area was kind of like the high

spots and stuff was that we were not supposed to be traveling because there is a relation of a (hadid?), a saying of the prophet, so (prophet?) that if you're in an area with the plague and like a plague hit or an illness hits you're not allowed to leave that area because you might pass it on to others and you'll regret it. So, one of the first things that, that we had is do not give up and then so, a lot of it is we just look to the examples of the past in the fact and the fact that this might be like a very like new situation for us but there has always been strife experienced by the Muslim ummah which is like the people. So, by the Muslim people, there has always been some sort of strife experienced by some part of like the Muslim world. Um, and this is just another one of those trials and strife's- examples of those strife's that we have to kind of like, kind of just um understand that everything comes from Allah and that this is one of those things. It's not out of the hands of Allah so, we do turn to prayer and we do ask Allah for help. But that does not mean that a person is supposed to just ignore the fact that um there are very real reasons. Like, that there are people passing around covid and getting covid and stuff. And that when we listen to the advice of those more educated than us on the topics, for example, doctors, scientists, like public health officials and stuff, and we're supposed to take their advice and like that's why all the masjids were closed at the beginning of covid. Um, so like that's one thing. And then again, we just turn to Allah, we turn towards prayer and uh we understand that we could not be, like it's not, it could be- one of the things is that um everyone who basically, pretty much everyone who dies in a state of sick, who gets covid, the pass away, um, one of the prayers we make is that they get accepted to t-t-the basically the reward of passing away a martyr. Um, someone who died in the path of Allah. Um, so yeah, yeah, this is just one example of the many like things that Muslim's have experienced. The fact that other people are experiencing it along with us is kind of like the new thing but, um we've always had some sort of thing. So, the examples that we take are those of how the Muslim people will respond to in those times of crises. Um, in turning towards Allah in modifying themselves and their behaving in a manor in accordance with Islam and um basically, just preparing because like we don't know when we're going to die.

I: Yeah. So, to look on the bright side of things, has there been any- like a positive experience during like you know the whole covid thing and is there anything you're looking forward to if or when you get the vaccination or you know once covid is over? If that happens.

R: Once covid is over [laughter] if that ever happens yeah. Um, oh shoot let me see one second really quick (...) um ok my phone is doing a fun thing, I just need to check my prayer time because I need to go pray in a couple minutes. Um and then we can pick this back up hopefully. But, um... ok I have like 7 minutes.

I: Yeah, no we'll be done actually very soon.

R: Ok cool. I have like 3 minutes before I need to go basically.

I: Ok, ok.

R: Um, so I'll try to get this done really quick. Positive experiences in like the meaning of what type of positive experience are we speaking?

I: Like, like any [laughter].

R: Um, so I mean positive experiences um like taekwondo wise I um twice I've gotten the highest grade, been like basically um highest grade thing in my class in the academy. In like the, basically the top class of high grades. I don't know how to explain it otherwise. Um, so like, I along with one other person, we tied for being like getting- getting A's in all our exams and classes.

I: Yeah.

R: Um, so that's one. Recently, I graduated from in my taekwondo class, I graduated one belt up so, I just that was- yeah that happened recently and I'm hoping to do that again another month.

I: Yeah, ok. We can just move to the closing questions now. Is there anything else you would want me to know? If not that's totally fine. I mean we touched on a lot of topics.

R: Yeah, we did. Um, any other things, I would say no. I don't really think so, no.

I: Um, do you have any other family or friends that we should interview? And if not that, again, it's totally fine.

R: Um, actually no I don't think so, I mean you know I think we're good.

I: Ok! Um, and again you're fine with sending a picture to me?

R: Sure, yeah, yeah.

I: Perfect! Well then thank you so much.

R: You're welcome.

I: This is extremely helpful, and you shared a lot with me, and I value it of course.

R: Thank you!

I: So, if I have any additional questions, can I contact you again? I mean I would assume yes [laughter]. I would assume yes!

R: Yes! Of course.

I: Ok, ok. Well thank you so much and I appreciate you taking the time out of your day to do this interview and you gave such thorough and comprehensive answers to my questions. Like I really appreciate it.

R: No problem and thank you, I was hoping- I was like oh am I rambling too much?

I: No, it was perfect, it was perfect!

R: Ok, I'm glad!