

Number of Interview: N.A. 1

Date: September 23, 2019

Gender: Male

Name: Maaz Ahmed

Country of Origin: Pakistan

Year of Immigration: Born here

Abstract:

Maaz Ahmed is a nineteen-year-old who attends Marquette University. Maaz identifies as Muslim but is unsure about his religion now, or how much he wants to be involved with it, causing Maaz to have issues in identity in relation to religion and culture. Maaz has traditional parents so conflicts arise when he does not follow his religious practices that his parents expect from him, especially with the career path he is choosing because of a generational gap. Maaz has felt segregated because of how he identifies as a Muslim especially in a predominantly white school and with the major he has chosen which adds to the feeling of division. Although Maaz feels segregated at times being a Muslim and identifying as Queer, he has not felt threatened by the people who discriminate against his culture and identity.

Key Concepts: Religious confusion, Generational gap, Parent conflict, Queer, race, feeling of division

Me:

I like to start the interview by asking some general questions about your background.  
Can you state your name and age?

Maaz:

My name is Maaz Ahmed and I'm 19 years old.

Me:

Where is your Homeland?

Maaz:

Uhh, so my umm parents were born in Karachi Paki...uhh or not born, but my parents were raised in Karachi, Pakistan and both of my sisters were born there, so I guess that would be my Homeland.

Me:

Were you born there?

Maaz:

No, I was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Me:

Okay.

Maaz:

Yeah, like two years after they came to the States.

Me:

Okay. Umm, when did your parents immigrate?

Maaz:

Uhh they came in 1998 in like September. Um, and my oldest sister was like four at the time I think. And my other sister was two.

Me:

Hmm.. did- So you were born in the U.S. so you did not live in any countries.

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

Mmm how, how, old are you now?

Maaz:

I'm 19.

Me:

After you were in the U.S. did any of your other family members immigrate here?

Maaz:

Uhh, we were actually the last people (laughter) umm because we still have like uhh a lot of family that lives in Pakistan. But like first it was my, one of my mother, my mom's brothers, and then it was the other one. And then all my dad's family is still in Pakistan.

Me:

Do you go and visit them a lot?

Maaz:

Um, I, the last time I went was like five or six years ago and then the time after that was 10 (Laughter). So it's been awhile.

Me:

I take it you are not married?

Maaz:

Nope (laughter).

Me:

Mmm and you don't have any children?

Maaz:

Uhh I sure hope not.

Me:

Hmmm. So it, it says in here to talk about the level of education about like before you immigrated, but you go to Marquette.

Maaz:

Yeah (laughter).

Me:

Clearly (laughter). Why did you choose Marquette?

Maaz:

Umm.

Me:

And you're from Michigan so I want to hear that.

Maaz:

Yeah. Yeah, and it's, it's tough to like be like first-generation when you're talking about it because like you're kind of in the, in between space and especially like in my situation because umm, I was born in the States, but like I'm still very much like, I feel like significantly more connected to Pakistan than I do like the U S in a lot of circumstances. Um, but also at the same time, I feel really connect to the States, than I do Pakistan (laughing). So it's a, it's a back and forth thing. Um, I chose Marquette because umm honestly scholarship (laughing). Um, like it was my second choice school because, um, my first choice was U of M actually, um, Michigan in Ann Arbor. Um, even though I wasn't raised in Ann Arbor, I was just born there. Um, I was planning on going there, but it was too expensive. And this school provided itself as like a really good opportunity because it was affordable and it had a lot of like the programs that I wanted to go through with and like, I could make connections here.

Me:

That's awesome. I had another question and I totally blanked.

Maaz:

(Laughing)

Me:

What is your major?

Maaz:

Uhh I'm a theater major.

Me:

Theater major?

Maaz:

Theater major and digital media.

Me:

Okay. Can I ask like how do your, like what do your parents think about that?

Maaz:

Wooh, that's a story (dramatic and laughter). Um, when I first told my parents, cause like I had been in theater a lot as um a high schooler because like, it seemed like something that I really, really liked to do. Um, so I was like, I want to do this as my career. I want to make art and media for the rest of my life. And I like sat my da- parents down and I was like, I'm gonna major in theater and they said, no you're not (laughter). So it was this big like kind of fight that we had throughout like my senior year of high school being like, I want to do this that's outside the norm. So like, um, there they weren't very supportive. I don't think they're still very supportive, but now they kind of know that like it's feasible and it's a lot of work. But like I'm going to put it in that to make this happen. I hope (laughter).

Me:

What do your parents do?

Maaz:

My dad is an IT consultant at John Deere and my mom does billing in a hospital.

Me:

Okay.

Maaz:

Yeah. Both of them, also both of them have masters degrees so, just thought I'd throw that in there (laughter).

Me:

(Laughter). Are you employed right now?

Maaz:

Yeah. I work two jobs on campus.

Me:

On campus?

Maaz:

Yeah I work in the writing center and then I also work in the theater.

Me:

Okay. And who shares these spaces and what activities happen inside?

Maaz:

Like where I work?

Me:

Mhmm.

Maaz:

Um, so the writing center is actually probably one of the most diverse places (laughter) on campus because like Marquette is such like a white school that like, um, the writing center is like really pushing its diversity message. Um, there's a lot of like Pakistani and Indian people who work in the writing center and like, um, there's, it's a super, um, open place. We all get to talk about different things and like show like how our identities influenced the way that we write and the way that we tutor, which I think is really, really cool umm (laughter). It's weird cause like I've never been to like an MSA meeting. The Marquette, um, the Muslim student association, um, I'd never been to a meeting. So the writing center is the most, um, Brown place I've been in (laughter). Um, the theater on the other hand is extremely Eurocentric. Um, it's like, you know, it's me and a couple other kids that are all the only people of color. I'm certainly the only Muslim in that department. And so, you know, that's a double edged sword because like it means that I can be like a vulnerable and talking about my experience and stuff like that. But it also means that like sometimes I don't get considered for things because like I have a, like there's an image that you see when you look at, like when you cast a Brown person in the show, it's like that takes on like this social message that maybe the director doesn't want to get it.

Me:

Yeah, for sure. Um, so next I'd like to ask some questions about your decision, or your parents decision to immigrate to the U.S.

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

Do you know the main reasons for immigrating?

Maaz:

Um, I think it was because, um, my dad came here ehh my dad talked to my mom into coming here because there's a lot of opportunity in the States for us, for my kid, for his kids. Um, cause like, you know, in Pakistan it's hard to be, um, what's up (laughter)?

Me:

Sorry I was fixing it.

Maaz:

Okay. Yeah, no worries. Uh, in Pakistan it's hard to be um a successful woman and I have two older sisters. Um it's hard to be a successful woman doing, um, like work that isn't necessarily considered like womanly of gender norms in that, in that area, in that time frame. Um, cause my oldest sister majored in computer science and my other sister made her maj- majored in mechanical engineering. So, um, you know, these are both traditionally masculine, um, jobs and the work space in Pakistan is not conducive to that. So like coming here, that gave them the opportunity to, to pursue all that and to be like able to like pursue that education. Whereas for me, I just decided to have, ehh forget it all. I'm going to go make some plays or something (laughter). But even to that note, it's like, um, you know, I wouldn't be able to do that in Pakistan. I don't think that I'd be able to create theater there. Um, I certainly wouldn't be able to like impact or like have the impact, have the opportunity to impact the way that I want to. Because the reason why I'm going into media is because, um, representation is so important and the only way we're going to change people's perceptions about Muslims and South Asian people is by representing them well and writing stories for these people.

Me:

Yeah. That's awesome. So did your parents plan on moving here and staying like...

Maaz:

Yeah I think so.

Me:

Or not going back I guess?

Maaz:

Yeah I think the goal was to come to the states and just stay here.

Me:

When your parents came, where did they originally immigrate to?

Maaz:

Uhh Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Me:

Ann Arbor Michigan?

Maaz:

We had umm some family in the area and so we stayed with them for a while and then umm my dad got a job in the Quad cities, which is like on the border of Iowa and Illinois. So, that's where we moved, that's where I grew up. Umm, we moved there in September of 2000. So like a couple months after I was born and yeah (laughter).

Me:

And did, okay, so you said you chose Marquette because mainly like Scholarship?

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

So was that, did you look into Milwaukee at all like the area and think it would be a good fit?

Maaz:

Uhh I should've (laughter) umm and that's not a bad thing because I really like this city. Umm I really just wanted to move to a city for college because um I was from a small town and there's not a lot of opportunity for- to create art in a small town, especially theater because it's such a collaborative space. You need so many people to make stuff happen. So, um, you know, I was looking at like Chicago, New York for like my professional career and like coming to Milwaukee actually was a really, really great spot for me because there's so many emerging theater people in this space because like people are seeing Milwaukee as kind of a new place to start making things because there's so many creative people here, so there's a lot of opportunity to grow and then move up through the ranks and like get some professional credits. So it worked out really well.

Me:

Yeah, and it's an up and coming city.

Maaz:

Yes.

Me:

Okay. The next questions pertain to your early experiences being in the U.S. I don't know if you remember this when you first immigrated, but do you know what your life was like? Was it different than what, especially for your parents..

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

Was it different with what like things you guys experienced now?

Maaz:

From what my parents have told me, like coming here initially compared to now has been super different. And like when I think about what I remember as a kid compared to now, it's crazy because um the mosque that I remember um going to first was this tiny little room and like the back of the church I think or like in like some community center. And um, you know, that's where we'd pray. That's where we eat. You know, we'd have Ramadan there, all that stuff. And so like seeing how much the community has grown and how like so much more like Muslims are so much more vocal now. And like, um, our mosque went from that small room to like this little house that we bought and made turn into a masjid and then it turned into this giant building that we like we fundraised for and built from the ground up, um, in my hometown. So that's like, that's the one way that I've seen it change. Beyond that. I also think that like social stigmas changed completely because umm like it's easier to talk about being Muslim. When I was a kid my mom told me like don't tell anyone because she was afraid of like stuff happening to me at school when I was like four or five. Um, whereas now like I can sit down, I can have a conversation in a class about Arab and Muslim women in the United States. I think that that's a really, really important change to show.

Me:

Yeah.

Maaz:

So yeah.

Me:

I agree with that. So I know your parents, you just said your parents told you not to say anything. Did you guys face, did you have any obstacles that you faced? And were there problems related to the ki- kind of place you prayed? Like you just said it was small, in the back?

Maaz:

Yeah. Um they weren't necessarily obstacles just because I grew up in such a small town that like we were already, like Muslims were already pretty well integrated into like the culture there in that like you know, we, everybody works at John Deere at my hometown. It's like the main employer so everybody knows each other, which is honestly a good thing because then it meant that like everybody kind of understood the Muslim experience as more Muslim started coming in and populating that area, then there were more people who could understand it. Um, I do remember one instance where umm not the mosque that I went to, but the one across the river in Illinois, um, I don't know if it was necessarily, I don't know if this was like a planned attack, but like, um, some rocks were thrown out the window or like it might've been a BB gun or something, but it shattered the window while people were praying and this was a big thing because we didn't know if it was an attack or if it was an accident and things like that. But, um, security ramped up. Um, same thing happen in the wake of the Christ church shooting. Um, this summer when I went home, um, security ramped up at our mosque. So like I, I guess that's a way in which likely would face obstacles and overcome that and how things have changed.

Me:

Yeah that is scary. That's also horrible that you can't feel safe in you're safe spot.

Maaz:

Well, yeah, I mean I guess that's kind of just like how it happens though, you know?

Me:

Unfortunately. Do your parents speak a different language...

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

When you go home?

Maaz:

Yeah both of my parents speak Urdu.

Me:

When you go, so when you talk to them do you communicate that way or..?

Maaz:

Uhh sometimes, my Urdu is really bad. I can understand it really well but like speaking it is hard, so I have some like preplanned phrases I throw in.

Me:

Okay, thinking about your life shortly after you immigrated tell me about the places and buildings where you spent a lot of time during the initial years after immigration.

Maaz:

Um, so I guess like I'll speak to like my parents and like my young experience is that like, we, um, we ended up spending a lot of time at the mosque and then we also, um, like we like built this community of friends where, um, we still see each other all the time. It's like my parents best friends from back where they were in Pakistan who also moved here. We all ended up in the same place somehow.

Me:

That's so cool.

Maaz:

And then, you know, yeah, their friends started coming into the mix and now we have like this like solid group that like we all try to hang out every month. Um, and it's more for my parents, um, because um, I don't necessarily get along with their kids, but like, you know, it's part of this community that like we all can at least turn to each other.

Me:

What activities happened there?

Maaz:

Uhh, it's like, you know, we meet, we, um, we eat food, we pray together and then we like just

kind of, every once in a while we try to like sit down and talk about like all the things that are going on. And like, if you know anyone's having issues, how can we overcome that?

Me:

Can I ask what kind of food you eat?

Maaz:

Yeah, totally. Like biryani and um, I don't know. My mom tries to make like, um, different things each time. So it's a lot of like (Dasey?) Indian food. Pretty cool.

Me:

Does your mom cook a lot?

Maaz:

Yeah, it slaps, I miss it.

Me:

So in your culture how are women viewed and what is their typical role?

Maaz:

Uhh that's a difficult question because like if umm, if I would ask my mom, she'd be like, Oh, women are viewed great in Pakistani culture, but to like the American standards of feminism and especially like third wave feminism right now, I'd say that it's a really difficult disparity to overcome because, um, there's like a lot of subjugation that happens and talking about it doesn't necessarily help because Pakistan is not in a place for a big social reform since like the government is so off, it's already so corrupt. Um, so like, it's a difficult question to answer when it comes to like, like how is it right now, especially as I don't have the, um, the field experience there. But yeah.

Me:

Do you know about men in the same sense?

Maaz:

Oh yeah. I mean like it's kind of obvious or I wouldn't say obvious, but like, um, I think it's reasonable to assume that like men would be considered on top just cause like the work field is so, so male oriented and like it's such a patriarchal society. Um, and that goes, that flows from like, you know, culture to religion to stuff like that. Oh, there's a rabbit, hey pal how's it going (laughter)?

Me:

Um how did your religion or ethnic upbringing contribute to who you are today?

Maaz:

Um, so I was raised Muslim. Um, right now I'm in a weird spot with my faith in like trying to figure it out, but I wouldn't say I'm not Muslim right now. Um, and it contributed so much. Like my entire moral compass is based off of Islam and how I see myself, how I see the world around me is based off of that. Um, even if right now I'm not necessarily eating Halal or like sometimes I miss a daily prayer. It's like the, um, the moral, the moral, the moral teachings that it has. And like the way that you interact with the people around you. Um, all of that for me is really based around like what I was taught by like my Sunday school teachers. And like, what I've learned from my religious leaders and stuff like that.

Me:

And what are some ways in which you balance your faith and your American identity?

Maaz:

Um, I'd say that it's not hard because like it's like being American and being Muslim are not, um, mutually exclusive, like you can be both. Um, I used to think that they were mutually exclusive. Like I used to be like, Oh, I'm just torn between these two worlds, but I'm not. Um, because American culture isn't based around anything that Islam prohibits because there's a lot that Islam prohibits. Um, yeah, there's a whole like Muslims can't drink or anything like that, but at the face of it, being a social person does not involve anything like that. So it's, um, I think that the way that I intersect the two is just by like being vocal about my position in my religion right now, even though I'm not fully committed to the faith currently. Um, and that's just cause I'm trying to figure it out. Um, by being active and vocal about it, it shows that like, that's an inherently American thing.

Me:

So, I know you said they're bro- they're both exclusive, but do you consider yourself more Muslim or more American?

Maaz:

I don't think so.

Me:

No?

Maaz:

I think that like, um, there's different facets to every single thing. So like in some ways I'm more like Muslim Pakistani and other ways I'm more American. And I think what it all levels out is, is that, I can't really put myself in either category because I'm in a middle space, you know, like we talked about in class, that third space.

Me:

Yeah. Yeah. I get that. And then when you say in some ways you're more one in like other ways, you're more the other, what ways? What do you mean?

Maaz:

Um, so like, so like, when it comes to like um...

Me:

\*Moving listening device\*

Maaz:

\*laughter\*

Me:

I don't want the wind to block the mic.

Maaz:

No, yeah, yeah. Um, when it comes to what I want to do with my career, that's definitely a more American viewpoint. Um, I'm sure that if I were raised in Pakistan, I would have a very different outlook on what I should do with my life (laughter). Um, so like that's one way in which I can kind of see myself leaning towards the American. But when it comes to like how I view myself and how I view myself socially, then I lean towards the Islamic side because I, like, my family and my connections with my friends come first in everything. And that's a really big thing in Islam is like your community. And so I think that that's something that's like, that's something that could be said about that.

Me:

Yeah. And then these next questions are like kind of about ma- they're about marriage. I know you're not married..

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

and I'm going to talk for like as in the future.

Maaz:

Yeah. No worries.

Me:

What does marriage mean to you?

Maaz:

Um wow, that's a broad question. I guess, like in a sense it's kind of like, um, a really firm partnership that like, is founded in trust and is dope to be in (laughter).

Me:

(Laughter) and what factors play a role in marriage? So, what are the first characteristics you look for, like for homeland, nationality, village, Muslim?

Maaz:

Um, to me personally, like right now, I'm not necessarily thinking about a lot of that just cause like right now I'm career focused and I want to get like myself established. Um, I think that for me personally, it's like, um, I don't know. I think being Muslim would matter to me, um, alongside that, like, no- not necessarily being from Pakistan but like being from somewhere else because, um, the um, experience of like (laughter) the experience of being, um, like Muslim and being a first generation immigrant is so unique that it's hard to relate to people um on a deep level who don't have to go through that when especially like when I'm like experiencing troubles with that, you know, like I can't talk to one of my white friends about how I feel like sitting around feeling excluded for like being a certain, like for like not being able to exist in either space like Pakistan or, um, America. So like that's something that I think is, would be important.

Me:

Yeah, I cannot imagine how hard that must be. And then, what about your parents?

Maaz:

Oh my God.

Me:

Do they have a view?

Maaz:

The things that they tell me (laughter). Um, every time I go home (laughter) my mom is always like, "Yeah, Maaz, we're gonna get you married right out of college. Um, you'll have like two days to breathe them and you're getting married." And (laughter) um, you know, they're very traditional. They want me to have an arranged marriage, um, strictly by the book. She'll be Muslim, she'll be from Pakistan, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And you know, that's fine (laughter). Um, I'll figure it out when I get there. That's my stake, my take on it.

Me:

So right now, when you say that, does that mean you just don't know? Like maybe you will go through it that maybe you won't?

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

Yeah.

Maaz:

Yeah. Right now um what I've always said is that like if I meet someone who I thi- um prefer, like who like I really want to end up with, then I'll voice that and I'll make that heard to my parents. But like, I'm not opposed to the idea of the arranged marriage because it worked out really great for my sister.

Me:

Oh, your sister did that?

Maaz:

Yeah, my sister is married.

Me:

How old is your sister?

Maaz:

She's 20 ss- Oh man. 2?. She's not that old. She's six years older than me and I'm 19.

Me:

25.

Maaz:

That's math.

Me:

\*Laughing\*

Maaz:

That's how math works.

Me:

When did she get married? Do you know?

Maaz:

Uhh, December, 2017.

Me:

2017?

Maaz:

yeah.

Me:

Did she have kids?

Maaz:

No.

Me:

And.. We answered these, I got ahead of myself sorry.

Maaz:

No worries (laughter).

Me:

So, there's a question that says who influenced your decision to get engaged or married to a specific person, but since you're not, you said your parents might..

Maaz:

Yeah, yeah, my parents might..

Me:

I don't know how to word it (laughter) might be able to?

Maaz:

No, no, no, no. I know what you're trying to get to. Um, yeah, I mean like my parents are going to be a big factor in it no matter what. Um, because like especially in like Muslim culture, like family is so rooted in important to like the marriage dynamic. Like it's not like two people meeting, it's two families meeting, I think. That's the way that it's always been framed to me. So that's what I think.

Me:

And then I know it's hard because your parents, so your parents are traditional..

Maaz:

Mhmm.

Me:

but now you're living in a space that you can do anything.

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

Does that collide a lot?

Maaz:

Yeah, a little bit (laughter). Um, and I mean like the choices that I make right now or it's like something that like, you know, there are things for me to learn from and then like, I think that like, no matter what happens to me when I'm away from home, like it's going to make me a better person in the future and I have a breadth of experience to, you know, um, live off of. So yeah.

Me:

Sorry.

Maaz:

No, it's all good.

Me:

Would you consider marrying a person younger than you?

Maaz:

Yeah, why not, who knows.

Me:

How many years?

Maaz:

Oh, nothing absurd.

Me:

What is absurd?

Maaz:

Um, I don't know, I always went with the rule like, like a couple of years up or a couple of years down (man skateboarding in the background).

Me:

Would you consider marrying a mate who is born and raised outside the U.S. (man skateboarding in the background).

Maaz:

Oh man (laughter). Um, yeah, probably. I mean it might be difficult because like there's a cultural gap there as well but you know.

Me:

Mmm, when it comes to marriage, who makes most of the decisions? Would it be your parents, you..

Maaz:

Um, my parents would say them, I would say me (laughter).

Me:

(Laughter) and what role would your sisters play in making? Like would they have any say too?

Maaz:

Yeah, I think something definitely. Um, because when my sister was getting married, like I would come and like, I would like say like what I felt about the guy and whatever. Um, I think that they would definitely be involved and they'd have a lot of really good perspective to bring.

Me:

What do you think about dating?

Maaz:

Like currently? I don't think it's an inherently bad idea (laughter). Um, I know a lot of Muslims are like, well, the way that we do things is different and yeah, but I don't think that that necessarily bars like dating being a good experience, a way to like learn limits, learn different things. Because like otherwise you're, you're going to be a bad partner at some point in your life no matter what. And you might as well learn all the easy stuff before you get into a like committed lifelong relationship so that you can be as strong as possible, you know?

Me:

Yeah. Do you think the internet and Facebook or social media made it easier for Muslim American to meet their future mate?

Maaz:

Oh, absolutely (laughter). I mean it's made it easier for all types of, tons of people to meet, so.

Me:

It's easy to connect.

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

Do you think communication types such as cell phones, texting and Skype made it easier for males and females to get to know- to get to know each other before making this decision to- (inaudible)?

Maaz:

Yeah. I have no idea how my parents did it because my parents met on their wedding day (laughter), so like I couldn't imagine.

Me:

Wow. How long have they been together? Do you know?

Maaz:

Oh um, it feels like a million years (laughter).

Me:

\*Laughing\*

Maaz:

And they're killing it. They're having a great time.

Me:

Yeah? That's great. Mmm, do you think community events or centers or weddings are places where people tend to see future spouses and proceed from there?

Maaz:

(Laughter) that's what my mom wants it to be. Every time we go to a wedding together, she's like, "Maaz, you have to look your best. You might meet your future wife."

Me:

How is marriage in America different that your parents' way of marriage?

Maaz:

My parents want to say that it's this vastly different thing, but I don't think it necessarily is. Um, I think that the scope of marriage is always a little different because, um, especially back home, it's like, you know, this is the person you're gonna spend the rest of your life with because divorce is kind of taboo. Whereas here, like, you know, this could be the person you spend the rest of your life with and stuff like that.

Me:

Very true. Wow (laughter) that is very true. A family which has more than one daughter, do you think the marriage restrictions and process are different between the oldest daughter and the youngest daughter?

Maaz:

I have two sisters. Um (laughter), I don't, I don't really know, um, because only one of my sisters had gotten married and, um, it's not that my parents were strict with her either. Um, because they ta-, try to be as open as they can when talking about, um, like how, how they feel about like, their- are they marrying certain people and like what I, what they identify with and like what would mesh with them? What would mesh best with considering our family, you know?

Me:

Yeah.

Maaz:

I can't spit words out today for some reason (laughter)

Me:

\*Laughing\* it's totally okay. Okay, now I'm gonna talk about parenting.

Maaz:

Mhmm.

Me:

In what ways, if any, do you think boys should be raised differently from girls?

Maaz:

Honestly, no, but like there's, there shouldn't be a difference just because like we're all people at the base of it and, um, you know, like I'm certainly going to instill my daughters with like, Oh, if I have kids, um, I'd certainly instill them, um, my daughters with like, at least a better way to like, not better, but like, it's difficult being a woman in America because like, um, you always have to be on edge about certain things, especially like when you're walking alone, safety's really important. So I think that that's (laughter) I think that that's like one way but like, even then, like

that's not something that I shouldn't teach, if I were to have a son that's not something that I shouldn't teach them either, you know?

Me:

Exactly, it can still happen to them.

Maaz:

Yeah, and like it's good to have streets smarts. It's good to have book smarts. Um, it's good to just be smart (laughter)

Me:

\*Laughing\* that's right. And what kind of husband or wife would you like for your children?

Maaz:

Like to, for them to marry?

Me:

Yes.

Maaz:

Um, it's just gotta be like someone who makes them happy and completes them. I certainly don't know if I'm going to go through it with like the whole arranged marriage thing with my kids, you know? Just cause like the world changing. Culture's changing. So why should we stick with these old in the warms if they don't, if they're not going to look in the future and if they do work in the future, no harm, no foul.

Me:

Yeah, makes sense.

Maaz:

Mhmm.

Me:

Now moving on to your culture and how you define yourself.

Maaz:

Okay.

Me:

How do you identify yourself?

Maaz:

Um, I see myself, like, my descriptors go, um, Pakistani um, like Pakistani American or for lack of a better term, Brown, um (laughter), uh Muslim, like creative and then queer.

Me:

Okay.

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

And (silence) tell me about the places and buildings where you spent a lot of time today.

Maaz:

Um, well since I didn't have rehearsal today, I didn't spend a lot of time in the theater, but any other day I would (laughter), um, I had work in the library. Um, other than that, just like in my classrooms. Today's a weird day for me because I have an off night (laughter).

Me:

Oh, cause you don't have the rehearsal?.

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

What language and languages do you speak at home?

Maaz:

Um, I speak mainly English. Um, my parents, people Urdu and I respond in English.

Me:

but you do you understand it?

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

And you just not the best at speaking it?

Maaz:

Yeah, I think that, yeah, I think that the term would be semi fluent.

Me:

Semi fluent? Mmm, how would you describe your religious life?

Maaz:

Oh, it's had its ups and downs. I was really religious up until I was like 13, and then I was like, Hmm, what.. if not (laughter)? Um, and then like I started like questioning things and um, the first time I really was like, maybe I should like take a break from really believing in Islam and like try to like, think of new things was around my senior year of high school. And then

eventually I came back to the faith. Thinking about like, um, like, you know, this seems like the most important thing for me. Right now, I'm in a more like intermediate area where like I'm trying to figure out like my personal view of Islam and how like how I can be comfortable by- with like being both in some aspects, very Muslim in some aspects and not.

Me:

Okay. Do you attend the Mosque on a regular basis?

Maaz:

Not on a regular basis. I really should. But um, I don't.

Me:

And in what ways, if any, do you participate in the community activities?

Maaz:

Um, I don't really at school, but um, back home there's, um, not only do we have like Friday prayers, but like, um, at night, um, my Mosque would always host like a Friday potluck. So all of us would get together. We'd all bring food and like, you know, I'd be with like my Muslim friends, we'd all hang out that night, you know, so I think that's like one of the ways and when I was younger I would attend the Sunday school. Stuff like that.

Me;

The potluck sounds like a lot of fun.

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

And yummy.

Maaz:

It was a good time.

Me:

How would you describe your political participation in the United States?

Maaz:

I am very political all the time. Everything I do is political (laughter). Um, I lean very far left. Um, like Bernie Sanders is my King (laughter). Um, in that cause, like as someone who wants to create art and create media, um, I think that it's important to like concern myself with politics in the world around me because there is so much that can be changed through politics and there's so much that like the media influences politics and politics influences the media. Um, I don't think that like me going to law school was out of the question once I'm done creating art and then like becoming like a Congress person or something. Um, so yeah, I think that like one of my friends said that like everything you do is a movement. Every action that you make has a political tie to it because it shows your own personal leanings. I dunno if I'd sa- go that far because sometimes I just want to sit and like eat eat popcorn and not be like queer coated until some liberal message (laughter). Um, you know, I think that there is truth to that statement. Like everything significant that we like, every significant choice we make has some regards to our political belief as well.

Me:

For sure. I believe that. So I take it you vote?

Maaz:

Oh yeah.

Me:

And what elections? Like only presidential, congressional.

Maaz:

Um, I'm trying to vote for everything that I can. I only turned 18 last year, so I've only voted in one so far. And it was the, um, the, uh, state level Congress election for the state of Iowa because that's where I was um raised and that's where I'm registered, so yeah.

Me:

And when it comes to candidates who are from your own culture, Homeland or religion, in what ways does that affect your voting behavior?

Maaz:

Well first I look at like if their ideas are aligned with mine cause um, there's this guy named (inaudible) Rashid who's um running in Virginia right now to be um I think a Senator and he's very liberal. He's great. I really want him to win. I can't vote for him because he's in Virginia, but you know, I follow him on social media and everything. So in that instance, I think that the fact that he is also, um, like from South Asia is really, really important to me because that's representation. On the other hand, there's people like, um, Ajith pie or Dinesh D'Souza who are in office right now and they're the scum of the earth and I hate them (laughter). So, you know, it goes either way.

Me:

Makes sense.

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

And do you read the daily newspaper?

Maaz:

Nope (laughter).

Me:

How do you get your news then?

Maaz:

Uh, through social media I see a lot on Twitter and a lot um on my Google news feed, stuff like that.

Me:

Twitter, yes. Twitter has all the information.

Maaz:

Yeah, it's really all I use. It's my favorite social media platform.

Me:

So I remember you saying that your family was last to immigrate.

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

Do you have any connections with your Homeland then?

Maaz:

Yeah, um we still have a lot of fa- family who still lives there.

Me:

You said family who lives there my bad. I misunderstood.

Maaz:

It's all good. It's all good. Um, yeah, we still do have some people who live there and we visit every once in a while. But um, my parents call home a lot and every, every time me or my sisters have a birthday, um, our family in Pakistan, will call us and let us know.

Me:

What about the other way around? Have you encouraged your family back home to visit or come live here?

Maaz:

Oh, absolutely. It's just so hard to get entrance into the U.S. it's hard for like um, you know, Muslims and people like that to get here. It's easier for us to go back.

Me:

And in what ways have political events in the Homeland affected you here?

Maaz:

Um, well specifically what's going on right now in Kashmir really is, I know it's giving my dad a lot of trouble, um, because like Kashmir is such a, um, talked about place in Pakistan and Indian politics, so that the fact that like the Indian government just decided to like claim it and break the UN policy. Um, it's, my dad is worried that it's going to cause a war. Um, because both of these countries are nuclear countries, they're both ready to fire. Um, so like that's a really big stressor and I can tell that like, you know, that's not something we anticipated. Whenever there's a Pakistani election, my dad is always very vocal about it even though he doesn't vote there anymore (laughter). Um, he's always campaigning to my relatives there about who to vote for, stuff like that.

Me:

Have you ever taken any action on that like your dad has?

Maaz:

Uhh, I'm more ca- interested in American politics, just cause that's like my everyday.

Me:

And where do you get your information from your Homeland? Is it your family?

Maaz:

Yeah, it's my dad.

Me:

How often do you guys talk to your family?

Maaz:

I try to call home at least once a week. Oh, are you mean in Pakistan?

Me:

Yeah, sorry.

Maaz:

Oh, um, he, I think he also tries to call back uh at least once a week. And we also have like a family group chat on WhatsApp. So you know, everybody's always talking (laughing).

Me:

That's so cool, I like that.

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

Were you in the United States during the Gulf war?

Maaz:

I don't believe so because I was born in 2000. I don't know when the Gulf war was.

Me:

Were you in the United States on September 11?

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

Yeah. You were one?

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

What about um, your like, so your family then, cause I don't know if you at the time felt anything since you were one...

Maaz:

\*Laughing

Me:

But what did your family... you can do like like not days and months either cause you were one. How did your family feel at the time in the days and months that followed if you know?

Maaz:

Yeah, my mom and I talked about it briefly, but she doesn't like bringing it up because it's like a, it's a tough spot to talk about. But like they were definitely discriminated against. Um, it was tough for my mom cause she wasn't working at the time so she was just at home. So like my dad had to experience a lot of that, just like the brunt of the work. Um, and like they remember like watching it on the TV when the towers fell and stuff like that. It's honestly the parallels between my parents' experience and the American experience with just watching everything fall is really interesting because it's pretty much the same. And then it's just how do people respond to them? Where is where it differs.

Me:

That is very true.

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

You're all watching, like it's all the same thing, you're all watching the same thing.

Maaz:

Mhmm.

Me:

Yeah, I'm sorry to hear that.

Maaz:

Ehh, it, I mean it is what it is, you know?

Me:

Unfortunately. And since 9/11 in what ways has your life or interactions with others changed?

Maaz:

Speaker 1:

Um,

Me:

Especially with non Muslims.

Maaz:

Yeah. Let's see. I don't know if I'd be able to answer this as well as like someone who's a little older than me because my entire conscious life has been posted online. Um, and I think that that's interesting because now like people who are post 9/11 are finally being able to be vocal about their experience rather than like this like culture being dominated by this like horrific event that

everybody remembers. You know, now we have people who are talking about just the aftermath. So I think that that's really where like my experience with that plays in. You know?

Me:

Yeah.

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

Thank you for sharing your experiences and your parents' experiences with that. Now I would like to switch to cultural clothing.

Maaz:

Okay.

Me:

Do you have any traditional or cultural- cultural clothing?

Maaz:

(inaudible voices talking in background) uh yeah. Um, I mean I wear like, um, the generic like Kurta [inaudible] during, um, like prayers and stuff like that whenever I have to go to the mosque for like something fancy and like weddings, I try to dress more traditionally.

Me:

How many, how much of the clothing do you have?

Maaz:

Uhh, at school, not a lot, but at home. Um, tons (laughter).

Me:

And you just said, how do you feel when you wear them?

Maaz:

Dope, I love it (laughter).

Me:

That's awesome.

Maaz:

Yeah and when I was younger I didn't. But like now, um, I went to prom my senior year, which was a big issue in my family. Um, not because I went with anyone because I went with two of my best friends. Um, but because I just went at all just cause like they are not big on school dances and neither of my sisters got to go. But I was on prom court. I ended up as prom King. Um, so when I went, I wore traditionally Pakistani clothes and it was awesome. I won best dressed.

Me:

That's so cool!

Maaz:

Subtle flex.

Me:

Big flex (inaudible).

Me:

What does the traditional culture or cultural clothing mean to you? Why are they important?

Maaz:

Um, I dunno, it's like, it's a big connection for me, especially because I care a lot about like the way that I dress in fashion and stuff like that. Um, you know, like being, um, wearing like traditional clothes matters because then I feel connected to the people around me. I feel connected to my family. Whereas, you know, in my, in my street clothes, I could be anybody so, yeah, sorry, I'm texting back in friend really quick. (Silence) You can go ahead and, and ask the next one.

Me:

Does religion play a role in your clothing?

Maaz:

Yeah, for sure. Um, I wear, um, especially on Eid, um, like the Muslim holiday I owd-, I'd always wear traditional clothes and like, since um weddings are very like Islamically oriented, I always wear clothes during then too.

Me:

Does anyone influence you to continue to wear your traditional clothing or is it you?

Maaz:

It's my parents.

Me:

It's your parents?

Maaz:

yeah.

Me:

Did your mom wear the traditional dresses?

Maaz:

Yeah, she still does.

Me:

(Silence) Okay. Sorry I read the wrong thing.

Maaz:

No, it's all good.

Me:

These next questions about- are about your perceptions and beliefs towards disability.

Maaz:

Okay.

Me:

Okay, do you think people with disabilities can lead lives that are as fulfilling as people without disabilities?

Maaz:

Oh yeah, absolutely.

Me:

And in general, do you think there is a prejudice towards people with disabilities in your community?

Maaz:

I would think so, but I don't think it's a quintessentially like Muslim prejudice against disabilities unless there's something I'm missing. But I think it's just like, you know, design and um infrastructure is all built for able bodied people. And so it's not necessarily, it's like more of a

broad um, like human thing that like we don't necessarily think about people who don't have the same skills as us.

Me:

In your community, do you feel that most families who have members with certain learning diisa- disabilities or mental ill- illnesses, hh my God I can't talk either..

Maaz:

It's okay (laughter)

Me:

Are secretive about it?

Maaz:

Um, I don't think so, but I might be wrong about this. Um, one of my aunts, um, I think she has a, or, I know she has a learning disa- disability and, um, that's always been a thing, but she's always been treated as just a normal member of the family. And, um, you know, she also has a college degree. She went to school. Um, I don't think she works, but that's just because she has people who she can rely on.

Me:

Do you think community and families with disabled members perceive disabled male, different than disabled female?

Maaz:

I would think so. Yeah. Um, my aunt is, as I mentioned before, um, I don't have um a disabled man in my family. Um, and I, but I think that like the way that we would treat them would be different just because, um, gender roles trickled down even into like the smallest subcategory.

Me:

So then do you think families who have disabled females feel more hardship and feel more restrictive in their carrying options than if they had disabled male?

Maaz:

Yeah, I would think so.

Me:

Yeah.

Maaz:

You know, and that's hard to say, but it's the truth.

Me:

Do you think marriageability options for disabled males more than that, available to disabled female?

Maaz:

Oh, I have no idea (laughter).

Me:

That's okay.

Maaz:

My aunt never got married, so, you know, based on my limited experience, I think I would say that it's difficult, especially for women.

Me:

Do you think it was because of that?

Maaz:

It might've been.

Me:

Is she tradition- is she like your parents and all..

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me: Where she is very traditional?

Maaz:

Yeah, so it probably was because of that.

Me:

Is there anything else about your history that you would like to tell me?

Maaz:

Um, (silence) history is a pretty broad term, I really like grilled cheese (laughter).

Me:

(Laughter) are there any particular services or resources that you think the Muslim woman, do you think Arab or Muslim women's resource and research Institute should provide to meet the needs of communities to which you belong.

Maaz:

I think just outreach. Um, this is a really, really interesting organization that I think could have a lot of really great potential, especially for highlighting the voices of Arab and Muslim woman. So I think that like, you know, the bigger that this grows, the more outreach you can have and then we can, this organization can reach out to like, you know, um, other communities rather than just a mov-, the Milwaukee area.

Me:

So how do you think it's doing right now?

Maaz:

Um, I didn't know about this before the class (laughter), so I don't know if that answers your question.

Me:

(Laughter) yeah of-, I mean, I guess it does. Um, Do you have any letters or old photographs by chance or any kind of documents that you think will help us understand your family history?

Maaz:

Uh, not with me, no.

Me:

Totally okay.

Maaz:

\*Laughing

Me:

All right. Thank you so much...

Maaz:

Yeah, thank you.

Me:

for your time and energy and for sharing your experience- experiences with me. They were really interesting.

Maaz:

\*Laughing

Me:

I really enjoyed it.

Maaz:

Yeah.

Me:

You have given us valuable information about your life and your family history. If you need to contact me, please do, you have my phone number.

Maaz:

Yup.

Me:

And if I have any additional questions for you, can I contact you?

Maaz:

Yeah, absolutely.

Me:

Thank you so much again. I- I really did enjoy your story.

Maaz:

Dope.

Me:

I enjoyed talking to you. Thank you for being my interviewee.

Maaz:

Yeah, thanks dude (laughter).