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# South Asian Muslim Americans' career development: factors influencing their career decision-making process

Michelle Mojgan Nanji  
*University of Iowa*

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SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIM AMERICANS' CAREER DEVELOPMENT:  
FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR CAREER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

by

Michelle Mojgan Nanji

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy  
degree in Psychological and Quantitative Foundations in the  
Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

August 2017

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Saba Rasheed Ali

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Michelle Mojgan Nanji

has been approved by the Examining Committee for  
the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree  
in Psychological and Quantitative Foundations at the August 2017 graduation.

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To my Baba (Dad) who always said, "Tough times don't last, Tough people last."  
You were there from the start, through the tears, laughs, struggles, excitement, and I so  
wish you could be here to see the end and the new beginning. I know you are with me  
always, my guardian angel. I miss you every day and love you so much.

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## ABSTRACT

The Muslim population in the United States has faced numerous challenges in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, including increased negative portrayal of Muslims in the media. While there is increased understanding that the social environment in the US has become more Islamophobic, there is little research in applied psychology fields to understand how this is influencing the life choices of young Muslims in the United States. This investigation focuses on South Asian Muslim Americans and the factors that influence their career decision-making process. Lent and Colleagues' (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory career choice model was used to develop a better understanding of these factors. This study investigated how the variables of gender, ethnicity, religiosity, perceived discrimination, and family involvement relate to career decision-making self-efficacy and outcome expectations for South Asian Muslim college students. A hierarchical regression analysis was used to understand the relationships among the variables. The goal of this study was to provide initial understandings of the factors influencing South Asian Muslim Americans career decision-making process. The study did not find a significant relationship among the variables or the applicability of the SCCT career choice model to this population. These findings demonstrate a need to learn more about the career process for this population and other factors specific to the population that may be involved in the career development process. The results provide valuable information for counseling psychologists in university counseling centers to broaden their understanding and support the needs of South Asian Muslim American students during the career choice process.

*Keywords: SCCT, South Asian Muslim Americans, careers*

## **PUBLIC ABSTRACT**

The Muslim population in the United States has faced many challenges in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, including increased negative portrayal of Muslims in the media. While there is increased understanding that the social environment in the US has become more Islamophobic, there is little research in applied psychology fields to understand how this is influencing the life choices of young Muslims in the United States. This study focuses on South Asian Muslim Americans and the factors that influence their career decision-making process. Lent and Colleagues' (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory career choice model was used to develop a better understanding of these factors. This study investigated how the variables of gender, ethnicity, religiosity, perceived discrimination, and family involvement relate to career decision-making self-efficacy and outcome expectations for South Asian Muslim college students. The goal of this study was to begin understanding the factors influencing South Asian Muslim Americans career decision-making process. The study did not find relationships among the variables and did not find connections between the variables like the SCCT career model had suggested with other groups of people. These results showed the need to learn more about the career process for this group and how there might be other pieces involved in the career development process for South Asian Muslim Americans. The results are helpful for counseling psychologists in university counseling centers to be open to and supportive of the needs of South Asian Muslim American students during the career choice process.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

#Muslimlivesmatter. This hashtag represents a global social media movement calling for justice and equality for Muslims around the world. It highlights and broadcasts issues of discrimination and threats of violence toward Muslims. It is also a reaction to Muslims continually being portrayed negatively in Western media. While Muslims have faced increased discrimination since September 11, 2001 (CAIR, 2008), the increased media exposure to the terrorist organization, ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), and the attacks on journalist Charlie Hebdo (France) have increased Islamophobic attitudes around the world. In the U.S., the political platform of the current President Donald Trump was based on anti-Muslim rhetoric, threatening a Muslim National registry and his subsequent executive orders as President that banned travel from Muslim majority countries have increased negative attitudes towards Muslim Americans.

Islam is the second largest religion in the world with an estimated 6 to 9 million followers in the United States, and between 700 million and 1.2 billion followers worldwide (U.S. Department of State, 2001). Pew research findings (2011) reported first-generation Muslim Americans make up about 63% of Muslims in the US and are from 77 different countries, including 41% from the Middle East or North Africa, 25% from South Asia, 11% from Sub-Saharan Africa, 7% from Europe, 5% from Iran, and 9% from other countries. About 45% of these first-generation Muslim Americans arrived in the US after 1990, meaning they are more recent immigrants. Pew (2011) also reported that 37% of Muslims are born in the US, with 15% being second-generation and 22% being 3<sup>rd</sup> generation or greater. Collectively, Muslims in the U.S. are a highly diverse group and continue to be a growing population that is exposed to an increasingly hostile, Islamophobic environment.

In a recent study by Al Atom (2014) found that attitudes of Islamophobia are on the rise in Western countries. Islamophobia is defined as “an outlook or world-view involving an unfounded dread and dislike of Muslims, which results in practices of exclusion and

discrimination” (Runnymede Trust, 1997, p.1). Islamophobia in the US is demonstrated through vandalization of mosques, hate crimes, negative portrayals of Muslims in mainstream media, increased surveillance and scrutiny of Muslim communities, and electoral candidates being devalued through smear campaigns because they are associated with a Muslim identity (Shryock, 2010). A recent Pew research poll in 2014 found that Muslims were the least liked religious group in the United States, presenting with a 40% cold rating (feelings toward a group, 0 being coldest and most negative feelings and 100% being warmest, positive feelings). These increasing anti-Muslim feelings are also present in daily places of work for Muslims, as demonstrated in increased reports of workplace discrimination (Tahmincioglu, 2010).

Recently a case was brought in front of the U.S. Supreme Court concerning a 17-year-old Muslim woman who was denied a job at Abercrombie and Fitch because of her hijab (traditional religious headscarf). The Muslim women’s counsel, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, argued that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was violated because it is illegal to “fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual because of such individuals race, color, religion, sex or national origin,” (Demby, 2015, p.1). In June of 2015, the Supreme Court ruled 8 to 1 in favor of the Muslim woman, sending a message that religious discrimination should not play a role in the workplace (Naylor, 2015). This case demonstrates to the need for Muslims to advocate for their rights in places of work (Demby, 2015). Workplace discrimination targeted at Muslims has also been demonstrated through experimental studies. Experimental findings have found that women wearing hijabs face covert discrimination, defined as aggression and disrespect from potential employers (King & Ahmad, 2010). Given that discrimination has been linked directly to issues of hiring, it follows that concerns about workplace discrimination may also affect the career decision making process for young adult Muslim Americans.

Muslim American young adults in the U.S. are growing up and making life decisions in an Islamophobic context (Shryock, 2010). These anti-Muslim factors may influence their career

development process and the careers they choose to pursue. While there is significant research that discrimination is impacting Muslims, there is very little research generated within applied psychology fields, such as counseling psychology Americans (Al-Atom, 2014; Ali, 2015; Every & Perry, 2014; Ghaffari & Ciftci, 2012; Pasha-Zaidi, 2014; Rippy & Newman 2007; Sirin et al., 2008). More specifically, there are significant gaps in the literature in regards to the career development processes of Muslim Americans.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT, Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) is a career development theory that has been applied to understand the career development of ethnic minorities (Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Flores Robitschek, Celebi, Andersen, & Hoang, 2010; Lent, Sheu, Gloster, & Wilkins, 2010; Nauta & Epperson, 2003; Navarro, Flores, & Worthington, 2007; Rivera, Chen, Flores, Blumberg & Ponteretto, 2007; Sheuermann, Tokar, Hall, 2014; Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999). Because this theory is adaptable to different contexts, as well as task and environment specific, it has been useful in understanding the career development of ethnic minorities. The current study follows the lead of other researchers in applying SCCT to understand the career development of South Asian Muslim Americans. To our knowledge, SCCT has not yet been applied to the experiences of Muslim Americans or South Asian Muslim Americans.

Previous research has begun to show the impact of the Islamophobic context and perceived discrimination on Muslim Americans (Al-Atom, 2014; Ali, 2015; Every & Perry, 2014; Ghaffari & Ciftci, 2012; Pasha-Zaidi, 2014; Rippy & Newman 2007; Sirin et al., 2008), but understanding how discrimination relates to the career choice process is still unknown. To address this gap, this study investigates the factors that influence South Asian Muslim American young adult's career choice process with propositions from Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994), used to frame the study. More specifically, the study examines how the variables of gender, ethnicity, religiosity, perceived discrimination, and family involvement,

relate to career decision making self-efficacy and outcome expectations for South Asian Muslim college students.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this review of the literature, Muslims Americans and South Asian Muslim Americans will be discussed, as well as how culture and religion influence their life choices. Then SCCT, the specific framework used in this study, and SCCT's use with ethnic minorities will be described. Finally, the research behind the potential factors that may play a role in South Asian Muslim Americans career development process will be presented.

### **Understanding Muslim Americans**

Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the U.S. with an estimated 6-9 million followers (U.S. Department of State, 2001) and is the third largest religion in the U.S. after Christianity and Judaism (Pew Research, 2011). As described above, a third of Muslim American adults (37%) were born in the U.S., but over three quarters are first generation immigrants (63%) or second generation Americans (15%) (Pew Research, 2011). Immigrant Muslims come from over 77 different countries, the major regional groups including 41% from Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa and 26% from South Asian region countries including Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan.

With ethnic origins from a wide array of countries and global regions, Muslim Americans are a diverse group with unique characteristics and needs, however, in the empirical literature, Muslim Americans are usually grouped into one category and studies on distinct groups of Muslim Americans are rare. When Muslim Americans are treated as one homogenous group, investigations run the risk of conflating and neglecting the variables and experiences unique to a given ethnic group of Muslims. For this reason, this study focuses on the distinct experiences of South Asians, a major ethnic group of Muslims in the U.S.

To ground this study, the literature review includes research on Muslim Americans to provide an understanding of the group as a whole and also incorporates the relevant literature about South Asian Muslims available at the time of the study. First, a discussion of the

characteristics of Muslims will be presented to provide a framework for understanding this population followed by a literature summary that explores some of the specific culture, influences, and experiences of South Asian Muslim Americans.

### **Muslim Americans**

While Muslims in the United States are often characterized as a homogeneous group, their ethnic, racial, and national differences are numerous (Kaya, 2007). Many Muslim families have immigrated to the United States from countries with distinct cultural backgrounds (Daneshpour, 1998). These local ethnic, social, and historical factors affect the ways in which the Islamic faith is interpreted and applied, and determine the practice of Islam. Specifically, national origin often dictates how strict and traditional or flexible and open families practice the tenets of Islam (Daneshpour, 1998). Most importantly, the attitudes of family members toward their own ethnicity and its values, and their own perception of their position in the dominant culture, influence every Muslim family differently (Daneshpour, 1998).

### **Basics of Islam**

Islam is a way of life that encompasses all aspects of living, social behavior, and conduct. Islam places major emphasis on self-control, modesty in dress, and the need to pray five times a day (Lippman, 1995). While there is great diversity in cultural and religious practices due to the numerous ethnic backgrounds of Muslims, there are five basic pillars that are accepted and followed by all Muslims (Esposito, 1998). Ali, Liu, & Humedian (2004) wrote an overview of the five pillars that will be reviewed here. The five pillars include the belief in God and that prophet Muhammad was God's last and final prophet (first pillar); praying five times a day (second pillar); Zakat, the alms tax, which asks that followers give money to rectify social inequalities (third pillar); fasting during the month of Ramadan, meaning refraining from drinking and eating between sunrise and sunset every day for the entire month (fourth pillar); and a pilgrimage to Mecca, to be done once in a lifetime if one can afford it (fifth pillar). How Muslim

families and individuals incorporate these principles into their lives occurs on their own terms and in their own ways based on their cultural backgrounds and religiosity (Ali et al., 2004).

### **South Asian Muslim Americans**

South Asian Muslim Americans, African Americans, and Arabs are three of the larger groups of Muslim Americans in the U.S. (Leonard, 2004). Each has their own distinct characteristics and shared cultural histories among the countries they represent. South Asian Muslim Americans consist of Americans that have immigrated from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. South Asians' practice of Islam is highly influenced by cultural and national identity as these Muslim groups share cultural beliefs and values similar to other Asian American groups. One major similarity is that South Asian culture is collectivist, like other Asian American cultures (Sue & Sue, 2003; Triandis, 1994). In South Asian culture, the family is a collective unit and an individual's actions are a reflection on the family (Mahmoud, 2008).

### **Family Life and Islam**

In collectivist Muslim families, individualism and individuation from families is discouraged (Almeida, 1996). There is a strong emphasis on the collective whole rather than the individual wants and needs of family members (Springer, Abbott, & Reisbig, 2009). Family well-being is fostered by cooperation, mutual dependency, sacrifice, loyalty, and conforming to expected roles and behaviors (Ali et al., 2004). Such values and behavioral scripts contrast greatly with Western values of individuality, independence, and self-sufficiency (Springer et al., 2009). In fact, pleasing others is more important than personal freedom and self-expression in Islam (Springer et al., 2009). For South Asian Muslims, loyalty, obedience to parents and religious leaders, and conformity to cultural norms and family expectations hold true as significant parts of the culture (Springer et al., 2009).

The Quran, the central religious text of Islam, repeatedly encourages showing respect to parents, and as such, regardless of age, Muslims will often defer to parents before making

important decisions (Ali et al., 2004). South Asian culture also emphasizes respecting elders and individuals in authority positions (Sue & Sue, 2003). South Asian parents typically promote and model values of being obedient to the rules of parents, respecting elders, and accepting the decisions made by elders (Hines, Garcia-Preto, McGodrick, Almeida, & Weltman, 1992; Maiter & George, 2001).

Respect for elders is also demonstrated by including elders in significant decisions and transitions. Relatedly, Muslims are discouraged from disclosing personal or familial difficulties outside the family, and because family structures are usually hierarchical and interdependent, members of the family must consider benefits to the family and larger community before making most decisions (Ali et al., 2004). This means including family in decisions and putting family before individual desires (Brook, 1995). This can also mean living at home until one is married, with income directly contributing to family funds, extended families living in the same home, and children caring for and supporting parents as they age (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006). Cultural and religious traditions are transmitted directly from older generations (Franceschelli & O'Brien, 2014), thus intergenerational influences play an important role in major life decisions.

### **Intergenerational Influences**

Franceschelli and O'Brien (2014) conducted a qualitative study with 15 South Asian Muslim Families in the UK investigating the role of Islam in parenting and the intergenerational transmissions within families. There were 52 semi-structured interviews conducted with these families. The authors found that parents used Islam to “inform the transmission of a sense of morality, support children’s education, and reinforce family ties” (p. 1190). They also found some differences in how families of varying social class utilized Islam in parenting. Parents from lower socio-economic and educational backgrounds depended on the use of Islam more closely and higher educated parents “felt they needed to integrate and support religious explanations with other sources of evidence” (p. 1203). Furthermore, the authors reported, “Islam was employed to inform aspirations and to generate social capital by providing a common platform of values

across generations” (p.1204). The interviews with the children demonstrated the assimilation of many of these parental messages, like, Islamic ideas of “the right path” (Franceschelli & O’Brien (2014). The right path refers to Qur’anic verses that teach moderation, focus, knowing the difference between good and bad, and not straying from the teachings of Islam (Franceschelli & O’Brien, 2014).

Scourfield, Taylor, Moore, and Gilliat-Ray (2012) conducted a secondary review of data on patterns of religiosity across generations in England and Wales from the 2003 Home Office of Citizenship Survey (1551 Muslim Adults) and Young People’s Survey (1661 Muslims aged 11-15), which provides religious affiliation or practice across three generations. The surveys include information about religiosity, ethnicity, gender, country of birth, and socio-economic characteristics. For this analysis of data, they collapsed religions into Christian, Muslim, Other religions, and no religion. From all of the categories, they found that Islam had the highest levels of transmission of religion from generation to generation. Their data also suggested that Muslims in lower social classes and those with lower educational qualifications were more successful than higher social class and higher educated individuals at passing on Islam to the next generation. The authors noted that Muslims were unique compared to other religious groups in having the highest levels of transmission of religion from generation to generation and that these findings supported further investigations.

These two studies provide limited evidence of the transmission of Islam across generations in Western cultures. Thus, religious values could potentially be playing a role in important decisions for Muslim youth. However, very little research has been conducted on how religiosity influences career choice and other life decisions. There is scant literature on how Islamic religious beliefs may be associated with decisions about leisure activities, which will be discussed in the next section.

## **Leisure**

Stodolska and Livengood, (2006) used concepts of ethnic resilience and selective acculturation as a theoretical foundation and analyzed the effect of religion on the leisure behavior of Muslim immigrants in the U.S (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006). This qualitative study was based on 24 in-depth interviews of Muslim immigrants living in the U.S. These immigrants time in the U.S. ranged from 2-30 years (M=11.8 years). Participants were from Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Pakistan, India, Mexico, and Korea. The interviewees included 12 men and 12 women, between the ages of 18-64 (average age 35 years old). The results of the study demonstrated the effects of Islam on the leisure behavior of immigrants in four different areas including: 1) Importance of strong family ties, 2) the need to pass traditional values to subsequent generations, 3) the requirement of modesty, and 4) restrictions on certain foods and alcohol (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006).

In the study, participants reported the importance of family ties and their influence on leisure behavior by incorporating leisure that is more family oriented (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006). Those interviewed emphasized that, it is not just the collectivist nature of Islam that stresses family, but also maintaining strong ties with family members. Parents talked about not wanting their children to leave the home at 18, but to stay until they are married in order to benefit from the advice and wisdom of older relatives. Participants reported that there are families who live with in-laws and other extended family in the same home. Authors found that the newer generations are moving away from extended family involvement to focus on the immediate family unit in order to avoid conflict (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006).

The results also showed the families felt the need to pass traditional values to subsequent generations (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006). The passing of traditions is done by restricting children's exposure to media or outside factors that promote non-Muslim traditions. The parents in the study reported that by strictly controlling their children's leisure that they were ensuring that they would acquire a degree of resiliency (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006). In addition,

results revealed, parents believed their children would make culturally and religiously appropriate choices when given the freedom to do so in the future and they suggested that strict boundaries would help the children to understand the importance of not engaging in restricted activities. Parents also reported trying to make sure their children participate in activities at the mosque to keep up with their native languages and religious traditions. Parents believed that having their children engage in these culture-appropriate activities promoted their cultural values and allowed them to interact with other Muslims facilitating in-group cohesiveness of the Muslim community (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006). At the same time, parents reported wanting their children to be “good Americans” and be accepted by the mainstream society. Overall, this study provided insight into how Islam is a way of life, that it affects all areas of life from social relations, dress, conduct, diet, and leisure behaviors.

The research on leisure among Muslim Americans also demonstrates the way Islam influences life choices and daily life decisions. It provides some preliminary insight into how ethnic cultural aspects like collectivism are cultivated through familial social dynamics. Gudykunst (2001) describes how there are various ways to understand the connection between ethnic and cultural identity and collectivism. The model proposed by Gudykunst (2001) suggests that Asian Americans who have strong ethnic identities tend to have more collectivist values, while those with a weak ethnic identity may have more individualistic tendencies. The findings from the Stodolska & Livengood (2006) study supported this model, suggesting those with more ethnic resiliency were more collectivistic, while those who were more assimilated to the dominant culture showed more connection to individualism. These seem to be initial understandings of how the level to which an individual identifies with their cultural and religious heritage could influence how they make decisions.

## **Identity**

There is not a great deal of research on South Asian Muslim Americans, but the majority of the research that exists focuses on identity development. South Asians are at times perceived to be a “model minority” in the US that are an affluent group with high standards of social morality (Das & Kemp, 1997). This model minority stereotype has implications in devaluing the discrimination they face and in turn, damaging efforts to challenge institutional racism (Kaduvetoor, 2009). Furthermore, the model minority status undermines the experiences of South Asians who do not fall into these expectations (Pasha-Zaidi, 2015). In a study of South Asians who are working class, Maira (2004) found that South Asian youth appreciated the opportunities their US citizenship provided them, but described themselves as their predominant identities of Pakistani, Indian, or Bangladeshi. Another study on maintaining identity found that through Bollywood (Indian Cinema) second generation immigrants were able to find a way to maintain their connection with their South Asian Culture (Tirumala, 2009). Another way that South Asian families may work towards maintaining their cultural identity in the US is through maintaining strict cultural limitations (Almeida, 2005).

Ali (2008) conducted an ethnographic study of middle class South Asian Muslim adults in New York City to develop a set of patterns of acculturation for this group. The author conducted 23 informal interviews (individuals in and outside of mosque, 13 women and 10 men), participant observation at cultural and religious gatherings, and 22 open-ended email interviews with second generation Sunni Muslim woman wearing hijab. The researcher made a point to have a complete picture of Muslim lives in America, so the investigation took place in and out of mosques, to include the diversity of practices among South Asian Muslim Americans. Ali’s (2008) findings on the three levels of acculturated individuals were described concisely by Pasha-Zaidi (2015): “acculturationists (those who value relationships with “American” peers who are not South Asian or Muslim origin over their own cultural and religious groups), partial acculturationists (those who adopt many mainstream American behaviors, but also retain some

aspects of their home culture and religion), and de-acculturationists (those partial acculturationists who actively distance themselves from mainstream American norms they deem to be contrary to Islam)” (p. 74). Ali (2008) notes that these are flexible and evolving categories that are significantly impacted by the youths peer group. The category of de-acculturationist is an increasing category for South Asian Muslim Americans, which can be observed through religious representations like hijab (Ali, 2008).

Robinson (2009) conducted a study with 240 South Asian Adolescents in Britain, aged 13-18 years (120 females and 120 males; 120 Indian students and 120 Pakistani students) to investigate cultural identity and acculturation preferences. The instruments used were an Adolescent demographic questionnaire, an ethnic identity scale based on the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), National Identity scale, Perceived discrimination scale, and an acculturation strategies scale. The authors found that the majority of the Indian youth embraced integration strategies, whereas the Pakistani Muslims embraced separations strategies. Both groups displayed high ethnic identity scores such that ethnic identity was more important to them than national identity. The author also found that Pakistani Muslim adolescents viewed religion as more important to them than Indian adolescents did. They also found that Pakistani participants felt more perceived discrimination than Indian adolescents who reported none or rare perceived discrimination. Furthermore, another finding was that perceived discrimination was connected to acculturation strategies (Robinson, 2009).

To further this discussion of how South Asian Muslims feel their religion is a part of how they live their lives, some relevant findings are included. Modood and Colleagues (1997) found that Muslims “were more likely than Hindus (43%) and Sikhs (46%) to say that religion was very important in the way they lived their life (as cited in Robinson, 2009, p. 451). Furthermore, in a previous study by Modood and other colleagues (1994) they found that “for first generation South Asians, religion was important to the way they lead their lives, but by the second generation this

importance was considerably lower. The exception was second generation Muslim Asians, who spoke most positively about the value and centrality of their religion. Many of them also discussed that Islam was very important to how they lived their lives” (p. 115, as cited in Robinson, 2009, p. 451).

The literature in this section provides some evidence that culture and religion may have an influence on South Asian Muslim American’s life choices and experiences. These preliminary findings begin to illuminate how South Asian Muslim Americans are influenced by culture and religion in their family dynamics, identity development, leisure activities, and intergenerational transmissions. While the literature is sparse overall on South Asian Muslim Americans, the career literature is even more lacking on the experiences of this population. Since we have some preliminary findings of how Islam and South Asian culture influences South Asian Muslim Americans lives, it may be beneficial to understand how this affects their life choices in regards to careers. The purpose of the current study is to understand what factors influence South Asian Muslim American young adult’s career decision-making process. Examining the career decision process for South Asian Muslims requires a theoretical model to frame the research questions. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; 1994) is both contextual and task specific allowing for easy application of SCCT constructs to better understand the career development of ethnic minority groups.

### **Social Cognitive Career Theory**

The career theory that was used in this investigation is social cognitive career theory (SCCT) developed by Lent, Brown, & Hackett (1994). Social cognitive career theory developed from a desire to integrate theories and cultivate a more comprehensive empirically based career theory. SCCT draws from Albert Bandura’s (1986, 1997) social cognitive theory of behavior and applies his variables of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals to the career development process (Lent & Brown, 1996). SCCT investigates how the above variables interact

with characteristics of a person (e.g. race, gender) and their environment (e.g. supports, barriers) as they go through the progression of career development (Lent, & Brown, 1996). “The SCCT framework focuses on the processes through which (a) academic and career interests develop, (b) interests, in concert with other variables, promote career relevant choices, and (c) people attain varying levels of performance and persistence in their educational and career pursuits,” (Lent & Brown, 1996, p. 311). In the following section, the value of SCCT will be explored, as well as further discussion of the influence of Bandura’s social cognitive theory on SCCT.

### **Importance of SCCT**

This theory can be used innovatively in developing career interventions for various populations (Lent & Brown, 1996). There are also initiatives explaining how to apply the theory through career counseling interventions (Brown & Lent, 1996). SCCT provides a theory with various models to understand the career development process and a foundation for considering all the variables in career counseling. The theory stems from a constructivist framework that assumes humans are active agents, impacting their own advancement and responding to their environments (Lent & Brown, 1996). SCCT recognizes the dynamic personal and environmental processes that are involved in the exploration of and commitment to “occupational and academic interests, choices, and performances” (Lent & Brown, 1996, p. 311).

### **Bandura’s Theory**

As mentioned previously, Albert Bandura’s social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997) had a major influence on the SCCT framework. Bandura developed his initial social learning theory at a time when the field of psychology was dominated by behaviorism and cognitive psychology, both of which neglected the social contextual variables influencing the learner. He was one of the first of his time to consider the role of observational learning from peers, authority figures, or role models, and the impact of the social environment on the learner. Bandura’s social cognitive theory provides a frame for how personal variables and an individual’s

social context interact. Specifically, social cognitive theory takes into consideration the triadic reciprocal model of causality, which demonstrates the relationship of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. The theory states that these three factors have a bidirectional relationship and each factor continually influences the others as a person interacts with their social context. Bandura's theory begins to help us understand people's behaviors and motivation toward the goals and actions in their lives (Bandura, 1986, 1997).

Bandura also discussed self-efficacy and outcome expectations as being motivating factors in behavior. Self-efficacy beliefs are "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). These beliefs are significantly related to personal agency and are linked to people's performances in academic and career tasks (Bandura, 1989, Lent & Brown, 1996). Outcome expectations are explained as, "beliefs about the consequences or the outcomes of performing particular behaviors," (Lent & Brown, 1996, p. 313). Bandura (1986) discussed how people's behaviors are impacted by their sense of what they are capable of (self-efficacy) and their beliefs about the probable outcomes of their actions (outcome expectations). Finally, personal goals, that maintain a key role in career choice and decision-making theories, are described as one's aim to be a part of an activity or to generate a certain outcome (Bandura, 1986). These social cognitive threads of Bandura's theory are relevant to career choices and intentions, both of which are integral parts of people's lives.

Lent, et al. (1994) found the social cognitive pieces of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goal representations to be the most applicable to career development. Social cognitive theory describes how people's goals are significantly impacted by their self-efficacy and outcome expectations. These social cognitive variables mentioned above are investigated in how they relate to an individual's personal characteristics (e.g., gender, race, and ethnicity), environment, and learning experiences (Lent & Brown, 1996). "The SCCT framework highlights

a few central mechanism and paths through which these variables affect career developmental outcomes” (Lent & Brown, 1996, p. 311).

### **SCCT Career Choice Model**

SCCT is comprised of two models for career development. One model is focused on interest development and the other is centered on the career choice process. The career choice model is an extension of the interest model and incorporates multiple factors that may go into choice goals leading to choice actions. The career choice model is being investigated in this study and the theories various components that are applicable will be described in greater detail below.

Lent & colleagues (1994) proposed this model to further our understanding of why people select certain academic or career paths (“e.g. direction or content of career related choices” (p. 94). Choice goals are conceptualized by Lent, et.al (1994), “as the intention to engage in a particular action or series of actions (e.g., to declare a major in physics or to become an engineer)” (p. 94). The model highlights the influence of learning experiences on self-efficacy and outcome expectations, which in turn influence interests and choice goals. It also includes the personal inputs of individuals and their environmental influences potentially having an impact on their choice goals. SCCT theorists recognized that the career development process could be influenced by vocational interest, choice, and performance, but maybe also by significant personal qualities and contextual factors (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.). The model recognizes the impact of culture and economic variables that may affect choice goals. This idea falls in line with Bandura’s considerations of the influence of people’s social context on their learning development. All of the components of the model work in a complex interactive fashion to impact career development (Lent & Brown, 1996).

Figure 1 depicts an overview of the career choice model. For the purposes of this study, we focused on the career choice model. The variables of person inputs, proximal environmental influences, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations were investigated in this study. Thus, a

discussion of the two components of person inputs and environmental influences are detailed in the next section.

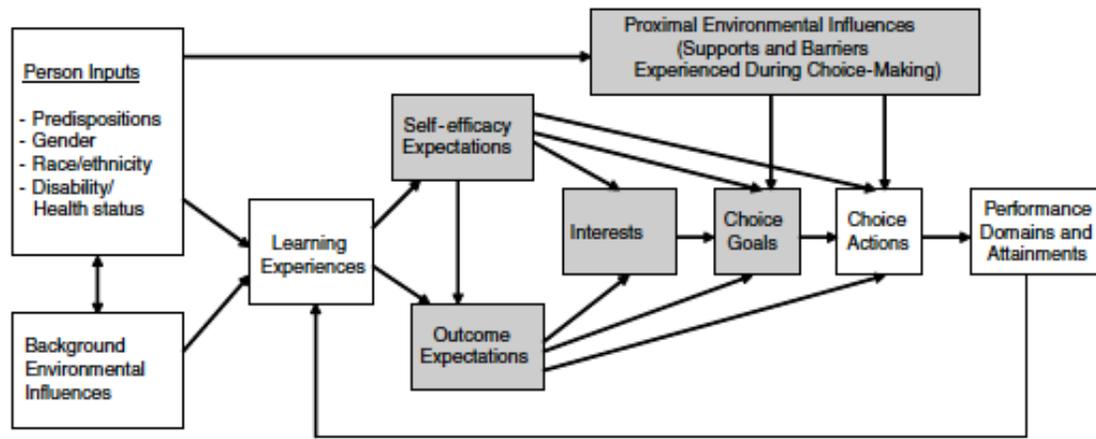


Figure 1. Model of social cognitive influences on career choice behavior (Lent et al., 1994).

## Person Inputs

Person inputs are defined as variables that could influence the career choice model, such as personal predispositions, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, or health status (Lent et al., 1994). In the SCCT literature, various categories of personal inputs were coupled in their discussion of how they may impact cognition, so this pattern will be continued in this discussion. While race and sex are physical characteristics, they also hold significance for people psychologically and socially. Race and sex are related to the career choice model because of the types of reactions they “evoke from the social-cultural environment, as well as from their relation to the opportunity structure that pervades career development” (Lent et al., 1994, Lent & Brown, 1996, p. 317).

Furthermore, SCCT postulates gender and ethnicity as socially constructed variables in people’s lives which people’s sociocultural environment and experiences. SCCT theorists posit that these person inputs that are socially constructed will have an impact on the learning opportunities individuals are exposed to, the reactions (e.g. support, discouragement (p.105)) they will receive from doing certain activities, and the outcomes they anticipate for the future (Lent et

al., 1994). Lent and colleagues (1994) note a study by Hackett and Betz (1981) that found that the development of gender role socialization could bias the opportunities for boys and girls to have access to sources of knowledge needed to contribute to their self-efficacy development for various cultural situations.

Additionally, the racial and ethnic groups an individual identifies with may have psychosocial interactions that influence the individual's career-related self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Some examples mentioned by Lent et al. (1994) include issues with educational access that can impact the value and variety of learning instances one is exposed to. Furthermore, various cultures may emphasize specific career-related behaviors.

All the contextual factors described previously influence the individual and have an influence on their beliefs and actions toward a career. Overall, the impact of gender and ethnicity on career interest, choice, and performance are understood through the path of various learning experiences that will, in turn, influence self-efficacy and outcome expectations. The SCCT choice model framework also highlights how gender and ethnicity are connected to, "the opportunity structure within which career goals are framed and pursued" (Lent & Brown, 1996, p. 315).

### **Contextual Influences**

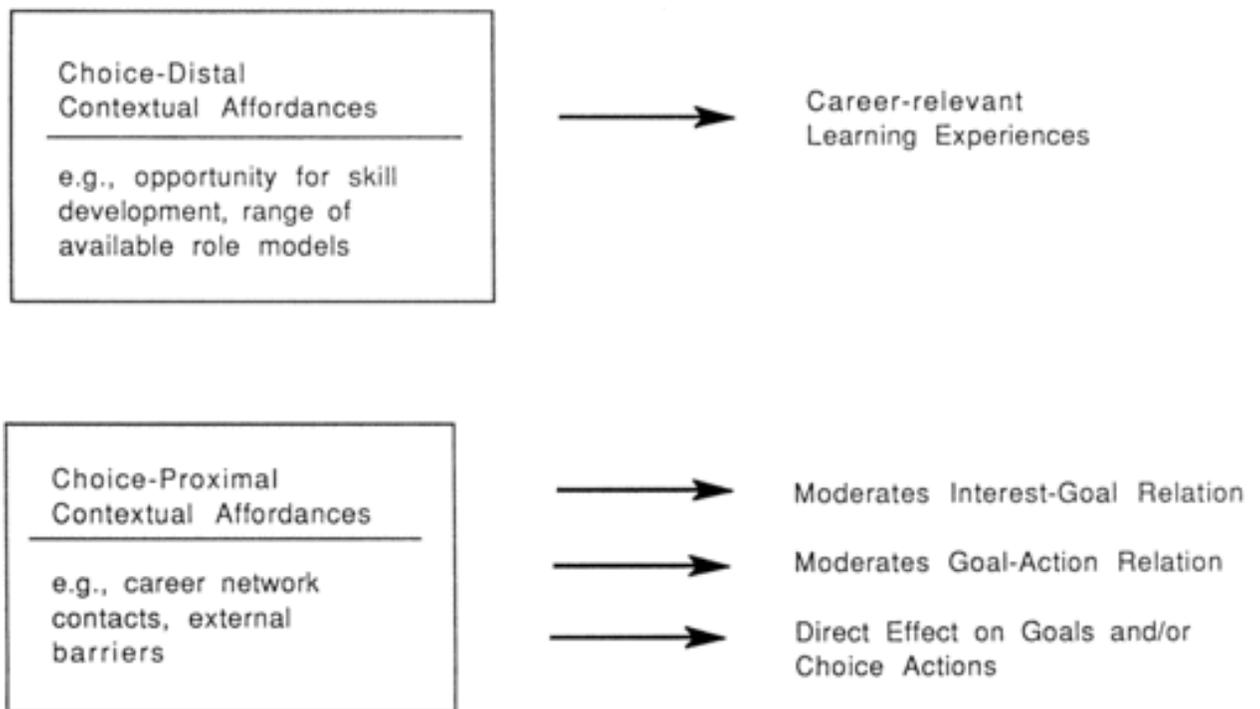
Contextual factors are considered in SCCT due to the fact that people's interests may not always drive their career decisions, particularly when they have other life considerations that take priority over their personal interests (Lent & Brown, 1996). Some examples of restrictions on an individual's career choice are socioeconomic standing, family responsibilities or demands, discrimination or other educational concerns. These contextual factors are therefore considered in the choice process model of SCCT and can be seen as supports or barriers to career choice decisions.

Lent and colleagues (1994) recognized the need for theoretical support in this discussion of contextual influences. To further understand how environmental influences impact career choice, they incorporate Vondracek, Lerner and Schulenberg's (1986) contextual affordance theory and Astin's (1984) opportunity structure theory (Lent et al., 1994). Vondracek et al. state, "the concept of affordance centers on the idea that environments offer, provide, and/or furnish something to the organism as long as the organism can perceive it as such" (1986, p. 38). These theories center on how an individual's environment can provide resources or present difficulties in the career development process.

In the SCCT model, contextual affordance and opportunity structure components are separated into two types: "(a) more distal, background influences that precede and help shape interests and self-cognitions (e.g., differential opportunities for task and role model exposure; emotional and financial support for engaging in particular activities; cultural and gender role socialization processes), and (b) proximal influences that come into play at critical choice junctures (e.g., personal career network contacts; structural barriers, such as discriminatory hiring practices)" (Lent et al., 1994, p. 107). Figure 2 summarizes the difference between distal and proximal influences on career development. SCCT recognizes that these two types of influences can overlap, like with contextual components that are continuous in one's life (e.g., family, friends, mentors, etc.) and have a significant role on the individual's academic and career aspirations.

Overall, contextual factors are seen as guiding the learning experiences that influence individual interests and choices, as well as make up the opportunity structures in which career plans are developed and achieved. These environmental factors can also directly influence how choices are formed and executed ("e.g., discrimination in hiring, cultural practices where career choices are deferred to one's elders") (Lent et al., 1994, p. 107). SCCT theorists predict that context influences interests, which guides choice goals and ultimately actions. They also predict

that interest in career choices will lead to goals and actions toward goals will probably be stronger with individuals who feel helpful environmental conditions (e.g. less barriers and significant support) and weaker for those who feel less positive conditions. Overall, it is predicted that these contextual factors could either “constrain or strengthen the relations between interests, goals, and actions” (Lent et al., 1994, p. 107). For example, the rise in experiences of Islamophobia (Al-Atom, 2014) could be seen as creating environments that may not seem helpful or be fear inducing in regards to the career development process (more barriers and less support).



*Figure 2.* "Hypothesized effects of distal versus proximal contextual factors (or affordances) on the career choice process" (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000, p.38).

### **SCCT Career Choice Model and Ethnic Minorities**

Lent (1994) articulated the need to examine the applicability of SCCT with minority populations. The comprehensiveness of the SCCT framework has led to theoretical literature (e.g., Byars & Hackett, 1998) and empirical investigations of how it might be used with women and ethnic minorities (e.g. Flores & O’Brien, 2002; Flores Robitschek, Celebi, Andersen, &

Hoang, 2010; Lent, Sheu, Gloster, & Wilkins, 2010; Nauta & Epperson, 2003; Navarro, Flores, & Worthington, 2007; Rivera, Chen, Flores, Blumberg & Ponteretto, 2007; Sheuermann, Tokar, Hall, 2014; Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999). In this section we will overview several studies that are related to the variables in the proposed study in that they investigate the SCCT career choice model with an ethnic minority group. The reason we are going into such depth with these studies is because SCCT has never been applied to a Muslim American population. Therefore, by covering these studies we begin to understand how SCCT has been applied to minorities that may be dealing with similar issues or concerns as Muslim Americans. The goal in this section is to provide the literature that supports the use of SCCT variables in understanding the career decision-making process for ethnic minorities. These studies, their designs, and their findings will be described in detail.

The first four studies covered relate to the current study in how they investigate the applicability of parental support, self-efficacy and outcome expectations with college students and minorities. Ong, Phinney, & Dennis (2006) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the protective influence of psychological and family factors on academic achievement for 123 Latino undergraduate students. They investigated if three cultural resources of ethnic identity, family interdependence, and parental support, would act as protective factors against socioeconomic disadvantages. The measures used were a parental support of education scale, family interdependence measure, an ethnic identity measure, and a demographics questionnaire that also provided SES information. The findings suggested that students with more psychological and family resources demonstrated greater academic achievement. “After covarying between-person differences in gender and generational status, both ethnic identity and parental support moderated the effects of low socioeconomic status on academic achievement” (p.961).

Betz and Vuyten (1997) investigated how efficacy and outcome expectations can influence career exploration and decidedness. They surveyed 350 students (125 men, 220 women,

5 no indicated gender), 16% of whom were minority students. The students were administered the Career decision making self-efficacy scale short form (CDMSE-SF; Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996), the career decision scale (CDS; Osipow, 1987), and the career decision making outcome expectancies and exploratory intentions scale (developed for this study). The multiple regression analyses demonstrated that self-efficacy beliefs were the best predictor of indecisiveness in regards to careers and that outcome expectations were the best predictor of intentions to explore. They also found that college men had a significantly stronger relationship between career efficacy and outcome expectations than did college women. Although minorities were only a small percentage of this sample, this study helps provide support the role of self-efficacy and outcome expectations in the career decision-making process.

Gloria and Hird (1999) conducted a study on the influences of Ethnic and Non-ethnic variables on the career decision-making self-efficacy of college students. They investigated how the variables of career decision-making self-efficacy, trait anxiety, and ethnic identity differed for 687 undergraduates (589 white and 98 racial and ethnic minorities). They found that white students had higher career decision-making self-efficacy and lower trait anxiety, ethnic identity, and other-group orientation. They also found that students who had declared their majors had higher career-decision making self-efficacy and lower trait anxiety. Racial and ethnic minority students indicated ethnic variables (ethnic identity, other- group orientation) as more significant predictors of career decision-making self-efficacy and trait anxiety than white students did.

Ali & Saunders (2009) investigated SCCT factors that could predict the career aspirations of rural Appalachian High School Students. While the population in this study is not similar to the current studies population, the structure of this study is similar to the proposed study design. Sixty-three students were assessed on their vocational/educational self-efficacy beliefs, career decision outcome expectations, socioeconomic status (SES), age, and their perceptions of familial and peer support. The measures used in the study included: a participant

information questionnaire, vocational/educational self-efficacy scale (VESES; Ali & Saunders, 2006), Career Decision outcome expectations (CDOE; Betz & Vuyten, 1997), Parent Support index, and a sibling support scale. In the study they conducted a hierarchical regression analysis that suggested that 52% of the variance related to career aspirations was accounted for by the SCCT variables. Furthermore, majority of the variance was accounted for by vocational/educational self-efficacy beliefs, SES, and career decision outcome expectations.

Navarro, Flores, & Worthington (2007) conducted a study to investigate if socio-contextual and socio-cognitive variables contributed to understanding math and science goals of 409 Mexican American youth (12-15yrs old). This study utilized a variation of Lent et al.'s (1994) SCCT framework to investigate these goal intentions. In particular, they used a Math-science interest scale and a math-science intention scale developed by (Fouad & Smith, 1996). These scales assessed for the particular sociocontextual and sociocognitive factors that impact choice goals. This study found the SCCT constructs to be applicable with this population. Participants past success and their perceptions of support from parents predicted their self-efficacy in math/science. Results of this study provide a better understanding of how parents from minority groups can influence career choices. These findings could be significant for the population in the current study that also experiences significant influence from parental figures.

The next two studies that will be covered are more comprehensive in how they look at pathways in the SCCT career choice model and investigate multiple variables interacting in SCCT to explain how it is applied to ethnic minorities that may have similar characteristics to Muslim Americans.

Sheuermann, Tokar, & Hall (2014) investigated African-American women's prestige domain interests and choice goals using Social Cognitive Career Theory. Their rationale for using SCCT was that it provided a framework that encompassed background and contextual factors through a social cognitive lens. Due to these comprehensive characteristics, SCCT has been

useful in increasing competence around the career development process for ethnic minorities and women. Sheuermann et al. examined the SCCT career choice model and used a prestige dimension to define the variables. The participants in the study were 198 African-American college women. Sheuermann et al. conducted a path analysis of the career choice model, specifically looking at how prestige self-efficacy, prestige outcome expectations, prestige of vocational interests and prestige of choice goals relate to one another. The measures used in this study included a Personal Globe Inventory (PGI; Tracey, 2002) which assessed prestige related interest and self-efficacy, as well as an Outcome Expectations (OE) scale based on Gore and Leuwerkes (2000) Occupational Outcome Expectations (OOE) scale. Sheuermann et al. created an Occupational Choice Goals (OCG) scale for this study based on the Occupational Consideration scale (Lent, Brown, Nota, & Soresi, 2003). Finally, they administered a demographic questionnaire, which included information about age, gender, racial/ethnic background, overall GPA, current occupation, anticipated highest level of education, year in school, and major.

The results of Sheuermann et al.'s (2014) path analysis were congruent with SCCT hypotheses that prestige self-efficacy and outcome expectations connect to prestige of vocational interests. They also found that prestige of outcome expectations and prestige of vocational interests connect with prestige of choice goals. "The relation of prestige self-efficacy to prestige of choice goals was fully mediated by prestige of vocational interests; the relation between prestige outcome expectations and prestige of choice goals was partially mediated by prestige of vocational interests" (Scheuerman, 2014, p. 273). This second finding held significance for the investigators because it corroborated the idea that outside contextual factors, like social norms and barriers (actual or anticipated discrimination), have a significant impact on the prestige of occupational choices for this population.

Sheuermann et al. (2014) found contrasting results including a non-significant relationship between prestige of self- efficacy and prestige of outcome expectations. Investigators hypothesized that this non-significant finding could have been due to participants' perceptions that contextual factors (e.g., racism, sexism, career networks, mentors, and other supports) act independently from their self-efficacy to influence successful outcomes in high prestige careers. The investigators concluded that the study provides initial findings that SCCT could be useful in understanding how prestige-related career interests and choice goals are developed among African American women. Sheuermann et al. note that, based on the existing literature, SCCT concepts seem to be "predictive" of the career-related interests and choice behaviors of African American women.

Tang, Fouad, and Smith (1994) conducted a study about the career choices of Asian American college students and the factors that influence their career choices. Similar to Muslim Americans, the participants in this study come from collectivist backgrounds, as well as some immigrant populations. These researchers had the advantage of previous research conducted on Asian American career development, which has demonstrated that occupational interests for Asian Americans are focused in the investigative and realistic areas of the Strong Interest Inventory and that the range of occupations pursued may be limited. The independent variables examined in this study include level of acculturation, family SES, family involvement, occupational interests, and career self-efficacy. The study used the SCCT model to assess the relationships between these predicting variables and the outcome variable (career choice) for 187 Asian American college students. Tang et al. hypothesized "that career choices are influenced by the predicting variables in such a way that lower acculturated individuals tend to choose more typical occupations (i.e., Realistic and Investigative occupations), that family background is influential on their choices, and that interest may not necessarily be related to their occupational choices" (p.142). The first measure used was the Suinn-Lew Asian self-identity acculturation

scale (SL-Asia, Suinn, Rickard-Figueroa, Lew, & Vigil, 1987), which measures acculturation and suggests how assimilated participants are to the mainstream culture. The second measure was the Strong Interest Inventory, which was used to measure participant's career interests (Fouad, Harmon & Hansen, 1995). Third, they used Betz's (1994) Confidence Inventory to measure career self-efficacy. Fourth, they had an Asian American career development questionnaire, which the investigators developed to gather information on demographic information (age, gender, ethnic origins, year in school, major and minors, family socioeconomic background, and family involvement). This questionnaire also asked what careers the participants had chosen to pursue. To calculate family socioeconomic background, parents' education and occupations were used. A path analysis was used to analyze the data and the SCCT career choice path model was supported from this study. The study found that factors influencing Asian Americans were acculturation, family background, and self-efficacy in selecting careers. The results also strongly supported the idea the family involvement has an impact on career choice.

Overall, these studies demonstrate the successful application of the SCCT career choice model with ethnic minorities. They each also begin to demonstrate how person inputs (gender, race, ethnicity), contextual influences (supports and barriers from parents and discrimination), and cognitive variables (career decision-making self-efficacy and outcome expectations), may have a role in the career decision-making process of ethnic minorities. The current study proposes an investigation of the SCCT career choice model, but focuses on discrimination, religiosity, parental support, ethnicity, and gender, and their relationship to career decision-making self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Next, we will investigate how these multiple variables mentioned above impact South Asian Muslim Americans to better understand their potential influence on their career choice pathway.

## **South Asian Muslim Americans, Proposed SCCT Variables, and Careers**

In this section, we will look at the intersection of Muslim Americans and the proposed SCCT variables of gender, ethnicity, religiosity, discrimination, and parental influence. As no studies to this point have investigated these variables with Muslim Americans specifically using SCCT, the following studies investigate the specific, individual variables that have been proposed and how they influence the lives of Muslim Americans.

A study by Sirin, Bikmen, Mir, Fine, Zaal, and Katsiaficas (2008) explored the dual identification among Muslim American emerging adults of immigrant origin. They investigated the relationships among experiences of discrimination, acculturation, religiosity, and gender, and American and Muslim identities. The study utilized a mixed methods methodology with participants completing a survey and creating an identity map, an illustration of their hyphenated identities. The participants were 97 Muslim Americans between the ages of 18 to 25. The results found that participants reported ways to balance their Muslim and American identities and a small number of participants reported struggling with identity conflict. Participant's identification with Islam was measured through religiosity and their identification with US culture was related to discrimination related stress and acculturation process. The relationship among Muslim and American identities were moderated by gender in the survey and identity map results.

Abu-Ali & Reisen (1999) investigated the influences on gender role identity of 96 Muslim adolescent girls living in the U.S in an Islamic high school. They used a dual language (Arabic and English) background questionnaire, the Bern Sex Role inventory (Bern, 1974), the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992), and a religiosity scale. The findings stated that the longer participants had lived in the US, the more masculine attributes they reported, increased identification with one's ethnic group and higher religiosity were associated with greater femininity. The studies above begin to help us understand the potential impact of acculturation on ethnic identity, gender roles, and religiosity within a western context.

Ali, Yamada, and Mahmood (2015) investigated the relationship of the practice of Hijab, workplace discrimination, social class, job stress, and job satisfaction among 129 diverse Muslim women living all around the U.S. The measures used were a Workplace Discrimination Inventory (WPDI; James, Lovato & Cropanzano, 1994), Muslim Attitudes toward Religion scale (MARS; Wilde & Joseph, 1997), Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI; Worthington et al., 2003), and a Job Description Index (JDI; Ironson et al., 1989). The study found a relationship between workplace discrimination, job stress, social class, and religiosity, with lower levels of job satisfaction correlated to each of these variables. Specifically, the results indicated how women with higher religiosity, higher perceptions of workplace discrimination, and lower social class indicated lower levels of job satisfaction.

Pasha-Zaidi (2015) investigated the experiences of perceived discrimination for south Asian Muslim woman living in the US and UAE. They used a demographic measure and adapted a perceived religious discrimination scale from Jasperse (2009) that was used with Muslim women in New Zealand and some additional items from Noh and Kasper's (2003) perceived discrimination scale. The study found that US South Asian Muslims perceived higher levels of discrimination than UAE subjects. The perceived discrimination was mostly described as "subtle nuance rather than direct harassment" (p. 70). All participants felt the most discrimination in work settings, but "hijabis (women who wear the Islamic headscarf) felt this more than non-hijabis" (p. 70). Although participants reported feeling most at ease socializing with either Muslims or South Asians, they also noted, "aside from strangers, their greatest sources of perceived discrimination also came from within their religious or cultural groups" (p.70). This study strived to understand the social experience of South Asian Muslims in a "western secular context and a globalized Islamic one" (p. 70). South Asian Muslims in the US reported that the "greatest reason for discrimination was religion, followed by race or color, and ethnicity"(p. 70).

This study demonstrates that religiosity or religious standing may be significant to consider in contextual factors affecting South Asian Muslim Americans.

There have been other studies that investigate Muslim perceptions of discrimination in western cultural contexts. Every and Perry (2014), investigated the relationship of perceived religious discrimination and self-esteem for Muslim Australians. They used the perceived religious discrimination scale and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale with 49 Australian Muslims (Mean age of 30.1). Their results demonstrated that "perceived interpersonal discrimination and systemic discrimination accounts for a small but significant variation on self-esteem" (Every & Perry, 2014, p. 241). Thus, this provides further support for the impact discrimination may have on the beliefs people have about themselves, which in the current study could be demonstrated in how discrimination influences career decision self-efficacy.

Another study by Ghaffari & Ciftci (2012) investigated religiosity, self-esteem, sex differences and the moderating role of perceived discrimination with 174 Muslim immigrants in the United States. Their major findings included that men had higher religiosity scores and they found a significant positive relationship amongst religiosity and perceived discrimination (Ghaffari & Ciftci, 2012).

Another study by Rippy and Newman (2007) studied how perceived religious discrimination related to anxiety and paranoia in a group of 152 Muslim Americans. The findings included a statistically significant relationship between perceived religious discrimination and subclinical paranoia (increased vigilance and suspicion). Furthermore, perception of discrimination was significantly different between ethnic groups, converts, immigrants, and second generation Muslims. Overall, the study suggests that for Muslim Americans perceptions of discrimination are associated with how they express increased vigilance and suspicion, and that group differences play a role in perceived discrimination. These findings further promote the importance of this investigation on how South Asian Muslim American young adults perceived

discrimination and how this influences their career choice process, potentially through the variables discussed above.

### **Muslim Americans and Career Research**

One of the few studies on Muslims and career development in a Westernized context was a study done by Basit (1996) on the career aspirations of British Muslim girls. Basit conducted a qualitative study interviewing 24 British Asian Muslims girls (15-16 years of age) in their final year of compulsory school (equivalent to last year of high school in US), their parents, and 18 of their teachers. The adolescence ethnic backgrounds were Pakistani, Bangladeshi or East African. They were all born and/or raised in Britain and from working class backgrounds. The data was analyzed by looking at the themes and categories that emerged from the data to help understand the topics being investigated. Authors demonstrated that British Muslims reported the path of education and career as one way to fulfill their need for upward social mobility and further reported that career goals are also dependent on religious and cultural values. Therefore, a desirable job would be in a higher SES bracket, but also respectable and not include un-Islamic behaviors. The author's findings demonstrate participants' desire to further themselves socially, but not at the cost of their religious identity. Findings also indicated that parental influence value certain occupations over others, but also develop their own skill set and interests. It also seems that along with parental influence, gender roles, racial/ethnic discrimination, as well as, congruence with religio-cultural norms, play a role in the adolescence striving to make pragmatic decisions in goals toward upward mobility. The results of the study also suggested that the parent-adolescent relationship requires negotiation and persuasion in the career development process. They did find a discrepancy between parent and the girls' goals toward upward mobility versus the teachers believing these upward mobility goals to be unrealistic. A contextual barrier can be seen with teachers having low expectations for these ethnic and religious minority students that could have a negative impact on their career choice process. They found that some teachers

were respectful of religio-cultural values and aspirations, but others had a difficult time taking this different viewpoint. The article also emphasizes how Muslim parents in the study seemed to be supportive and encouraging to their daughters and a desire to be involved in their child's future. Basit (1996) calls for using this information to engage parental support and involvement in the career process, as well as engage the community through role models from the girls' ethnic and religious background.

Although this study was conducted with a small sample, it still has provided some limited understanding on the possibilities of how the personal inputs and contextual influences can impact Muslim Americans and their career choices. It is valuable to have these qualitative studies to gain a better understanding of the factors that may be associated with Muslim American career choices. The findings from the Basit (1996) study suggests that external influences of parents, teachers, and the behaviors of the students, may influence students' motivations, self-efficacy and outcome expectations in regards to career choices. The study also demonstrated that Muslims living in a western context from immigrant backgrounds strive towards social mobility and there are various ways this can influence their children. This study suggests that a lack of support or understanding may negatively influence student's career aspirations (e.g. teachers not believing students career desires are realistic). Furthermore, it found how parents have such a major influence in relaying religio-cultural values and also influencing career development. Parents may act as cultural guides who are supports and have a major influence that can be seen as positive or negative (Basit, 1996).

There is virtually no research that investigates the factors that influence South Asian Muslim Americans career choices. While there have been many articles written on the characteristics of the Muslim American population in general, very little has been done on understanding how these religious or cultural components influence their career development process. Further in the majority of the research that does exist on Muslim Americans, Muslims

are categorized as a single unit, despite the significant diversity that exists in ethnic background, country of origin, and cultural practices within this population. There is a lack of literature on South Asian Muslim Americans in general, with the majority of research being done on South Asian Muslims in Europe.

While there are beginning to be more studies on how the increasing Islamophobic environment in the US since September 11, 2001, is effecting perceived discrimination for Muslim Americans, we do not understand how it may be influencing the life choices they make. There is major lack of understanding as to how the social context of islamophobia in the US effects South Asian Muslim American young adults career aspirations. The lack of focused literature on this population demonstrates the need for more understanding of how personal inputs and contextual influences and how they relate to cognitive variables are affecting south Asian Muslim Americans career decision-making process.

### **Introduction to this Study**

Throughout this review of the literature Muslim Americans were continuously grouped together as if they are a homogenous group, but they have major differences that impact their lives in a variety of ways. There needs to be more literature on the various subgroups of Muslim Americans in order to provide culturally competent care toward these individuals seeking support. Furthermore, Muslims and South Asian Muslims are significantly underrepresented in the career literature. The hope is that by investigating relationships among variables from an empirically supported career theory (SCCT) there can be exploration of the significance of person inputs, contextual influences, career decision self-efficacy, and outcome expectations for South Asian Muslim Americans.

## **Purpose and Hypotheses**

The specific purpose of this study is to examine SCCT career choice variables and how they contribute to the career development of Muslim American college students. The specific SCCT variables of person input variables (Gender, Religiosity, Ethnicity), contextual variables (parental support, perceived discrimination), and cognitive variables (career decision making self-efficacy and career decision outcome expectations) were investigated to assess how they relate to the career decision making process for Muslim American young adults. The proposed research hypotheses that were tested are as follows:

Based on SCCT propositions, the following was hypothesized:

Hypothesis one: Perceived religious discrimination, religiosity, and parent support, will predict career decision-making self-efficacy when gender and ethnicity are held constant.

Hypothesis two: Perceived religious discrimination, religiosity, and parent support, will predict career decision outcome expectations when gender and ethnicity are held constant.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Procedure**

#### **Participants**

The study had 160 respondents, who opened the survey, 114 respondents that worked on the measures, but did not complete all of them, and 75 participants that finished all of the measures. Participants were all aged 18-30, from Muslim Backgrounds, had ethnic backgrounds from India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The mean age of participants was 24.85 and the standard deviation was 4.00, so there seemed to be a variability in the age range of participants. The ethnic backgrounds consisted of 85.3% (64) from Afghanistan, 8.0% (6) from Pakistan, 2.7% (2) from India, 4.0%(3) other (mixed nationality). Of participants, 49.3 % (37) indicated they were not born in the US and 50.7% (38) of participants were born in the US, but came over in childhood/adolescent years. The biological sex of participants in this study consisted of, 34.7% (26) Male and 65.3% (49) female. The educational background of participants included, 39.9% (30) were undergraduate students, 32% (24) were graduate or professional students, and 28% (21) were no longer students. This population was chosen due to being in the stage of career development where they will be choosing college majors and making decisions about careers.

#### **Recruitment of Participants**

The survey was distributed to list serves on college campuses that would most likely have the population being investigated. The procedure for data collection used in this study has been used previously in the literature to gain access to this population (Every & Perry, 2014). The leaders of organizations and Facebook groups were contacted to request permission to post or email the survey. Once these leaders granted permission, the survey link was posted or sent via email to list serves or Facebook groups. The list serves included college Muslim student associations, Indian student associations, Pakistani student associations, and Afghan student associations. The survey was also distributed on Facebook to relevant groups, organizations, and

mosques. Initially, the survey was distributed in the Midwest at the University of Iowa, Iowa state university, University of Nebraska Omaha, and Creighton University. Eventually, the scope was broadened to student organizations in the east and west coast, where there were more chances of reaching this population in larger cities. Also, in the recruitment email and post, participants were asked to pass on the survey to those they believed would qualify. This snowball sampling method was effective in gathering participants for this population that is difficult to reach. All participants received the survey with the measurements in the same order. The survey software used was Qualtrics through the University of Iowa. Data was collected over a 6 week time period.

## **Measures**

*Asian American Career Development Questionnaire.* This questionnaire was adapted from the Tang, Fouad, and Smith (1999) Asian American Career development questionnaire. The questionnaire collected data in three areas: “demographic information such as age, gender, ethnic origins, year in school, and family involvement” (Tang et al., p.146).

Family involvement was measured through eight items in a Likert scale (1-5) format. Tang et al., (1999) found the scale demonstrated a moderate reliability ( $\alpha = .59$ ). Previous studies did not report validity for this measure. Some of the items included questions like: “Have your parents pressured you to take a job that is financially secure?”; “Have they compared you with others who are successful in certain occupations?”; “How often have your parents or any family members discussed any career plans with you?”

*Religiosity.* The Muslim Attitude towards Religiosity Scale (MARS; Wilde & Joseph, 1997) was used to assess religiosity. The scale is a 14-item survey inquiring about the level of importance of various Islamic tenets to the participants (e.g. “Allah helps me; I think the Quran is relevant and applicable to modern day”). The participants responded using a likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to report their agreement and observance with certain Muslim tenets. The items are then scored positively on a scale of 0 to 70, with higher scores

demonstrating greater commitment to Muslim ideology. The internal reliability estimated by Wilde and Joseph (1997) was Cronbach's alpha of .93 and the reported validity information was demonstrated with low correlations between the MARS scale and psychoticism.

***Perceived Religious Discrimination.*** The Perceived religious discrimination scale (PRDS: Rippey & Newman, 2008; Jasperse, 2009) was used to assess participant's experiences of perceived religious discrimination in their lives. Variations of the scale have been used with Muslim populations in western contexts, Australian Muslims (Every & Perry, 2014), Muslim women in New Zealand (Jasperse, 2009), South Asian Muslim woman in US (Pasha-Zaidi, 2015), and Muslim Americans (Rippey & Newman, 2008, 2007). It is a 33-item measure with 3 subscales. The overall internal consistency reliability for the scale is a Cronbach's alpha of .92. The three scales cover areas including: religious prejudice and stigmatization (22 items), bicultural identification and conflict (5 items), exposure to religiously discriminatory environment (6 items). In Rippey & Newman's study (2008) they found a significant correlation of .45 ( $p < .01$ ) between total scores on PRDS and total numbers of hate crimes or discriminatory acts reported. Furthermore, the internal consistency reliability from the original study on the PRDS scale was high ( $\alpha = .92$ ; 33 items)

***Parental Support.*** A Parental Support of Education Scale, developed by Ong, Phinney, and Dennis (2006), was used to assess parental support, understanding, and encouragement of college and the challenges college students may encounter. Ong and colleagues initially developed and pilot tested to be used with ethnic minority first generation college students. The instrument was revised after pilot testing, which was conducted with 800 incoming freshman. The scale has six statements regarding parental attitudes in regards to college. The responses will be recorded on a 5 point scale, from not at all (1) to very true (5). Some examples of the statements on the scale include, "My parents/family understand that I often have to study instead of helping out at home," "My parents/family give me a lot of encouragement for attending school," and "My parents/family are willing to make sacrifices and help me out financially". Ong and Colleagues

(2006) found the estimated across-time (four times over 2 years) reliability (“defined as the ration of true to total variance” p. 965) for parental support to be .92. In regards to validity, they found that GPA was positively correlated with parental support of education ( $r=.21, p<.05$ ).

***Career Decision Outcome Expectations.*** Outcome expectations were measured using the Career Decision Outcome Expectancies Scale (CDOE; Betz & Vuyten, 1997). Career Decision outcome expectancies are conceptualized, as what one believes will be the successful results in the long term of educational and career-decision making behaviors. The CDOE scale has 9 items that are answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Betz and Vuyten (1997) created the scale with 5 items assessing the connection between academic performance to career choices and accomplishments and another 4 items assessing outcome expectations for certain career decision making actions. An example of an item on the educational outcome portion states, “If I try hard enough, I will get good grades” and an example of an item from the career outcome portion states, “If I learn more about different careers, I will make a better career decision.” In this study we will combine both scales for one overall total score. Betz and Vuyten (1997) found Cronbach’s alpha of .77 for items on educational outcome and .79 for items on career outcome. In regards to validity, they found correlations between efficacy and outcome expectations for women (ranging from .35to.53) and men (.12 to .33), as well as, a strong correlation ( $r=.50$  for both men and women) between career outcome expectation and exploratory intentions. In a study by Ali and Saunders (2009) they combined the scales and found a Cronbach’s alpha of .85 from their sample of rural Appalachian high school students.

***Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy.*** The Career Decision Making Self- Efficacy scale-Short form (CDMSE-SF; Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996) was used to assess self-efficacy. This scale has 25 items that assesses the beliefs one has on their abilities to successfully accomplish tasks essential to making career decisions. The items are rated on a 5-point scale from no confidence at all (1) to complete confidence (5). The five subscales in the CDMSE-SF include: accurate self-appraisal, collecting occupational information, goal selection, creating plans for the

future, and problem solving. Some sample items include, “Make a plan of your goals for the next five years” and “Find information about graduate and professional schools.” Higher scores on this scale indicate high self-efficacy expectations for decision-making. The internal consistency for the subscales ranged from .73-.83 and for the total score the alpha coefficient was .94 (Betz et al., 1996). The scale has been used with racial and ethnic minority undergraduates to yield a Cronbach’s alpha of .97 (Gloria & Herd, 1999). Betz and colleagues (1996) established validity of this scale through finding a correlation between scores from CDMSE-SF (subscales and total score) and career indecision (ranged from -.45 to -.66 for females and from -.19 to -.60 for males).

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis in this study included an analysis of descriptive statistics, correlation analysis of the variables, and hierarchical multiple regressions to test the proposed hypotheses. For a medium effect size (partial r squared of .13) and power of .9, there needs to be 73 participants. Two hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to test the two hypotheses. First hypothesis was, perceived religious discrimination, religiosity, and parent support, will predict career decision-making self-efficacy when gender and ethnicity are held constant. Second hypothesis was, Perceived religious discrimination, religiosity, and parent support, will predict career decision outcome expectations when gender and ethnicity are held constant. For this reason, variables were entered in accordance with how important they are believed to be through the SCCT framework. They were entered in a block format with the most important variables entered last. Due to the lack of diversity in ethnic backgrounds (Majority from Afghanistan) in the participants, this variable was not included in the analysis. The person input variable of gender was entered in the first block; the second block included the contextual variables of religiosity, parent support and perceived discrimination. Then the analysis examined significant changes in  $R^2$  and standardized regression coefficients.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The sample in this study was 75 South Asian Muslim Americans between the ages of 18 and 30 years old. Participants were enrolled in universities or in the early career work force. A demographics questionnaire was used to assess some family background, family career involvement, and their career goals. Then SCCT career choice model was assessed through measuring factors of religiosity, parental support, perceived religious discrimination, self-efficacy and outcome expectations. First, descriptive statistics of the variables will be presented, and then a correlation matrix of all of the variables will be explored. Finally, the results of the hierarchical multiple regression of outcome expectations and self-efficacy will be shown.

### Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were collected for the variables of Religiosity (MARS), Self-Efficacy (CDSE-SF), Outcome expectations (Career expectations and Intentions), Parental Support, and Perceived Religious Discrimination (PRDS). The descriptive statistics for these measures are presented in the Table 1. below.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Sample on Each Measure

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
<b>MARS</b>	75	53.11	14.53	14	70
<b>CDSE</b>	75	3.83	.92	1	5
<b>OutcomeExpectations</b>	75	37.79	5.76	19	45
<b>Parental Support</b>	75	25.72	4.03	6	30
<b>PRDS</b>	75	88.28	26.88	30	161

Note: MARS= Religiosity, CDSE=Self Efficacy, PRDS=Perceived Religious Discrimination

***Muslim Attitude towards Religiosity Scale*** The mean score of the MARS for this sample was 53.11 with a range from 14-70 and a standard deviation of 14.53. The 14 items were scored positively on a scale of 0-70, with higher scores demonstrating greater commitment to Muslim ideology. MARS with this population yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .97.

***Career Decision making self-efficacy*** The mean score of the CDSE for this sample was 3.83 with a range of 1 to 5 and a standard deviation of .92. . Higher levels of career decision-

making self-efficacy was represented by higher scores. The scores were added up and divided by 25 to provide an average score for each participant. Seems that this studies sample remained close to the average range on self-efficacy. CDSE measure with this population yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .97.

***Career Decision Outcome Expectations*** The mean score of the CDOE for this sample was 37.79 with a range of 19-45 and a standard deviation of 5.76. The 9 items were added to find total scores for each person and the higher the score the more one believes they will have success in their long term educational and career decision-making behaviors. The scores on outcome expectations seem to be clustered higher in the range of outcome expectations. CDOE measure with this population yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .82.

***Parental Support*** The mean score of the Parental Support scale for this sample was 25.72 with a range of 6-30 and a standard deviation of 4.03. The 6 item scale assessed parental support, understanding, and encouragement of college and the challenges students may encounter. The items were added up to provide a total score, that indicated with higher scores, participants felt more support from parents. The scores seemed to be clustered toward the upper end of the range, indicating more participants feeling support from parents. Parental support scale yielded Cronbach's alpha of .62.

***Perceived religious discrimination scale (PRDS)*** The means score of the PRDS for this sample was 88.28 with a range of 30-161 and a standard deviation of 26.88. The 33 item scale measures participant's experiences of perceived religious discrimination in their lives. The scores were added up to get total scores of perceived religious discrimination experienced by each participants with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived religious discrimination. PRDS with this population yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .95.

***Power Analysis.*** *GPower* software was used to conduct an a priori statistical power analysis. This a priori statistical analysis was used to determine the number of participants needed to achieve a power of .9. The results reflected that for a medium effect size (partial r squared of

.13) and power of .9, 73 participants would be the ideal number of participants. 75 participants completed all of the measures, so the desired apriori power established was reached.

Career Decision Self Efficacy and Outcome expectations were the dependent variables and religiosity, parental support, and perceived religious discrimination were the predictor variables. A correlation matrix was made to explore the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Table 2 shows the correlation matrix.

Table 2. Correlation Among Variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Religiosity	1				
2. Self Efficacy	.149	1			
3. Outcome Expect.	-.138	.165	1		
4. Parental Support	.055	-.006	-.049	1	
5. PRDS	.083	.024	-.039	-.330**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: PRDS= Perceived Religious Discrimination

The correlation matrix revealed only one significant relationship between SCCT variables. There was mild significance between perceived religious discrimination and parental support. This interesting finding demonstrated a small negative relationship between these two variables. This suggests that participants with more parental support, perceived less religious discrimination.

The two hypotheses were tested using a hierarchical multiple regression with outcome expectations and self-efficacy serving as criterion variables in two separate regressions. Predictor variables included gender, parental support, religiosity, and perceived religious discrimination. Hierarchical regression can be used to investigate relationships between variables that were selected through considerations of logical or theoretical connections (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). It was theorized through the use of SCCT career choice model that there would be some

connection between contextual variables (PRDS, Religiosity, Parental Support) and Person inputs (gender) predicting self-efficacy or outcome expectations.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Outcome Expectations

<b>Step and Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE B</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b><math>\Delta R^2</math></b>	<b><math>R^2</math></b>	<b>F</b>
Step 1					.015	.015	1.086
Gender	1.487	1.426	.122	.301			
Step 2					.021	.036	.643
Gender	1.630	1.462	.134	.269			
ParentalSupport	-.050	.182	-.035	.785			
PRDS	-.006	.028	-.028	.825			
Religiosity	-.055	.048	-.137	.260			

Note: n=74, PRDS=Perceived Religious Discrimination  
All p values > .05

The hierarchical regression analysis (Table 3) examined the contribution of the SCCT predictor variables to the criterion variable of Outcome expectations. The Final model (Step 2) yielded an  $R^2 = .036$ ,  $F(4,69) = .643$ ,  $p = .634$ . In the sample, 3.6% of the variation in outcome expectations can be explained by gender, PRDS, religiosity and parental support. There were not significant changes in  $R^2$  at steps 1 and 2 of the model.  $R^2$  change from model 1 to model 2 is not significant ( $\Delta R^2 = .021$ ),  $F(3,69) = .502$ ,  $p = .682$ . After gender was controlled, PRDS, religiosity, and parental support did not predict significant unique variation in outcome expectations. There is not sufficient information to conclude that gender, PRDS, religiosity and parental support can predict a significant proportion of variation in outcome expectations.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Self-Efficacy

<b>Step and Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE B</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b><math>\Delta R^2</math></b>	<b><math>R^2</math></b>	<b>F</b>
Step 1					.001	.001	.061
Gender	.050	.203	.029	.805			
Step 2					.017	.018	.324
Gender	.027	.208	.016	.897			
ParentalSupport	-.001	.026	-.005	.969			
PRDS	.001	.004	.019	.879			
Religiosity	.007	.007	.129	.284			

Note: n=75, PRDS=Perceived Religious Discrimination  
All p values > .05

The hierarchical regression analysis (Table 4) examined the contribution of the SCCT predictor variables to the criterion variable of Self-Efficacy. The Final model (Step 2) yielded an  $R^2=.018$ ,  $F(4, 70)=.324$ ,  $p=.861$ . In the sample, 1.8% of the variation in self-efficacy can be explained by gender, PRDS, religiosity and parental support. There were not significant changes in  $R^2$  at steps 1 and 2 of the model.  $R^2$  change from model 1 to model 2 is not significant ( $\Delta R^2=.017$ ,  $F(3,70)=.412$ ,  $p=.745$ ). After gender was controlled, PRDS, religiosity, and parental support did not predict significant unique variation in self-efficacy. There is not sufficient information to conclude that gender, PRDS, religiosity and parental support can predict a significant proportion of variation in self-efficacy.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to investigate some of the factors contributing to the career development process of South Asian Muslim Americans. As there is currently no research on South Asian Muslim Americans career development, this investigation sought to determine whether social cognitive career theory (SCCT) is applicable to this population. SCCT has not previously been applied to Muslim populations. The primary focus of the investigation was to examine SCCT career choice variables and how they contribute to the career development of South Asian Muslim American populations. This chapter will begin by discussing the results of the analysis and understanding the outcomes of the study based on the population, including considerations due to this being the first time SCCT has been applied to South Asian Muslim Americans. Next, the chapter will consider limitations and future research directions with this population. Finally, the chapter will end with discussion of the implications of this research for the field of counseling psychology.

### **Relationship Between Variables**

SCCT career choice model was chosen due to its well-established reputation as a career model, and because it has been applied to some diverse populations, including Latin Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans and others (e.g. Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Flores Robitschek, Celebi, Andersen, & Hoang, 2010; Lent, Sheu, Gloster, & Wilkins, 2010; Nauta & Epperson, 2003; Navarro, Flores, & Worthington, 2007; Rivera, Chen, Flores, Blumberg & Ponteretto, 2007; Sheuermann, Tokar, Hall, 2014; Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999). Lent (1994) emphasized the need for more research on the application of SCCT with minority populations. The intention in the current study was to continue learning about SCCT's applicability to a sub-group of the Muslim population in the United States, particularly as South Asian Muslim Americans have different immigration backgrounds and life concerns than many of the other groups investigated.

The current study did not replicate previous studies, but it took steps to find ways that person input factors (gender, religiosity, ethnicity) and contextual factors (parental support, perceived religious discrimination) contribute to self-efficacy and/or outcome expectations in this population. Because South Asian Muslim American's career development had not been studied using SCCT, one portion of the model was investigated to see its applicability. Therefore, based on the SCCT career choice model, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis one: Perceived religious discrimination, religiosity, and parent support will predict career decision-making self-efficacy when gender and ethnicity are held constant.

Hypothesis two: Perceived religious discrimination, religiosity, and parent support will predict career decision outcome expectations when gender and ethnicity are held constant.

The data were collected and analyzed using multiple hierarchical regression. The findings from this study suggest that perceived religious discrimination, religiosity, and parent support do not predict career decision-making self-efficacy for the current sample. The findings also suggest that perceived religious discrimination, religiosity, and parent support do not predict career decision outcome expectations. The analysis led to no significant findings in regards to the hypotheses proposed. These findings did not align with the hypothesis that predicted that SCCT could potentially be applicable with this path in the career choice model for South Asian Muslim Americans. These results were surprising and seem to contradict previous research that has been done to support the use of SCCT with diverse populations. At the same time, this specific population has not been investigated with the SCCT framework and there has been little to no research on this population's career development process, so these results are very informative.

There have been two other studies with South Asian Americans, non-Muslim, that have not found significance with components of the SCCT model. Kantamneni and Fouad (2013, p.69) findings suggest, "Contextual factors, like acculturation, individualistic and collectivist values, and gender do not predict congruence between expressed and measured interests." They were also surprised by this finding due to previous research supporting contextual factors shaping the career

decision-making process for racial/ethnic minorities. They referenced a qualitative study by Fouad and Colleagues (2008) that found cultural factors influenced career choices for Asian Americans. The current study investigated religio-cultural factors (religiosity, perceived religious discrimination, parental support) and did not find significance of these factors on self-efficacy or outcome expectations.

Another study on South Asians by Gupta and Tracy (2005) found that South Asians demonstrated less congruence in their expressed and measured interests when compared with Caucasian groups. Gupta and Tracey (2005) found that “the cultural value of dharma, or familial duty, did not significantly predict interest-occupation congruence for South Asian Americans. Together, these findings suggest that congruence is not influenced by contextual factors for South Asian Americans, although more research is needed to fully understand this relationship” (Kantamneni & Fouad, 2013, p. 69). Findings from the current study and these two previous studies on South Asians challenge researchers to think about what other factors may be coming into the career development process for these populations. South Asians and South Asian Muslims have unique characteristics that models like SCCT may not be considering as factors contributing to the career development process.

Correlations were investigated among all the five variables of religiosity, parental support, perceived religious discrimination, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations. Only one significant correlation was found. There was mild significance (-.333) in the relationship between perceived religious discrimination and parental support. This negative correlation suggested that as parental support increased, perceived religious discrimination decreased. This was an interesting finding considering the importance of family for South Asian Muslim Americans (Mahmoud, 2008) and how potentially parental support could alleviate experiences of perceived religious discrimination. This connection should be investigated further because it could demonstrate a path toward managing negative impacts of perceived religious discrimination (Rippey & Newman, 2006) with parental support.

No significant correlations were found between self-efficacy and outcome expectations with this population. This was in contrast with previous findings by Sheu and Colleagues (2010) who found significance with these two variables. This finding does coincide with research done by Scheuerman and Colleagues (2014), which also found a non-significant path between prestige self-efficacy and prestige outcome expectations. Lent et al. (1994) suggested that this relationship should exist between these two variables because “people presumably expect to receive desirable outcomes in activities in which they view themselves to be efficacious” (Bandura, 1986, p. 89). The non-significant findings for African American women and this South Asian American Muslim population suggest that for these groups, their level of confidence in their abilities may not be linked to their outcome expectations. There may be other factors that contribute to outcome expectations, like contextual factors including racism, sexism, career networks, mentors and other supports that are separate from their attitudes about their own competencies to complete activities related to the career development process (Scheuermann, et al., 2014). It is also important to consider this finding in the context of the sociopolitical challenges faced by these two populations, as they are oppressed and marginalized in the current political climate and historically in the United States.

In this investigation we looked at the SCCT career choice model, person input variables, and contextual variables and how they relate to self-efficacy and outcome expectations. The career choice model directly connects learning experiences as the main source of self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994). The career choice model also directly connects person inputs and contextual variables as sources of learning experiences. The current study did not specifically investigate learning experiences. This could be the missing link for the analysis of this career choice model in the current study. This investigation focuses on the sources of learning experiences, which are person inputs and contextual factors, but not specifically learning experiences. It may be beneficial for future research to investigate the learning experiences of

South Asian Muslim Americans through qualitative methods to ensure clarity and quality in the information gathered regarding learning experiences for this population.

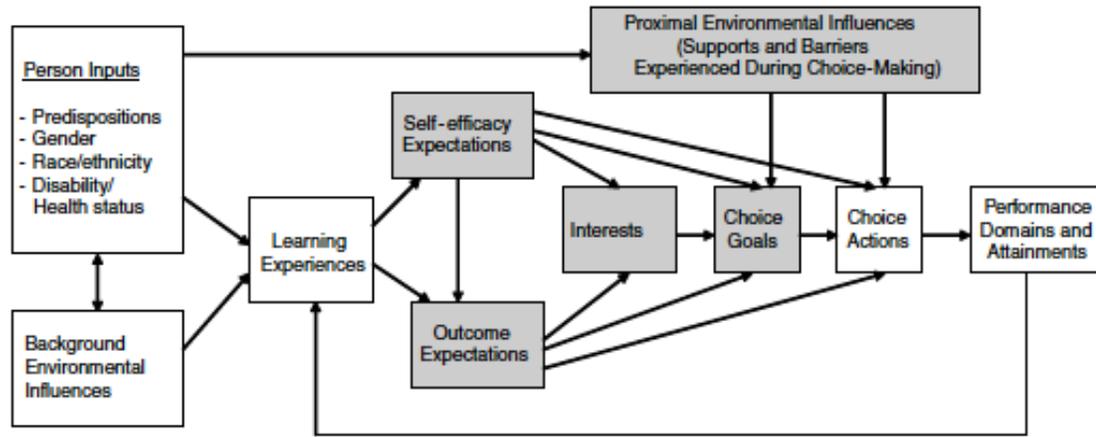


Figure 3. Model of social cognitive influences on career choice behavior (Lent et al., 1994).

There are other factors to consider for this population that may uniquely impact the application of SCCT. The participants in this study are about half U.S. born and half non U.S. born (coming over later in life). These participants were either immigrants themselves or were children of immigrants to this country. This more recent immigration status introduces different variables and levels of pressure or life considerations (World Health Organization, 2001; Eisenhurch, 1991) that may not be fully understood in the career literature. The majority of the respondents came from Afghanistan, which is a war-torn country (Noorzoy, 2012); many potentially came as refugees, or their parents were refugees coming to the United States for a safer and better life (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2014). There can be secondary/vicarious trauma from experiences of war passed down to future generations (i.e., transgenerational trauma) (Fox, Burns, Popovich, Belknap, & Frank- Stromber, 2004; Yeh, 2003) that influences the decisions they make in their lives. There are many layers of complexity when participants present as more recent immigrants or children of immigrants that fled war (William & Thompson, 2011).

It is important to discuss the cultural validity of the SCCT model and how this study did not suggest applicability of SCCT career choice model in this population. There are many factors that could have contributed to this. This population has some unique characteristics due to more recent immigration status (Pew Research, 2011). People coming from these South Asian countries have differing value systems and views of the world than other populations that the SCCT model has been studied with (Almeida, 2005). The practice of Islam is another layer that is added to the experience of this population and their way of life. There seem to be other components involved within this population that are involved with choosing a career. It may be that less acculturated groups have other considerations that SCCT has not considered yet. Islamophobia has increased in this country dramatically since 9/11, and that is another consideration that may be contributing to this population's career development experiences (Al-Atom, 2014).

Additionally, it is worth considering factors beyond the scope of past research, grounded in previous research highlighting the strong family bonds in collectivist cultures (Mahmoud, 2008) and connections to core traditions of countries of origin (Almeida, 2005). An assumption made in this investigation was that the measurement of self-efficacy was based on an idea of self-efficacy built from the perspective of a westernized individualistic lens. There may be other components that contribute to or make up self-efficacy for South Asian Muslim Americans. Self-efficacy for this population may be significantly influenced by their family's messages or by their desire to live out the "American dream" being new immigrants to the U.S (Basit, 1996). There could be factors around families coming as refugees and passing on to the next generation a desire to pursue certain careers or reach success for the family (Basit, 1996). The collectivistic nature of these groups assessed seems that it may influence career development and pressure south Asian Muslim Americans may feel around reaching success in the United States (Mahmoud, 2008). Social class struggles of being refugees, immigrants, and coming from families starting new lives, but still potentially holding on to old traditions or ways of thinking, could also be factors impacting career development (Almeida, 2005; Basit, 1996). The contextual

factors impacting the individual seem to be a bit more diverse or complex than potentially anticipated for this population.

Another consideration that this investigation brings forward is that the model may not align with how South Asian Muslim Americans engage in the career development process. It may be possible that self-efficacy and outcome expectations may not be related to their career development process. Self-efficacy and focus on how one feels about their own abilities may be a more individualistic trait or component of the SCCT career choice model. There may need to be consideration of how in collectivistic communities what factors may be a part of the career development process in groups (e.g. ethnic identity) rather than focusing on the individual (Gloria & Hird, 1999). There may be information lost when only focusing on the individual with someone who is from a collectivistic background. The above ideas and considerations are areas for future research and further understanding of South Asian Muslim American's life experiences.

### **Limitations**

In this study, there were limitations related to chosen measures, challenges in data collection, and cultural factors influencing how this group may have responded to the research request. Strong efforts were made to use measures that had been used with Muslim populations. The religiosity and perceived religious discrimination measures were both previously used with this population (Every & Perry, 2014; Wilde & Joseph, 1997). The Asian American demographic questionnaire was used with Asian American populations, who share collectivist backgrounds with South Asian Muslim American populations. Unfortunately, due to the lack of research on Muslims regarding careers, the Career Self efficacy, outcome expectations, and parental support measures had not been used with Muslim or South Asian populations. These three measures had been used on diverse populations in previous research, but not specifically the current population.

Another major challenge in this research was accessing the population and gaining trust for them to take the measure. The primary investigator sought out student organizations, university list serves, and Facebook pages and groups to gain access to this population. Several student organizations or groups did not reply to requests. Also, due to the primary investigator's ethnic background of being from Afghanistan, more Afghan participants distributed and participated in the study. This population has faced a lot of fears in the midst of the Islamophobic political climate, and trusting a researcher getting information from them in an online survey may have felt threatening or uncertain. This population is also very private and collectivistic, which typically values keeping things within families and not sharing information to outsiders. About 160 participants responded to the study, but only 75 participants participated in the full study. The response rate demonstrates this privacy and skepticism of research. The majority of participants being from Afghanistan demonstrates the points above that accessing Muslim groups in the United States can be very challenging. It seems that the PI being of ethnic background from Afghanistan led more participants from that country to feel safe enough to participate in this anonymous study. Due to the high levels of Afghan participants, the PI was unable to measure any differences between Afghan, Indian or Pakistani participants.

It also may have been beneficial to open the study to all Muslim groups. This may have been easier to access more participants, but the PI believed that a subgroup with similar characteristics and traditions should be studied, given the tremendous diversity within Islam. It is a difficult balance to hold when there is not enough research on a population, but the population is also very diverse. It may be a good consideration to open studies to all Muslim groups, due to the lack of research on Muslim Americans and the career process.

There is also an interesting component of South Asian Muslim American's being more collectivistic in nature (Mahmoud, 2008), which may influence their career development process. Unfortunately, the parental support measure in this study was not the strongest measure for this population (Cronbach's alpha of .61), but if this factor had been stronger, it may have told us

more about how collectivism impacts the career process for this population. A measure that focuses more on measuring collectivism may have been beneficial to understand the connection to family and community on a deeper level.

### **Future Directions**

Further research and investigation on the career development of Muslim Americans are much needed. The literature on this population is scarce and the societal challenges for this population are increasing (Al-Atom, 2014). It would be beneficial to learn more about how islamophobia is impacting Muslim Americans and how this may be influencing different areas of their lives, like careers.

In support of the findings in the literature (Kantamneni & Fouad, 2015; Sheueurman et al., 2014; Gupta & Tracey, 2005), the results of this study demonstrate how SCCT may not predict certain factors of the career development process for diverse populations that may be experiencing systematic oppression. It is essential to assess different models and/or frameworks across culturally diverse populations to understand their worldviews, or investigate different pathways utilizing the SCCT to expand its efficacy. The SCCT can be applicable with some diverse populations (add sources to support this statement), but some nuances of the complexities in the background and experiences are not addressed. There is a paucity of research exploring other factors, such as acculturation, experiences of racism, islamophobia, family expectations, and social class, that could be contributing to the career development process. It can be beneficial to assess this population's career aspirations or goals; however, many of the studies on diverse populations focus on this outcome variable that was not assessed in the current study.

Specifically, additional qualitative research on career development with this population can assist in gaining more knowledge about Muslim Americans. Qualitative data can help understand other factors or themes that could arise in their career development processes. This type of information could then inform more culturally appropriate measures for diverse

populations (e.g., South Asian Muslim Americans). In addition, qualitative data offer a new perspective on people's experiences of islamophobia, the impact of the travel ban, the current political climate, and living in a world in which harassment of Muslims or hate crimes against individuals identifying as Muslim present to be a daily concern. These factors must have an impact on Muslims somehow and this would be vital information to understand their career experiences.

This investigation had a smaller sample size, which was also a limitation. Although it is large enough to have enough power to run a regression and test the hypothesis, stronger connections or predictions could have been made with a larger sample size. In addition, the measures in this study were all self-report measures, which are subjective and have the potential for bias. Furthermore, the length of the study seemed to be long for some because over half of initial respondents did not finish the study.

## **Implications for Counseling Psychologists**

### **Theory**

The insignificant results of this study evidence the need to learn more about significant factors in the career development process of South Asian Muslim Americans. What is happening in their career development that is not being considered or captured in this analysis? SCCT has been used with other diverse populations (e.g. Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Flores Robitschek, Celebi, Andersen, & Hoang, 2010; Lent, Sheu, Gloster, & Wilkins, 2010; Nauta & Epperson, 2003; Navarro, Flores, & Worthington, 2007; Rivera, Chen, Flores, Blumberg & Ponteretto, 2007; Sheuermann, Tokar, Hall, 2014; Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999), but there is continued need to understand the career development of ethnic minorities. The research on South Asian Muslim Americans career development process is extremely scarce and also very limited for Muslim Americans in general. The findings of the current study highlight the need to further expand research on career development models with ethnic minorities, while not conflating minoritized

identities. There is evidence that, for racial and ethnic minority students, ethnic variables (ethnic identity, other-group orientation) are more significant predictors of career decision making self-efficacy and trait anxiety than for their white counterparts (Gloria & Hird, 1999). This and the current study's findings support more research to understand the intricacies of these diverse populations. Qualitative research with South Asian Muslim Americans may provide more information about what details are currently being missed, in order to gain insight into their career development process and what factors influence this process.

Preliminary qualitative research on career development of Muslim youth by Basit (1996) suggested that the external influences of parents, teachers, and students' behaviors may impact students' motivations, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations in relation to career choices. Furthermore, maintaining cultural identity in the US for South Asian families is very important and may be done through strict cultural limitations (Almeida, 2005). The connection and bond with family and culture is very evident within South Asian Muslim Americans and may be playing a larger role than was accounted for within this study's model. The specific path of SCCT career choice model chosen in this study may have shown more evidence for SCCT if learning experiences (the sources of self-efficacy and outcome expectations) were assessed. Investigating learning experiences from contextual factors, role models, family, or parents could be helpful in gaining more perspective of how context influences this population's career development process.

One of the challenges faced in this study was the paucity of available instruments that have been tested on Muslim populations or South Asian populations. Expanded use of existing career instruments/assessments on South Asian Muslim populations would help understand the application of the instruments to this population and what the instruments may not be capturing. The development of instruments that are more culturally sensitive may be another way to improve research in this area. This seems vital due to the unique nature of this population: many South Asian Muslim Americans are more recent immigrants to the U.S., where they have experienced an environment of increased Islamophobia.

The points above reiterate the importance of further research and career theory development for the unique experiences of South Asian Muslim Americans. It is imperative that researchers do not continue to forgo this population in the career and research literature.

## **Practice**

These findings suggest the need for further exploration of South Asian Muslim Americans and their career development. This is especially important in a period of time in which we do not know the major impacts of Islamophobia on students and their major life decisions, like careers. Career counseling with South Asian Muslim Americans may entail considering a multitude of factors including stigma around seeking services, contextual influences, collectivism, acculturation, and how to apply this gathered information (in conjunction with career assessments) to the career counseling process. Counseling psychologists need increased education on South Asian Muslim Americans and career issues relevant to this population.

*Stigma in using career-counseling services.* There are various factors that may influence or prevent South Asian Muslim Americans from seeking career services from mental health professionals. These factors include the stigma of obtaining mental health services from professionals outside of their cultural background, unavailability of therapists with cultural sensitivity to serve this population, and a shortage of training programs that adequately prepare therapists to understand and feel comfortable working with the Muslim population (Kelly et al., 1996). Discussing personal problems with someone outside of their kinship networks can create a deep sense of shame for some Muslim Americans (Daneshpour, 1998). Personal problems are considered private matters that families are expected to control and take responsibility for handling, with the help of extended family (Daneshpour, 1998). Due to the stigma of seeking outside (i.e., external to their kinship networks) help, assistance is generally not sought until there is desperate need, at which time the client may be overwhelmed by a sense of crisis or persistent strain (Daneshpour, 1998). Students may have a strong need, but be unsure of how to approach

career counseling services. Outreach around career services and career counseling options is a great way to reach out to this population, and it may reduce some of the stigma of going to a counseling center. Structure and focus within career services may help South Asian Muslim clients to feel more comfortable with the therapeutic relationship.

***Familial background.*** Kantamneni and Fouad (2014) conducted a study on South Asian Americans' vocational development, and they suggest, "career counselors should explore the influences of contextual factors on students' vocational development. Gender, acculturation status and cultural values all appear to be related to vocational interests, specifically in the expression of Realistic and Social interests," (p. 69). It is important for counseling psychologists to gain knowledge of the ethnic background, acculturation status, and other influences in clients' lives that may be impacting their career development.

Moreover, knowledge of clients' experiences and level of acculturation is important background information. Clients' participation (or lack thereof) in Western traditions and their acceptance or denial of Western traditions is vital information. The information gained from inquiring about familial acculturation processes and experiences of South Asian Muslim American clients, including how the client perceives their acculturation experiences compared to their families and if they are satisfied and/or content with existing differences or similarities, assists in expanding psychologists' understandings of their clients (Ibrahim & Dykeman, 2011). This information can support the career counselor's understanding of how to support clients in their decision making processes, and what considerations may be going into their career choice.

Overall, gathering as much information about South Asian Muslim American clients' backgrounds and where they originate from is crucial (Ibrahim & Dykeman, 2011). Details on self-perception, their perceptions of their families, and comparing the two can assist counseling psychologists in understanding how South Asian Muslim American clients view themselves in the context of their own cultural background. Familial and personal backgrounds are pivotal in counseling with Muslims (Ibrahim & Dykeman, 2011).

*Utilizing the Cultural and Background knowledge.* After gaining this important background knowledge, counseling psychologists ought to explore how clients' cultural identity, worldview, spiritual/religious assumptions, and acculturation experiences relate to the presenting career related concerns (Ibrahim & Dykeman, 2011). Among all of these factors affecting the client, from family to religion and culture, where does the client fit in? Which factors are most prevalent for the specific client? The client could be struggling with finding their own identity in context of collectivist culture and religion. It is important for counseling psychologists to help clients understand how to find themselves and a balance of these internal and external influences (Ibrahim & Dykeman, 2011). Then, depending on the client's religiousness or family-orientation, the psychologist can integrate family or religion into conversations about career to assist in the efficacy of treatment. It is about emphasizing those factors that are most salient for the individual client and helping the client find balance among these influencing factors.

Career assessments are another avenue for gathering information, but understanding the limitations of these assessments for this population must be considered. Kantamneni & Fouad (2014) state that, "It is imperative that career counselors integrate more comprehensive assessment in career counseling to fully capture the dynamic and complex ways context can influence career choices made by individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds," (p.69). To practice as multiculturally competent clinicians, it is essential that the cultural bounds of assessments normed on western populations be considered. This is a significant issue for South Asian Muslim American clients in order to really understand their desires, views towards careers, and because assessments might miss important information. The integration of a comprehensive assessment, thorough background information, and attention to current career concerns is needed to provide multiculturally competent career counseling.

## Conclusion

Islamophobia is continuously increasing in the United States, with additional political conflicts within a sociopolitical climate instigating more fear of Muslims. The impact of Islamophobia is unknown for Muslim Americans. This study investigated one area of career to see if a subgroup of Muslim Americans could be better understood through the SCCT, a career model used with other diverse populations (e.g. Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Flores Robitschek, Celebi, Andersen, & Hoang, 2010; Lent, Sheu, Gloster, & Wilkins, 2010; Nauta & Epperson, 2003; Navarro, Flores, & Worthington, 2007; Rivera, Chen, Flores, Blumberg & Ponteretto, 2007; Sheuermann, Tokar, Hall, 2014; Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999). There are complexities in the experiences of South Asian Muslim Americans that were challenging to capture within the framework of the SCCT career choice model. This study found that the assumptions of SCCT connecting different factors of person inputs (gender) and contextual factors (religiosity, PRDS, parental support) did not contribute to self-efficacy or outcome expectations. The results demonstrated the need to understand more of what current models may not be capturing in the nuanced experiences of modern immigrants or refugees to the United States from Muslim backgrounds.

Therefore, it is vital to continue research on this population, and for clinicians to be aware of how to support clients in their career decision-making process with openness. In working with Muslim Americans, it is helpful to have awareness of the complex connections between clients' cultural identities, worldviews, and acculturation processes, in addition to the presenting concern. This author hopes that the reader has a better understanding of various ways Islam is present in Muslim Americans' lives, and recognizes how it can be manifested in various levels. Also addressed were the specific concerns that may come up for South Asian Muslim Americans, including their struggles with identity development and with navigating collectivism within a society that promotes individualism. Counseling psychologists must recognize how these religious and cultural factors are simultaneously important and a point of contention among

different generations of Muslim Americans. Furthermore, it is important for counseling psychologists to use this background knowledge, either through assessment or narrative work, to find the levels of religion, culture, and family in clients' lives and utilize the framework to help them in setting up the process and goals for counseling or career counseling.

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