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Racial-Religious Hinges: Pakistani-Heritage Student Experiences in California Colleges

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DEDICATION

To my niece and nephews

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Racial-Religious Hinges: Experiences of Pakistani American College Students

by

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Colleges have consistently treated their Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students as a monolithic community. Disaggregated data and personal accounts reveal that students from minoritized AAPI subgroups do not feel well supported or represented on their college campuses; resources for AAPI students are not adequate. Pakistani-heritage students have been consistently overlooked in this research, rendering the challenges this population faces invisible to institutions of higher education. Despite their omission from research, studying Pakistani-heritage students in the US provides a lens to better understand how a unique AAPI community dealing with both anti-Asian racism and Islamophobia navigate the limited institutional resources available to them. Through thirteen interviews with Pakistani-heritage college students and recent graduates and campus cultural center staff members, I explore how these students are utilizing both institutional and student-led resources, while navigating the racial-religious hinge between their AAPI and Muslim identities. Findings suggest that, while Pakistani

students will sometimes visit campus cultural centers or South Asian and Muslim student organizations, none of these resources are currently well situated to provide the support that Pakistani-heritage student populations need. Pakistanis, and AAPI subgroups more broadly, need more university sponsored spaces dedicated to their wellbeing as they contend with racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination on interpersonal and institutional levels.

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Introduction

> **"Being Pakistani, you're kind of stuck in the middle. Because you want to be part of these Muslim spaces, but it's largely dominated by Arab people. But you're also part of the South Asian places, but it's Indian dominated. So, where do we go? Where can we actually find a community?" - Bisma, Pakistani-heritage college senior at a UC**

Racialized as both "South Asian" and "Muslim," Pakistani youth in the US are often subject to competing narratives about their racial identity, all while facing an abundance of racial and religious discrimination. As people with heritage in a predominantly Muslim nation, Pakistanis are often viewed in the West as threatening terrorists, oppressors of women, and an uncivilized people (Considine 2017). Violence against people perceived to be Muslim and/or Pakistani has been a common occurrence in Western countries, pre- and post- 9/11 (Austen 2021; Horobin 1972). Meanwhile, Pakistanis are also navigating anti-Asian racism and "model minority" stereotyping, which create the pressure of living up to an impossible standard (Chou and Feagin 2016). This Orientalist[1] ideology positions Pakistani Americans as potentially threatening and violent yet expected to perform as a model minority--all while never truly belonging in America (Do, Wang, and Atwal 2019; Ghidina 2019; Malreddy 2015).

Pakistani-heritage people in the US have at least two salient racialized narratives imposed onto them. Pakistanis' experiences of race exist somewhere between the two statuses of their racial identity as Asian Americans and their assumed religious identity as

[1] While Islamophobia and the model minority might appear to differ entirely, they are both rooted in Orientalism, a white Western construction of Asian and Middle eastern cultures as backwards and threatening. Pakistanis and other demographics experience both forms of subjugation simultaneously (Malreddy 2015).

Muslims. Their positionality and experiences can shift depending on the context. In this way, Pakistani people in the US are situated on a racial-religious hinge, between their race as Asian Americans and their assumed-to-be Muslim identity (Guhin 2018; Maghbouleh 2017).

A toxic combination of Islamophobia and anti-Asian racism result in mental and physical health challenges, alienation, and erasure of discrimination that this population faces (Chou 2008; Samari 2016; Shams 2019). Despite the Islamophobia and anti-Asian racism they face while occupying this liminal space, relatively few studies directly examine Pakistani and Pakistani-American experiences navigating competing narratives in the US overall, let alone college student perspectives (Davies 2019; Ghaffar-Kucher 2012). My study includes Pakistani-heritage college students to unearth how this demographic is impacted by these racial narratives in a setting that often emphasizes racial identity exploration and politicization (Eitzen and Brouillette 1979; Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2004; Morales 2012).

Discrimination against students of Pakistani heritage leads to some shared experiences with AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander), SWANA (Southwest Asian and North African, or "Middle Eastern"), and Muslim communities on campus. However, students like Bisma, quoted in the epigraph that opens this paper, do not always feel like they can be authentically supported in spaces dedicated to AAPI, SWANA, and Muslim students. As prior research shows, experiences and feelings of marginalization in "umbrella" spaces is, unfortunately, a common occurrence for many AAPI subgroups in college, including Filipinos, Pacific Islanders, and Southeast Asian

students (Ocampo 2013; Ngo 2006). Yet, little is known about how Pakistani students--who are at the intersection of multiple identities, stereotypes, and forms of discrimination--negotiate their position at the margins of minoritized groups. How are they finding support when colleges insist that Pakistani students are "Asian American" and therefore assume that they must already have adequate resources in AAPI centers? It is important for researchers, faculty, and administrators to understand additional nuances of different Asian American student experiences, which is essential to a diversifying college student population across the country.

Not only does studying Pakistani-heritage college students illuminate how members of AAPI subgroups can be inadvertently further marginalized by members of their own communities, but focusing on their lived experiences can enrich our understanding of racialization in the United States more broadly. My study centers Pakistani young people's voices to examine what it is like for Pakistani individuals facing complex and competing racial narratives in college. More specifically, I uncover how Pakistani college students utilize both institutional and student-led resources, and the support and limitations each of these offers. In certain settings, such as AAPI and South Asian student groups, Pakistani students feel isolated and ostracized because other members of their same racial group do not understand their religious background and the Islamophobia they experience. In other cases, like Muslim Student Associations, Pakistani students feel that their identity as South Asian Americans becomes more prominent and makes others question their belonging in that space. College campuses

serve as settings where the racial-religious hinge operates constantly, as these students seek out support from university and student-led resources.

Thirteen interviews with current Pakistani-heritage college students, recent graduates, and university cultural center staff reveal how Pakistani students are isolated on campus and the institutional barriers in improving support for these students. Findings and analysis suggest that Pakistanis, and AAPI subgroups more broadly, need more university sponsored spaces dedicated to their wellbeing as they contend with racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination on institutional and interpersonal levels.

To situate the present study, in the following section I present relevant higher education research on students of color and AAPI concerns in college. I then discuss the impact of Islamophobia on students and explain in detail how Pakistani students yield unique insights into intersectional AAPI challenges. Third, I describe my sample of ten Pakistani-heritage students and recent graduates and three staff members, and my qualitative analysis. Next, I provide my findings, which address discriminatory experiences in college, barriers in cultural centers, and the limitations of student organizations. Findings contribute to race and higher education research, and can inform policy, curriculum, and support programs targeted to improve experiences of minoritized college students.

Higher Education and AAPI Students

Although college can and should be a beneficial time in a person's life, challenges due to racism and class inequality are well-documented. Students in general face a great deal of mental health struggles and barriers to seeking help (Goodwin et al. 2016);

students from low-income backgrounds and people of color encounter additional barriers to their wellbeing (Banks and Dohy 2019; Hamilton, Roska, and Nielson 2018; Havlik et al. 2020).

Because AAPI students as a whole are not underrepresented in higher education, they are often considered separate from discussions of racial inequality or discrimination. However, these students' experiences of exclusion in elite institutions can be quite similar to other racial groups (Museus and Truong 2009). Numerous studies have explored the impact of model minority stereotypes on college campuses (Museus and Kiang 2009; Suzuki 2002; Yu 2006). Often viewed as a positive stereotype, the model minority argues that, among other things, Asians are inherently smarter and perform better in prestigious careers like medicine and law (Chou 2008).

In this view, it is assumed that Asians do not experience racial discrimination like other minorities because their cultural values of a strong work ethic, prioritizing education, and deferring authority put them in a superior position (Chou 2008). This stereotype can diminish Asian Americans students' performance on exams (Wicherts, Dolan, and Hessen 2005). Due to model minority stereotyping, AAPI students often deal with anxiety, stress, and imposter syndrome, which can hurt their wellbeing (Cokley, McClain, Enciso, and Martinez 2013).

Lower income AAPI students can be academically "at risk," as they work to support families, live at or closer to home, and struggle to afford their higher education (Yeh 2002). Recent rises in xenophobia during the Covid-19 pandemic have severely impacted Asian heritage people's mental health, and some have even attempted to hide

their Asian identity (Tessler, Choi, and Kao 2020). Despite these clear issues, AAPI students' struggles tend to be overlooked and dismissed due to their racialization as a model minority and institutional refusal to disaggregate data about this demographic (Museus and Truong 2009).

This failure to disaggregate data leads to incomplete and inaccurate information about AAPI communities (Dave et al. 2000; Maramba 2011). Disaggregated data reveals significant disparities between Asian subgroups, in areas such as academic attainment, health, and experiences with discrimination (AAPI Data 2019; Museus and Truong 2009; Srinivasan and Guillermo 2000). For college students, several AAPI subgroups have discussed the implications of underrepresentation within AAPI communities. South and Southeast Asian college students experience particular forms of marginalization that East Asian populations do not (Nadal 2019). They may be considered "model" students in some circumstances but are also subject to labelling as delinquents or threats in the classroom (Ngo 2006). Filipino students have wondered if they really belong in spaces designated for "AAPI" students because their experiences do not always match the dominant, East Asian groups that are most represented there (Ocampo 2013).

Particular groups of AAPI students consistently raise concerns that their cultures are not as valued or recognized as their Korean, Chinese, and Japanese counterparts (Nadal 2019; Ngo 2006). This means that these students feel alienated from campus resources meant to help them, such as AAPI cultural centers (Alcantar, Kim, Hafoka, and Teranishi 2020). This is especially unfortunate, as studies demonstrate that these resources have the potential to increase success and wellbeing of college students of color

(Hypolite 2020; Morales 2012; Ramos 2019; Torres-Baez, Felix, and Mendoza 2021; Yosso 2005).

Research also suggests that college is a time when many students first become politicized and gain increased awareness in social issues (Eitzen and Brouillette 1979; Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2004; Morales 2012). Students of color often find empowerment in college through classes and cultural events which accurately portray their communities' histories and provide language to describe their lived experiences (Morales 2012). Finding mentors in faculty and staff positively impact students and increase their self-efficacy (Ramos 2019). Students' unique cultural backgrounds can provide them with strengths as they navigate higher education and begin to build solidarity with other students (Davies 2019; Yosso 2005; Vue 2021).

The literatures on college student experiences and resources for students of color help inform institutional policies and practices in higher education. If colleges can give students structured, ongoing opportunities to see their cultures as assets, they will produce more confident and successful graduates, prepared to engage in meaningful conversations about diversity and racial justice. Despite many institutions' stated goals to do so, there are many areas in which institutional support for students of color falls short and could be strengthened. More research is needed to better understand the implications of students, particularly those from underrepresented subgroups, missing out on these transformative opportunities.

Race and Islamophobia

Racialized Muslim Identity

In addition to the challenges of being a minoritized AAPI subgroup, outlined above, Pakistani college students are subject to additional dimensions of racialization and institutional discrimination due to their heritage in a Muslim country. Pakistani-heritage people who may not even self-identify as Muslim are still likely to experience Islamophobia. Scholars argue that post-9/11 scholarship on American Muslims fails to place Islamophobia within the race literature (Cainkar and Selod 2018; Kaufman and Niner 2019). Islamophobic harassment and violence extend beyond religion. Black, white, and Latino Muslims typically do not experience discrimination based on their religious identity, unless they wear a visible marker of their faith; meanwhile, non-Muslims who fit phenotypical traits associated with Islam deal with these issues regularly (Kaufman and Niner 2019). In many ways Islamophobic images and stereotypes are more racialized than religion based. Therefore, race research must consider Islamophobia in a racial lens (Garner and Selod 2015).

The fear associated with this type of discrimination and violent attacks against Muslims has detrimental impacts on the affected communities. Social science scholarship has explored Islamophobia in detail, often focusing on South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Sikh populations in Western countries (Kunst et al. 2012; Love 2009; Maghbouleh 2017; Samari 2016). Health-wise, anti-Muslim discrimination can lead to high levels of stress, strained patient-provider relationships, and even poor birth outcomes (Samari 2016). Socially, young Muslim and "Muslim-looking" people believe they are deemed threats

based on their physical appearance (Davies 2019; Kyriacou et. al 2017; Maghbouleh 2017). Students feel the need to compensate for the negative perceptions of Muslims by constantly projecting a positive demeanor. This leads to heightened pressure to favorably represent the Muslim community (Kyriacou et. al 2017).

Sustained pressure to succeed academically while standing as a positive example of a Muslim student has serious impacts on young adults in college. While some campuses have dedicated spaces and resources to address this, colleges more commonly perpetuate Islamophobia (Ahmadi, Cole, and Prado 2019). Research on Muslim students in the UK suggests that they may perform worse academically than their peers of other faiths because of this stress (Gholami 2021). They also feel simultaneously neglected and hyper visible in the university, due to the lack of representation in the curriculum and Islamophobic stereotypes perptuated by institutional actors (Gholami 2021).

Programs like *Prevent* in UK schools and universities aimed at "counter-terrorism" make Muslim students feel like they are being surveilled by their teachers (Davies 2019; Kyriacou et al. 2017). US students have reported similar feelings on campus due to physical and verbal attacks, invisibility in the curriculum, and limited options for meeting their religious needs (Ahmadi, Cole, and Prado 2019; Council on American Islamic Relations 2020). Despite ongoing, international violence against Muslim communities, Muslim college students and their allies are often villainized for speaking out against injustices, perhaps most notably in the 2010 "Irvine 11" case.[2]

[2] *In the 2010 "Irvine 11" case, eleven Muslim UC Irvine and Riverside students demonstrated against a speech from Israeli ambassador Michael Oren on UC Irvine's (UCI) campus. After this event, UCI temporarily banned the Muslim Student Association. The students were later charged with misdemeanors*

Direct experiences and hearing about cases like these are extremely isolating and fear-inducing for Muslim and "Muslim-looking" students on college campuses.

There are emerging theoretical approaches to groups racialized as Muslims that take these complex experiences into account. For instance, Maghbouleh (2017) creates the concept of "racial hinges" in her research about Iranian Americans. She describes how Iranian Americans are only circumstantially treated as "white," despite their census designation. Racial hinges in this case refer to the ways in which this demographic can be perceived and labelled as either white or as racialized Muslims depending on the context. Airports, conversations about politics, and other situations place this group in precarious positions where a racial hinge can quickly shift their status from a white-passing individual to a threatening outsider. How might racial hinges operate for other groups, such as Pakistanis, in the US? Racial hinges may function differently for Muslim-heritage groups that fall between two marginalized, non-white identities and do not have the same options to avoid negative, discriminatory experiences.

Where are Pakistanis?

Invisibility in race and education research

As we have seen, prior research has uncovered AAPI subgroups' experiences in higher education, model minority stereotyping, and other issues AAPI students deal with. Less attention has been paid to South Asian students, with very limited Pakistani representation in samples. Several studies have either excluded Pakistanis or failed to

of "conspiring to disrupt a meeting" and stifling Oren's right to free speech, although he still gave his speech at UCI (de La Paz 2011).

distinguish between South Asian subgroups (Cheryan and Monin 2005; Museus and Kiang 2009; Rahman and Witenstein 2013).

While South Asians are usually aggregated into one group in research and education, the region is large and diverse, encompassing Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives; Afghanistan is also sometimes considered part of South Asia. There are South Asian migrants and diasporic communities throughout the US and California. Yet, California law only requires school boards to identify this diverse population as "Asian Indian," even though they disaggregate other Asian subgroups by nationality such as Laotian, Samoan, or Korean (Anderson 2021). UCs and other colleges have some accessible disaggregated data available about enrollment, but not about experiences and retention on various campuses (University of California 2021a). This lack of information about South Asians hides unique circumstances and inequities of subgroups.

For instance, Pakistanis in the US have characteristics that distinguish them from other South Asian Americans. The population has more than doubled in the past twenty years. There are over 500,000 Pakistanis in the US today, with the largest concentrations in New York, Texas, and California (AAPI Data 2019; Buddiman 2021; Vakil et al. 2019). Pakistanis tend to have lower incomes and occupational statuses than their Indian and Sri Lankan counterparts (Rahman and Witenstein 2013). While their income and degree attainment are generally higher than other minoritized populations in the US, some analyses have uncovered lower college admissions rates at prestigious universities like UCLA and higher rates of poverty than other Asian subgroups (AAPI Data 2019;

Buddiman 2021). Inequities like this are hidden when race research fails to acknowledge unique subgroups.

A few studies have given insights into Pakistani student experiences, though primarily in K-12 education. Davies' (2019) UK-based research focused on secondary-school aged Pakistani-heritage young people. In Britain, standardized tests identify Muslims as an academically underachieving group in secondary and tertiary education (Davies 2019; Shah, Dwyer, and Modood 2010). However, the disaggregated data Davies (2019) provides shows that Pakistani students perform better academically than almost all other groups, regardless of their socioeconomic status. This suggests that there is something distinctive about Pakistani culture impacting these students' education. Interviews with these students revealed that they believed their Pakistani-Muslim families instilled a strong appreciation for the pursuit of knowledge, allowing their faith and education to coexist (Davies 2019). Despite their academic success, students still felt that they were subject to stereotyping and did not always feel comfortable in their predominantly white classes (Davies 2019).

Ghaffar-Kucher's (2012) research with Pakistani-American youth in high school revealed similar stereotyping and harsh bullying in K-12 education. These "humiliating" experiences left Pakistani-American youth longing for more acceptance and support in school (49). However, because the US does not disaggregate data and it is difficult to find information about Pakistani students' academic performance and wellbeing, we do not know much about the bigger picture for this demographic. Based on this research, it is a fair assumption that K-12 experiences like this can shape how Pakistani-heritage students

enter college. South Asian American college students can be subject to Islamophobic hate-speech and hate-crimes (Ngo 2006). In addition, they must balance competing cultural expectations from their parents and from white hegemonic US culture, which may be more Islamophobic than other nations (Rahman and Witenstein 2013; Sahgal and Mohamed 2019).

Most of this already limited research has drawn on broad South Asian samples, rather than specifying how members of different South Asian subgroups experience college. More specific examination of Pakistani-heritage college students in the US is necessary to further elaborate what navigating higher education is like for them, especially as the population continues to grow. Insights gained from this research present opportunities to investigate how underrepresented AAPI and/or Muslim students can be further marginalized in college, and ways to intervene to prevent this from happening.

Data and Methodology

I draw on ten in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Pakistani-heritage students and recent graduates from colleges in California. Three additional interviews were conducted with staff members who work in California university cultural centers, such as AAPI and Middle Eastern resource centers. I focus on California-based college students, as the state has one of the largest populations of Pakistanis, second only to New York and Texas (Migration Policy Institute 2015). Additionally, California universities serve a large demographic of AAPI students. In fall 2020, the University of California system enrolled 77,778 “Asian” undergraduate students (University of California 2021b); at 34.4% of the UC student body, this is the most represented racial group. There were

about 2000 Pakistani students included in this percentage, compared to 14,686 Asian Indians (University of California 2021a).

Participants were recruited through a flyer shared with cultural centers and student organizations, such as South Asian and Pakistani Student associations. I also used referral sampling (i.e., participants were asked to refer other potential participants to me) to actively recruit students and recent graduates who were less involved with these campus programs. Pakistani students and recent grads were eligible to participate if they met the following criteria: 1) identified as having Pakistani heritage, 2) were young adults (between the ages of 18 and 30), and 3) were currently attending or recently attended (within the last five years) college in California. The study was not limited to those who identified as "Pakistani American," as not everyone had a strong connection to an American identity. Participation was also open to international students, provided they had at least one year of experience living in the US, as well as multi-racial and multi-ethnic people.

All participants attended public colleges. Nine of ten the student and alumni participants identified as women. All but one participant attended Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) in the UC system. One participant attended a Cal State. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted over Zoom in compliance with local and state social distancing mandates. Interviews were approximately one hour long. With students and recent graduates, interviews covered ethnic background, familial or personal immigration stories, college experiences, and reflections on their Pakistani identity. Staff interviews

focused more on the staff person's reasons for pursuing their career, the strengths and limitations of campus support for their AAPI and SWANA students, experiences working with Pakistani students specifically, and their future visions for improving students of color's experiences in college.[3]

To protect participants' privacy, I assigned pseudonyms and removed identifying information from transcripts. I, along with four undergraduate research assistants, analyzed interview transcripts, coding the emerging themes across participants' narratives, and writing memos (Charmaz 2006). In line with tenets of grounded theory, I coded as I collected data and let emerging themes and concepts shape future interviews and analysis (Charmaz 2006; Corbin and Strauss 2015). I also utilized an iterative and abductive process to connect interview findings with previous literature and reassess how I coded future interviews (Deterding and Waters 2018; Srivastava and Hopwood 2009; Timmermans and Tavory 2012). I journaled throughout my recruitment, data collection, and coding processes to increase reflexivity and better understand the role my positionality played in the research (Corbin and Strauss 2015; Miled 2019). I also asked faculty advisors, research assistants, and community members for their insights on my analyses and interpretations of the data to strengthen the overall analysis (Creswell and Creswell 2018).

Positionality

As a US-born Pakistani American woman and scholar from a low-income background, my own educational experiences inform the perspectives that I bring into

[3] For participant demographics, see Appendix A

this research. Drawing on my both my "visible" and "invisible" traits in my "ethnographic toolkit" gave me access to this population of Pakistani-heritage students through my personal identity and my ability to use campus resources to connect to participants (Reyes 2020).

My background places me as an insider to this population in many ways, a position which can be both beneficial and difficult to occupy (Baca-Zinn 1979; Chavez 2008; Collins 1986). This position gave me advantages in building rapport and trust with participants and alleviating some of the discomfort they might have felt in terms of the researcher-participant power dynamic (Reyes 2020). If I communicated to participants that I related to their stories, even in a general sense, they often began to share more in-depth answers. However, I had to be careful not to share much about my perspectives before and during the interviews. I was transparent with participants about my identity but waited until the end of the interview to share more specifics about my life.

In other ways, I was an outsider to my participants. For instance, immigrant participants might not view me as truly understanding their experiences, as I have never been to Pakistan. I navigated this by encouraging all participants to elaborate on their own explanations of their experiences as they relate to Pakistani identity. Gender was another aspect of my positionality which may have impacted who was comfortable participating in this study. Nine out of the ten student/alumni participants were women; the one man I interviewed only participated when another participant encouraged him to do so. Perhaps Pakistani young men were less comfortable speaking to a woman about

these potentially sensitive topics, which could explain why the demographics skewed towards women.

Nevertheless, interviews led to rich stories detailing significant moments for all participants as they navigated higher education with questions about where their Pakistani identities place them. As we will see in the next section, interviews revealed that students struggled with discrimination from non-AAPI people, as well as exclusion from AAPI and Muslim student spaces.

Findings

Discriminatory Experiences and Comfort on Campus

Experiences with racial stereotyping, harassment, and discrimination impact Pakistani students' sense of safety and comfort on campus. Consistent with previous studies, every Pakistani participant in my study had experienced some form of stereotyping, racism, and/or harassment (Ahmadi, Cole, and Prado 2019; Council on American Islamic Relations 2020). Most of these stories occurred in K-12 education, but they continue to impact students in college (Cabrera et al. 1999). Discriminatory experiences can influence decisions to attend college and increase distress and anxiety once enrolled (Huang and Goto 2008; Crisp, Nora, and Taggart 2010).

Mariam, who graduated from university in 2018, recalled an experience in which an unknown man driving in a car saw her wearing a headscarf and crossing the street and accused her of carrying a bomb in her backpack. Discriminatory experiences ranged from participants witnessing their headscarf-wearing mothers being verbally harassed while shopping, to their homes being vandalized. Participants also discussed pressure and

frustration stemming from model minority stereotyping. Jokes about being “good at math” seemed harmless, but Mehreen, a current sophomore, realized they affected her throughout her education in the form of stress and a sense of obligation to pursue a STEM career.

These situations can range from jokes about being a model-minority to potentially unsafe environments if people around Pakistani students perceive them as Muslim, indicating the shifting nature of the racial-religious hinge affecting them. Both Islamophobic and model minority stereotyping can alter how Pakistanis feel about themselves and how they choose to navigate higher education. Although many discriminatory experiences occurred earlier in participants’ lives, the issues linger throughout their time in college. Perhaps the most notable story shared was third-year college student Naila detailing a time when a sociology professor chased after her and her friend. She and her Pakistani friend were enrolled in his course, which had an optional lecture component. Naila is Muslim, but does not wear a hijab (headscarf), so she does not think she is perceived as “obviously Muslim” like her hijabi friend and classmate. One day during Ramadan, her friend was fasting and felt lightheaded. She had to leave the lecture, and Naila followed her out.

As soon as they started walking out, the professor shouted "Girls, girls! Girls, stop!" Naila did not stop, because he had “never done this to any other student.”

> We already left the building, we're out of the classroom. But he runs and chases us down! We're not running, we're just walking. So, we stopped and then he was like, "Why did you girls leave?!" And he starts telling us stuff about like [...] "this is very immodest of you to act this way. You wear the hijab right, is this how your parents raised you?" That automatically goes to show you the assumptions, that

> like she was super conservative, and she was raised in a way by her parents like… to just conform to other people.

Naila recalled that this professor directed all his comments toward her friend wearing a headscarf, and he largely ignored her, even though they both left the classroom. She was angry at his "patronizing" and "condescending" confrontation with them. She described this experience as "traumatizing" for several reasons. Not only did this professor make judgements about her friend based on her religion in a public place, but he ran after them and berated them. This is a person with power on campus, displaying clearly discriminatory and aggressive behavior, who can intimidate Pakistani Muslim women in his classes. Naila and her friend were left with a lingering concern about reactions from other faculty if they ever stepped out of a classroom in the future.

Sadaf experienced similar fears on campus with other students. Though she graduated university in 2019, she vividly recalled the discomfort she felt when praying in a library study room in her first year, one of the few times she prayed on campus.

> He just stopped in front of my door and he was like, looking at what I was doing. […] And he's still like just stopped and stared, and I felt so uncomfortable. Yeah, and then he walked away but he stared for like a good minute and left. [...] It's like "what is he going to do?"

This was one of the few times she prayed individually on campus, as she would usually go to her car due to potential encounters like this. Sadaf was left fearing for her safety at a time when she should have been able to focus on her prayers.

Even though most participants did not recall specific experiences like those detailed by Naila and Sadaf, they were all very aware of the potential for something like this, or worse, to happen. Current experiences in college, previous harassment, and

hearing stories about discrimination leave Pakistani students constantly wondering where they are safe and welcome. Mehreen did not recall any major racist remarks in college but said, she is "hesitant" when she meets someone new. In cases where the person has no South Asian or Pakistani friends, she wonders if they will make the "assumption" that she is a Muslim extremist. Mehreen, along with several other participants, were cognizant of the fact that people they encounter might subject them to racism and Islamophobia.

Second-year student Tasneem described having to gauge where white people stand when she meets them on campus. She said, "If I meet a white person, it's like alright… I need to find out what kind of a white person you are. Like you know, a MAGA white person? Are you like, a chill white person?" Participants tended to share remarks like this in a lighthearted manner, but it is clear there are serious implications behind these assessments. Like many minoritized student populations, Pakistanis must be hypervigilant when they meet new people. They are hyperaware that their interactions with people have the potential to quickly shift into an uncomfortable, unsafe situation.

Barriers in Institutional Support and Cultural Centers

Pakistani students clearly need safe spaces to debrief the distress that discrimination has caused in their college lives. Interviews demonstrate that, despite their serious concerns about racism and a desire to find support in college, Pakistanis often find that they have limited options to interrogate the racial and religious discrimination they have encountered as students. This section uncovers some of the reasons why cultural centers, a main source of intuitional support for students of color on college campuses (Means and Pyne 2017), are not currently well situated to provide for Pakistani

students. Pakistani students' alienation from campus resources has implications for academic performance, self-esteem, mental health, and more (Ali, Yamada, and Mahmood 2015; Gholami 2021; Kyriacou et. al 2017; Nadal et al. 2015; Samari 2016).

Cultural centers are particularly important interventions, as sometimes general campus resources like counseling and disability resource centers are not enough. For example, when Maya, a class of 2019 graduate, was dealing with severe anxiety, depression, and academic pressure, she received accommodations through the student disability resource office. The experience was mostly positive for Maya, but a large aspect of her mental health struggles related to her identity as a Pakistani young woman in predominantly white classes. Maya went on to explain that, while campus officials were accommodating, her white classmates were not.

> I literally almost killed myself that semester, and these girls were bullying me… They were a bunch of white girls so like, obviously they think they're hot shit. And they're all size zeroes. [...] They basically bullied me the entire time I was in that class, because I wasn't-- I was going through manic episodes so like, along with my depression I have severe anxiety.

While Maya received important academic accommodations, she did not receive guidance or protection in dealing with the bullying she experienced as a brown woman dealing with mental health issues. The answer to concerns like Maya's are usually ethnic and gender student programs. Many campuses recommend students go to offices designated for supporting students of color, such as AAPI and Middle Eastern resource centers (Means and Pyne 2017). But interviews reveal that neither of these spaces are completely appropriate for supporting Pakistanis on campus.

Because Pakistani students are categorized as Asian or Asian American, colleges likely expect that these students will use AAPI centers as a source of support. Some participants have friends from other Asian backgrounds, but do not typically visit AAPI centers. Ben, a director of a university AAPI center, described some of the complications of the huge "Asian American umbrella."

> We still don't visibly see [South Asians] in our office. [...] I just think there are certain groups that feel very comfortable in our office, and they come into our office, and, like, this is their place. So, I can see where if others tried to come in, not just from South Asia but, [others] too... they come in and it's like, "man everybody knows each other." And there's almost this, almost this feeling of like, "Oh, like, I don't fit in because it seems like everybody knows each other."

Although Ben pointed out that the center's relationships with South Asian student organizations have improved over the past few years, it is still uncommon to see South Asian students in the space. Ben also discussed how Asian American studies and AAPI centers have made progress in including more Asian subgroups, but the populations that have historically been overlooked can still feel a discomfort in broad AAPI setting. Filipino, Pacific Islander, and South Asian students have all expressed varying degrees of exclusion from these spaces at some point (Ngo 2006; Ocampo 2013).

Participants also expressed that, although they often build strong friendships with AAPI students, there are some aspects of their lives in which it is more difficult to relate. Almost all Mehreen's friends are Asian American. However, she explained that some of their family dynamics did not resonate with her own as a Pakistani Muslim.

> I feel like most of my East Asian like friends, like their parents are really lenient. And also, because I'm Muslim I think that contributes to it. But I think that my parents are not very lenient about stuff. Like for example... hanging out with friends like past like, eight or something. I feel like my parents get super

> concerned. And they're like, "Where are you?" but I've noticed that some of my friends' parents don't do that.

Mehreen demonstrates just one example of a difference she's noticed between her and her East Asian friends. She and other participants said that they rarely open up to their friends about the things they deal with as Pakistanis with Muslim families.

While they are part of the same racial group, religious aspects of Pakistani students' identities can make them feel distant from other Asian heritage friends. Although she has been building strong friendships over her two years in college, Fatima's friends do not even know about her religious background.

> Even like close friends, they don't know much about my religious affiliation. But ever since the pandemic I-, I've... I feel like taking space from them has helped me discover that much more.

Fatima still felt like she could not fully relate to her friends, despite them being fellow AAPIs. She shared how having time away from friends on campus gave her much needed space to reflect on her own religious identity. Social distancing gave her a sense of freedom to determine her faith and values on her own, away from social pressures. Cases like these demonstrate how there are particularities of the Pakistani college student experience that make it hard to feel a strong sense of relatedness in broad, AAPI spaces and that Pakistani students benefit from opportunities to freely explore different parts of their faith and identity.

Although Pakistanis are Asian, they have shared experiences with folks of South West Asian and North African, or "the Middle Eastern," descent who may also have Islamic backgrounds. As such, some students reach out to Middle Eastern student centers, although these are quite uncommon on college campuses according to staff I interviewed.

Bilal, a director of one of these rare university Middle Eastern student centers, described who the center serves.

> We're specifically focused on Middle Eastern or SWANA student populations. And
> we started to add Muslims as part of our being part of our focus as well. So basically, we
> are a resource for many students.

While not all Pakistanis are Muslim, many are. So even if Pakistani students do not consider themselves to be Middle Eastern, they are still included within the scope of this Middle Eastern student center. However, most Pakistanis interviewed did not utilize the resource. It is possible that this is because these students do not identify as Middle Eastern, and the centers do not have specific signage indicating that they are also Muslim serving. Bisma, a senior who has been very involved as a student leader, collaborated with the Middle Eastern student center on her campus often. She was one of the only participants who regularly visited the center. She appreciated the support that staff provided for student events, but she still did not feel like she could completely relate to the other students in the space.

> I've noticed because I feel like culturally like because of Islam we're so close, but I think that, like in other regards, like obviously linguistically, etc... like we're so different from them.

Cultural and language differences are not an inherent obstacle to community building, but Pakistani students are seeking a place where they feel understood and authentic. With AAPI friends and in AAPI centers, the racial-religious hinge operates so that their religious backgrounds become more prominent and make them feel separate from their peers. But in Middle Eastern and/or Muslim serving spaces, this pendulum

shifts back to Pakistani students' cultural and racial identity as South Asians, impacting their sense of belonging here as well.

Mariam talked about her great friendships with non-Pakistani, SWANA Muslims, but mentioned how she felt they had some differences.

> I have a few of my friends which are now... one of them is Palestinian, and the other one is, she's from Sudan. […] But basically, like they have a different identity when it comes to that [ethnicity and religion] and I've noticed with being Pakistani Muslim we have different like cultural things within our religion and our culture. [...] I think it has its own unique identity when it comes to being Muslim and being Pakistani.

Mariam's reflections on her friendships point to a key issue for Pakistani Muslim young people in the US. They have their own unique identities, at the intersections of different cultures and racial narratives. They can and do develop strong relationships and a sense of solidarity with other ethnic groups, but they are missing the opportunities to unpack what their various identities mean to them. For many of my participants, these interviews were the first time they talked to someone outside of their families about being Pakistani. Pakistani students are missing out on an important aspect of the college experience for students of color; they lose out on opportunities to freely explore their racial and ethnic identity, which can be important for individual and collective development (Morales 2012). They are slipping through the cracks of institutional resources, like many other Asian subgroups, and finding their own way through without a strong sense of community or belonging.

Limitations of Student Organizations

When the institution cannot provide necessary assistance, students realize they must advocate for their own needs. Student organizations are a significant pillar of

support for students of color on college campuses (Means and Pyne 2017). Many of the organizations Pakistani students described can provide meaningful and substantial support, but they can still be problematic in many ways. This section describes how inequality and microaggressions are perpetuated in Muslim Student Associations and South Asian student organizations, where students are placed with the burden of supporting each other without institutional assistance.

Muslim Student Associations

While there are many religious groups in Pakistan and in the Pakistani diaspora, all participants in this study either identified themselves or their families as Muslim. This fact, combined with the common experience of Islamophobia, makes the Muslim Student Association (MSA) seem like a good fit for Pakistani students to find a community.

For students like Yusuf and Sadaf, the largely student led MSA can be an important contributor of social and spiritual growth in college. On many campuses, MSAs have advocated for collaborations with local mosques, prayer rooms, and safe spaces for Muslims to gather. Sadaf said,

> I used to go to MSA for like more of the resources they provided like for prayer areas and prayer time which is really nice. Which was kind of cool because it's like, while I'm like at school, I can pray, I don't have to like go in my car… I guess the community was really nice.

She developed a sense of community when she found other Muslims and a safe place to pray. This allowed her to find more confidence in herself and feel proud of her faith, instead of feeling a need to hide it.

Yusuf, a 2020 graduate, also had fond memories of his time in MSA, and it was the only club he joined in college. Although he noted he never saw another Pakistani

there, he still valued the things he learned from guest speakers and conversations he had with fellow Muslim students. He described what MSA meetings looked like when he attended.

> So, there'll be like a main meeting, and then it'd be like a girls' group and a guys' group meeting. So, the girls' group they would just hang out for like one or two hours and the guys will just hang out one or two hours, and they would, they would just like hang out and play games and socialize, stuff like that.

Although Yusuf had positive things to say about MSA, his sharing also revealed that some of the meetings were gender segregated. This separation of men and women in non-prayer settings, combined with patriarchal leadership within the organization, discouraged many of the women I interviewed from joining. Bisma did not feel comfortable joining MSA for these reasons.

> I don't really feel welcomed as a non-hijabi person in that circle and like there's just a lack of Pakistani South Asian representation in there. [...] Sometimes I feel like there's also this misogynistic thing going on. […] When I was a first year, I found out that there had never been a time in MSA history where a woman was president or vice president. That kind of a dynamic is really uncomfortable for me. […] If you actually learn the religion, you will see that it's very feminist and like, there's a lot of power that women hold. But there's just so much misogyny in these spaces.

Bisma's hesitancy in joining relates to both her gender and ethnic identity. She did not see people from her background represented, and she felt judged for her personal choices and interpretation of her faith as a Muslim woman. This made MSA precarious for her.

Faiza, a Pakistani woman who now works in a cultural resource office for SWANA and South Asian students, had similar experiences as an undergraduate. She said her "values were very different from how the MSA was operating" and referenced

the male-dominated leadership. She went on to describe the other issues she dealt with in the organization.

> MSA felt completely different to me. […] Like my Muslimness would be questioned in terms of like, "oh I didn't know you were a Muslim" and I'd be like, "What does that even mean?" you know? But it was always I think speaking to this like performance, or this, this view of what folks themselves within the community think a Muslim person should look like.

Faiza's experience in MSA made her feel unwelcome and like people did not consider her a real Muslim. In Faiza's case, it was both the fact that she did not wear a headscarf and others Muslim students' perceptions of her as a South Asian led to assumptions that she was likely Hindu Indian; this left her wondering what exactly her peers thought a Muslim person looks like. Pakistanis, and Pakistani women in particular, experience alienation from people outside *and* inside their religious communities on campus.

South Asian Student Organizations

If joining MSA does not work out, Pakistani students often turn to South Asian student organizations. Because faith was a very personal and individual practice for many of my participants, broader cultural organizations might have been a better fit. Connecting with the larger South Asian community had a positive impact on Bisma. She went from feeling depressed and alone in her first year to finding a sense of purpose and belonging. Despite her positive reflections on the student organization, most other participants were not active members of clubs like this. Bisma shared many insights, including a lack of representation even at events marketed as South Asian, as to why this might be the case.

Limited Pakistani representation among members and in the actual events organized can leave Pakistani students feeling unsure about their place in a South Asian group. In her leadership role, Bisma wanted to build more of a connection with non-Indian South Asians to address the previous "Indo-centric" nature of the space.

> We had this talk on "Not Just India." And the whole point of the talk was so that we could, you know, educate people about countries that are not associated with India. You know, like other countries in South Asia, like Nepal, Maldives, all these other countries that we never really pay much attention to. […] A few of our board members were kind of showing sort of a discomfort [before the event]. Like you know, obviously this is a conversation that's targeting most of the board. [...] People will feel attacked, even though there is no motive to attack anyone. Like when you have that conversation, like they're gonna feel some sort of discomfort.

Bisma hoped these conversations would be productive in sparking healthy dialogue about how some South Asian groups are more represented and privileged than others. But the Indian students did not display this same eagerness to engage, even though they held leadership positions. They felt attacked, in Bisma's view, even though the goal of this conversation was to include more people and not to demonize a particular group.

When Faiza was an undergrad, she felt that the South Asian Organization was not only Indo-centric, but also purposefully excluded Pakistanis at times.

> When the army school shooting that happened in Pakistan in December [2014], where a bunch of children ended up getting murdered, there was like a vigil on campus. And I remember wishing that [the South Asian organization] would show up but they didn't. Instead, PSA (Pakistani Student Association) ended up making, you know, making the vigil happen. And then, when there was an earthquake that happened in Nepal that's when [the South Asian organization] showed up. And so, you could clearly see which things they were picking and choosing.

According to Faiza, it was discouraging for Pakistani students to see "internal politics within the communities" making the South Asian organization an uncomfortable place for them. She attempted to bring these issues up to the group at the time. Faiza left these

meetings feeling disheartened and isolated. The group worsened some aspects of her college experience, as she did not find the community she had hoped for. Though she felt that the organization had eventually improved over the years, it did not provide her the support she needed in college.

Even if South Asian spaces have become a bit more inclusive and increased Pakistani representation, there are several reasons why an Indo-centric organization might not be an appropriate space for Pakistani students to share some of their frustrations. For example, many participants raised concerns about being mistaken for Hindu Indian. Mariam described white people *and* Indian people telling her she was "basically Indian" all her life. This was especially difficult for her in college as she interacted with more South Asian people for the first time.

> Pakistan isn't...you know, we're not Indian. [...]I don't know much about Indian culture. There's so much diversity in Indian culture. It's as foreign to me as like Bangladesh or the United Kingdom, right? Like it's not something that I could talk about, besides from what I've seen in Bollywood films for that matter. But Pakistani culture is its own identity, and so I'm quick to correct people when they say that.

Mariam raises the interesting point that no one would expect her to be an expert on any other country, but people find it easier to homogenize all South Asians as "basically Indian." The fact that other non-Pakistani South Asian people would also label her this way prevents her from connecting on a deeper level with them. One of Mariam's closest friends is Indian, but she has never engaged in a conversation about the history between their family's countries and keeps discussions on the topic at a surface level. Assumptions made about Mariam, along with the traumatic histories of the South Asian

region and violence against Muslims in India, make it difficult to feel comfortable sharing her experiences as a Pakistani.

Tasneem, whose mother is Indian Muslim and father is Pakistani, usually only identifies herself as Pakistani. Even though she is "technically Indian" too, she had similar concerns with the assumptions that come with being labelled as Indian in the US.

> When people ask, I typically just say Pakistani. [...] I know it's wrong, but when you think "Indian," immediately the first thing that comes [to mind] is Hindu and like all that sort of thing. [...] As soon as I say I'm Indian, then all of a sudden people think that, you know I'm Hindu and I do like, you know I do Holi, and stuff. And in general, I've grown up much more accustomed to Pakistani things.

Though this is an honest reflection on how people unfamiliar with South Asia assume things about her Indian identity, Tasneem still felt "wrong" to say this. She made sure to clarify that her family raised her to be accepting of everyone, and that she was not looking down on Hindu Indians. But she was frustrated about the assumptions people made about her.

Fatima also revealed her aunt advised her to tell Americans she was Indian instead of Pakistani, so she could avoid Islamophobic remarks.

> She was telling me about that, like, before I started high school. Like, "Hey, just say you're Indian, so that, you know… whenever people ask where you're from say you're Indian, you know there's too much prejudice." [...] Like I couldn't share my personal experience. Like I went to Pakistan senior year in my high school, for my brother's wedding. And I told people that I went to India instead. And, you know, even my close friends… I mostly regret it. But I also feel like it helped me prevent a lot of bullying.

Fatima feels that lying about her heritage protected her in many ways, but she still somewhat regrets having to do this. Now she wants to be prouder and more confident, and openly shares that she is Pakistani. But her aunt's advice was accurate. While some

people might not know anything about Pakistan, the ones that do usually know that it is a predominantly Muslim country. A stranger knowing this fact could potentially lead to Islamophobic targeting. Fatima was able to strategically use a racial-religious hinge to her advantage by downplaying her true religious and ethnic identity, and instead emphasizing her general South Asian race and allowing people to assume she was Hindu Indian.

Being Muslim, having to constantly explain what Pakistan is to people, and being told you are "basically Indian" creates a constant burden. Pakistani students must be aware of stereotypes against Muslims and raise awareness about what it means to be Pakistani to positively represent where they come from. These pressures are worsened for some students when they join the South Asian clubs meant to support them.

Beyond a Pakistani Student Association: Where can Pakistani students find community?

Pakistani students need a stronger sense of community and support on college campuses. This is especially important, as Fariha explained, because of the community-oriented Pakistani culture. The class of 2020 graduate said, "We are, I think we are very, like, wanting to help the community. [...] We're more community type, neighbors taking care of neighbors." Despite this characterization of Pakistani culture, Fariha felt that the community itself was divided on her campus, even though there was a Pakistani Student Association (PSA).

> I feel like the thing you're researching, like how I felt like for the Pakistani community itself is not like… it's not very together. I feel like Indian people had, like a more solid group and like the Arabic people have a more solid group. [...] Maybe we need to become stronger... Maybe PSA offers those opportunities and I

> missed out on all that so I can't really complain, but I feel like they could do more things.

She felt that the Pakistani student group on her campus did not do enough to make her feel that they had a solid community to rely on. She wanted more opportunities to connect with Pakistanis and discuss things going on in her life.

Faiza echoed this sentiment when she recalled that there were significant differences in her values compared to the dominant members of PSA. Even though everyone in the space might have been Pakistani, some people would make Faiza feel uncomfortable with the language they used joking about immigrants (i.e. “fresh off the boat”). For those of my participants that went to an organization like a PSA, they felt that only some Pakistani people were represented there. It was primarily students of higher socioeconomic status and second-generation Pakistanis, rather than lower-middle/working class people and recent immigrants.

These issues within the Pakistani community make it challenging for students to create a sense of solidarity. They do not feel that they can rely on one another, because only a few privileged voices are heard in these spaces. Based on her experiences in college and as a student affairs professional, Faiza developed insights as to why it is hard to unify Pakistani students on American college campuses.

> There's so much like ethnic isolation too within our communities. Even being Pakistani is not enough at times, like there [are] so many differences. Some folks will be like, "Oh no, I am Punjabi, like I don't really…I don't really identify with this larger umbrella of Pakistani." Or like something you know, within Karachi where I'm from it's always like okay these are the Urdu speakers or these are the, you know, Sindhi, Balochi, like, so on and so forth. And even there, there's no intermixing happening too much. So, yeah, it becomes a challenge then when you start thinking about talking about like larger Pakistani American experiences within the United States.

There are several cultures, ethnic groups, and languages spoken within Pakistan that make it hard to create a cohesive diasporic community. The burden to do this work on college campuses should *not* fall onto the students. Students are trying their best but can inadvertently perpetuate the inequalities and traumas that they have witnessed in their cultural communities. Groups like the MSA, PSA, and South Asian clubs are not *bad*, but rather the students leading these groups are not equipped to handle these complexities. They need more institutionalized guidance to build a more constructive community.

For instance, Faiza and Ben both emphasized the importance of having a full-time staff member dedicated to underrepresented AAPI populations like Pakistanis to do this important work. Ben stated,

> That's ideally where we can be at, and then we can focus and find... you know, do the research and everything, and the data to find out: "All right, let's keep these students on campus, and make sure that they are connected to our office, or connected to *an* office, so that they are succeeding in college and that they're graduating and doing good stuff." And hopefully, [they are] turning around and going back to those communities, once they're outside of college.

Connecting more students to cultural centers and institutional support when they are in college has the potential to positively impact AAPI communities, once students graduate and take what they have learned into the world.

Discussion and Conclusion

Findings from this research demonstrate that Pakistani-heritage students can and do deal with discrimination in college for their religious and racial identities. They have a constant concern for their safety and comfort in college. While some participants found support and solace in conversations with cultural center staff and student organizations,

this support is insufficient. Participants did not have any resource or community which felt fully comfortable to share their lived experiences. Microaggressions related to immigration status, gender, and ethnicity in student organizations, like MSA and South Asian student groups, left most Pakistani participants feeling isolated from the groups meant to provide camaraderie for these students.

Overall, previous studies and my findings show that Pakistanis are constantly negotiating their positions as "model minority" South Asians, often assumed to be Hindu-Indian, and as racialized Muslims in the US regardless of their actual religious beliefs. However, the scholarship has yet to explore the impact that this duality has on Pakistanis. My study begins to address this complex issue by exploring what life looks like for Pakistani students as they navigate different forms of institutional and interpersonal discrimination on racial-religious hinges.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although these 13 interviews led to notable findings and suggestions for colleges, there are some limitations of this research. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, recruitment and interviews were more challenging and the sample size was smaller than intended. Future research can expand on these topics and include a larger sample size. A larger sample with more gender diversity will also strengthen analysis of gender differences in Pakistani experiences. Increasing the sample size could also allow for more comparative analyses across different institutions and perhaps case studies of different campuses. For example, Pakistani experiences at UC Riverside, located in Southern California's Inland

Empire, likely differ from those attending UC Berkeley, located in a city with a larger South Asian activist presence (Ghosh and Chatterjee. n.d.).

Including Pakistani heritage students from other states, particularly New York and Texas, might also yield interesting research results. Do Pakistani students feel more represented in states with larger Pakistani populations? How does attending college in a red state like Texas affect how Pakistani students are treated? In addition to qualitative interviews and focus groups, wide-reaching surveys asking Pakistani students in different regions of the US about their experiences and campus resources can illuminate more structural inequalities. Similar research with other AAPI subgroups in higher education, such as Indonesian and Malaysian students, should be conducted to elaborate on intersections of race, culture, and Islamic faith. Broader research with Pakistani-heritage and other populations in the US can reveal more ways racial-religious hinges function. When AAPI Muslims or "Muslim-looking" people are doctors or engineers, they may be given a model minority status and held as an example of a "good" minority succeeding in America. But when traveling or discussing their faith and politics, Islamophobic prejudices can color their experiences. In these contexts, "Muslim-looking" people are viewed as threats to society rather than model citizens (Maghbouleh 2017). More work needs to be done with these populations to better understand what they go through and to develop proper tools to address these issues.

Recommendations for College Campuses

Due to this range of racial experiences that have yet to be fully explored, AAPI subgroups like Pakistanis are slipping through the cracks in cultural centers' offerings.

Pakistani students do not have the opportunities to explore their culture, engage in conversations about their racial identity, or build a strong sense of community with co-ethnics. Because colleges fail to recognize the true diversity of AAPI communities, resources for AAPI students are understaffed and cannot provide necessary support. This is a huge disservice to underrepresented AAPI students who are left to navigate higher education and ethnic and racial discrimination on their own.

Pakistani students are left out of important conversations and community spaces on campus, due to the lack of representation and microaggressions. The burden to resolve these issues should not fall on students, as this adds even more stress to the already overstretched college student. 12 of the 13 students, college graduates, and staff interviewed in this study were at AANAPISIs, but there were still major problems with AAPI students not being supported or affirmed. Colleges need to seriously reevaluate the narrow "boxes of identity," as Faiza referred to them, they use to categorize students of color to account for the varied ways students are identifying and experiencing their racial identities.

Higher education institutions need to do more to support Pakistani students as they navigate these issues and begin to heal from various racial and cultural traumas. All staff members interviewed recognized the importance of connecting students to community organizations and broader opportunities to learn about racial justice. Colleges must invest into their students by increasing support for AAPI and Middle Eastern Student Centers. Staff members called for increased investment into cultural centers and student programs. A significant advancement in this area would be to hire designated

staff people to work with underrepresented students in each cultural center. Colleges can also provide cultural centers with more resources to foster students' critical engagement with topics in racial justice, intersectionality, and privilege.

Both students and colleges can benefit from this. For example, Bilal's Middle Eastern student center uses funding to sponsor paid internship opportunities with community organizations related to Middle Eastern/SWANA causes. This is a significant opportunity to institutionalize support for lower income students to take otherwise unpaid internships, increase students' sense of connectedness, and better prepare them for post-grad employment. Colleges can increase support for programs like this to improve students' experiences and outcomes for their graduates. Bilal and the other staff members hope to continue community building efforts with local organizations, departments like Ethnic Studies and History on campus, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices, to create a more inclusive and productive space for all students of color on campus.

Conclusion

This study establishes the need for more research in this area, focusing on both Pakistani heritage students and other AAPI subgroups. More research can open opportunities for AANAPISIs to reconsider the ways in which they can improve their support for minoritized populations (Alcantar et al. 2020). What kind of future can these colleges have if they move towards recognizing the *real* diversity within their "diversity" statistics? Institutions must take the recommendations from students and staff working on these issues of inclusion every day. Devoting funding to full-time staff to work with underrepresented communities and fostering a culture in which students feel safe to

explore privilege, oppression, and identity through curricular and co-curricular events can have a huge impact on ethnic subgroups in college. Researchers should continue centering different AAPI subgroups and illuminate more areas of students' struggle and resistance on college campuses (Vue 2021).

Additionally, this study contributes new perspectives on race and racialization of Muslims. Pakistani-heritage young people in the US are racialized in particular ways as they are situated on the racial-religious hinge between their South Asian AAPI identity and their status as Muslims, or simply as people with roots in a predominantly Muslim country. Pakistanis present an interesting case to increase our understanding of how different groups transcend certain conceptions of race, urging scholars and practitioners to reexamine the ways in which we categorize groups of people.

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Appendix A – Participant Demographics

Students and Recent Graduates

Pseudonym	**Gender**	**Graduation Year**	**Age**	**Major**
Fatima	Woman	2023	19	STEM
Mehreen	Woman	2023	19	STEM
Bisma	Woman	2021	21	Non-STEM
Tasneem	Woman	2023	19	STEM
Sadaf	Woman	2019	23	STEM
Mariam	Woman	2018	26	STEM
Naila	Woman	2022	21	STEM
Fariha	Woman	2020	22	STEM
Maya	Woman	2019	25	Non-STEM
Yusuf	Man	2020	23	STEM

Staff

Pseudonym	**Position**
Bilal	Director of a Middle Eastern student center
Ben	Director of an AAPI student center
Faiza	Director of a SWANA resource office