Summer 8-2019

"I Will Be the Leader": Leader Emergence as an Adaptive Response Among MENA Refugee and Immigrant Women in the U.S.

Tiffani Luethke

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, tiffani@whole-leader.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/aglecdiss

Part of the Gender and Sexuality Commons, Leadership Studies Commons, and the Near and Middle Eastern Studies Commons
"I WILL BE THE LEADER": LEADER EMERGENCE AS AN ADAPTIVE RESPONSE AMONG MENA REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE U.S.

by

Tiffani N. Luethke

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Human Sciences

(Leadership Studies)

Under the Supervision of Professor Gina S. Matkin

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 2019
"I WILL BE THE LEADER": LEADER EMERGENCE AS AN ADAPTIVE RESPONSE AMONG MENA REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE U.S.

Tiffani N. Luethke, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2019

Advisor: Gina S. Matkin

The findings of this research provide important implications for leader emergence as an adaptive response to traumatic experiences. Additionally, improvements for workforce transition of MENA refugee and immigrant women are discussed through understanding the impact of cultural context as well as facets which provide a means toward empowerment. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to investigate the leadership patterns that existed within a culture-sharing community of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) refugee and immigrant women who resettled in the Midwestern United States. Limited exploration has sought to understand the existing knowledge and the practice of leadership within such communities. Through an ethnographic approach over three years, this study involved immersive observation, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with seven key informants. Primary sources of data included fieldnotes from three focus group discussions and transcripts from nearly 36 hours of interviews that were analyzed through first cycle eclectic coding and second cycle pattern coding. Fieldnotes and reflective memos served as supporting sources of data that contributed to the development of a rich context and deeper understanding of the emerging themes. Through the development of supporting concepts and subthemes, five major themes emerged, including (1) cultural context, (2) powerlessness, (3) empowerment, (4) unethical leadership, and (5) ethical leadership. These themes contributed to the
development of a model that helped explain the process of leader emergence within this community which appeared to be an adaptive response to trauma. Drawing on psychological literature about the concepts of tend-and-befriend and posttraumatic growth as responses to stress and life crises, leader emergence may provide use beyond the present research for other populations who have experienced trauma.
DEDICATION

To Bonnie Walker, Mary Krieser, Teresa Rowe-Hunt, and Elaine Luethke

"In the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders."

Sheryl Sandberg
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Through this research, I have come to realize just how important it is to have a support network, a community, a tribe; individuals who stand by you. Not only was this a finding within the present study, but something I came to value personally as I worked through the process of completing my program and this dissertation. I am fortunate to be surrounded by so many people who care and who have helped to support me through this process in many, many ways. To all of you, I am so grateful. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

To my advisor, Dr. Gina Matkin, who provided invaluable guidance, compassion, and endless support. Your office was always an oasis and I thank you for allowing it to be that.

To Dr. Michelle Fleig-Palmer for becoming my mentor and seeing me through. You perceived something within me before I knew it was there and you inspired me to pursue this degree. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and for serving as a member of my committee.

To Dr. Lindsay Hastings for providing attentive and careful feedback with kindness. Thank you for all of your contributions which made this research better and for serving as a member of my committee.

To Dr. Wayne Babchuk for providing methodological expertise. Your detailed feedback contributed largely to the quality and richness of this work. Thank you for serving as a member of my committee and for your constant support, words of wisdom, and sense of humor.
To Dr. Susan Burton for serving as my peer reviewer. Thank you for the depth of knowledge and insights you provided along the way.

To the members of administration, faculty, and graduate students within the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication department for being an amazing group of people. I have been so privileged to work with you and I thank you for allowing me to learn from all of you.

To the University of Nebraska’s Graduate Office for the Dean’s Fellowship as well as the Warren and Edith Day Dissertation Travel Award which helped fund this research. Thank you for providing this assistance.

To all of my participants for allowing me to become a part of your world. None of this would have been possible without you. Thank you for your willingness to share, for your endless hospitality, and for being my cheerleaders. You are my sisters, my mothers, and my friends for life, “Insha’Allah.”

To my interpreter for the many hours you invested in helping me to complete this research. Thank you for your expertise, patience, and guidance which were invaluable to me. I could not have completed this study without you.

To my doctoral cohort, Beth, Jaye, Jason, and Kate for sharing this experience with me. Thank you for listening to my rants and for bringing me back down to earth.

To all of my family members and friends, including Stacie, Kandi, and Austin, who have supported this effort. Thank you for your love and belief in me. And for always sharing words of support and shoulders to lean on.
To my sister, Beth, for always being there. Thank you for taking my late-night calls, listening patiently, and for always welcoming me with open arms when I just needed a change of scenery.

To my grandmothers, the late Bonnie Walker, the late Mary Krieser, Teresa Rowe-Hunt, and Elaine Luethke for teaching me to be strong. Each of you contributed to shaping me into the woman I am today. Thank you for modeling the way.

To my husband, Yousef for all of your support along this journey. Thank you for serving as a sounding board, for providing cultural, religious, and geographical insights, and for always reminding me of my potential.
# Table of Contents

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Dissertation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Key Terms</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigration in the United States</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration and Resettlement Challenges</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Experiences as MENA Refugee and Immigrants</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Acquisition</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Healthcare</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and Religion</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Family Support</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Workforce Experiences as MENA Refugees and Immigrants</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Human Capital</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Wages and Other Contributing Factors</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Non-)Transferable Qualifications</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Violence and Discrimination</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Social Networks</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial Pursuits</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Leadership</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disparities and the Labyrinth</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Notions about Leadership</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context Matters</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes of Women in Leadership</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Leadership in MENA Contexts</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Contextual Factors</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activism and Change</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter 3: Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population and Sample</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Qualitative Research</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification of Method</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection and Instrumentation</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Positioning</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODS

Ethnographic Process

Fieldnotes and Coding

Interviews and Coding

Data Organization and Interpretation

Validation Strategies

Triangulation

Member Checking

Peer Review

Thick Description

Chapter Summary

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

Introduction

Reflecting on Observations, Focus Groups, and Interviews

Meeting the Key Informants

Bushra

Dahlia

Deema

Lemma

Jana

Sama

Suha

Findings

Cultural Context

Family

Image

Gender Norms

Patriarchy

Interaction Limitations

Covering

Powerlessness

“You’re Weak”

“You are Naked”

Losing Assistance

Stress

Diminished Health

Violation of Trust

Distrust

Living in Fear

“Cut Off Your Wings”

Empowerment

Having Faith

"In shā’ Allāh"

God’s Justice

Internal Locus of Control

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

Reflecting on Observations, Focus Groups, and Interviews

Meeting the Key Informants

Bushra

Dahlia

Deema

Lemma

Jana

Sama

Suha

Findings

Cultural Context

Family

Image

Gender Norms

Patriarchy

Interaction Limitations

Covering

Powerlessness

“You’re Weak”

“You are Naked”

Losing Assistance

Stress

Diminished Health

Violation of Trust

Distrust

Living in Fear

“Cut Off Your Wings”

Empowerment

Having Faith

"In shā’ Allāh"

God’s Justice

Internal Locus of Control
## LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1: Themes, Subthemes, and Supporting Concepts .......................... 194

Table 5.2: Comparison of Findings from Previous Research Involving MENA Refugee and Immigrant Women with Present Study ......................... 197

Table 5.3: Ethical Leadership Theme Characteristics ............................... 202

Table 5.4: Comparison of Ethical Leadership Theme Characteristics with Transformational Leadership ................................................................. 203

Table 5.5: Comparison of Ethical Leadership Theme Characteristics with Servant Leadership ................................................................. 204
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Literature Review Map................................................. 12
Figure 2.2: Map Highlighting MENA Counties............................... 15
Figure 3.1: Overview of Data Collection and Data Analysis Process...... 63
Figure 4.1: Photographs from an Engagement Party......................... 77
Figure 4.2: Examples of Food and Beverages Prepared by Key Informants... 79
Figure 4.3: Traditional Dishes Prepared by Key Informants............... 79
Figure 4.4: Examples of Table Settings and Plating as Prepared by Key Informants......................................................... 80
Figure 4.5: Model of Adaptation to Leadership................................ 89
Figure 4.6: Cultural Context Theme.............................................. 90
Figure 4.7: Woman Wearing Hijab.............................................. 103
Figure 4.8: Components of Powerlessness................................. 107
Figure 4.9: Model of Empowerment Theme................................. 130
Figure 4.10: Two Approaches to Leadership................................. 161
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Purpose of the Study

Though it was only in the recent past that women in Western civilization were granted the right to vote alongside their male counterparts, accounts of women in powerful leadership roles exist throughout the history of the world. Nefertiti (ruled from approximately 1353 to 1336 BCE) of Egypt, for instance, was regarded as ruler of the Nile and purported to have had power equal to that of the Pharaoh (Tyldesley, 2005). Empress Zenobia, queen of Palmyra, Syria, conquered the Roman territory in Egypt and claimed it as her own in 269 CE (Southern, 2008). In addition, Queen Boudicca was credited for uniting British tribes against the Roman Empire in 60-61 CE (Lawson, 2013). In fact, accounts throughout Greek mythology demonstrate high regard for women’s lineage, skills (e.g., prophecy), courage, and intelligence, rather than their virtue (a notion that emerged later) (Lefkowitz, 1985). These mythological accounts are filled with stories showing the powerful influence of women, as in the case of Mestra, who was regarded for her cleverness (though she was eventually outsmarted by Poseidon) (Lefkowitz, 1985).

Today, the study of women’s roles within the field of leadership has proved to be a worthwhile pursuit, revealing the existence of gender-based disparities within virtually all organizational contexts (Acker, 2006; Friedman, 2015; Schaefer, 2019). Much like a labyrinth, challenges related to gender have greatly limited accessibility to leadership roles for women by creating a winding and complex path (Eagly & Carli, 2008). This has resulted in an underrepresentation of women within powerful decision-making positions overall (Stainback, Kleiner, & Skaggs, 2016). While many factors have emerged to shed
light on understanding the plight of women, the research is limited in its exploration of intersectionality including factors beyond gender that may create further barriers to leadership (e.g., race, ethnicity, culture, religion, etc.) (Chin, 2013; Chin & Trimble, 2014).

The need for research that explores leadership within diverse cultural populations is all the more relevant as globalization creates a more diversified workforce (Chuang, 2013; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Kabasakal, Dastmalchian, Karacay, & Bayraktar, 2012). A more nuanced understanding has the potential to promote better integration of diverse representation within the labor market, thus enriching organizations by fostering innovation and creativity (Avolio, 2011; Bassett-Jones, 2005). Moreover, this research is particularly important as the United States and other nations face difficulty in fulfilling their employment needs through more traditional populations (Cagle, 2019; Mutikani, 2018; Porter, 2019).

Research has suggested that potential employability of refugee women is a valuable resource for economic progress; a virtual goldmine of untapped human potential (Dumper, 2002; Macionis, 2014). Yet, Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) refugee and immigrant women tend to participate in the United States workforce at far lower rates than other immigrant populations (Bloch, 2007; Deacon & Sullivan, 2009). Furthermore, in instances where they have been successful in finding work, MENA women tend to be greatly underemployed and underpaid, often filling roles for which they are well-overqualified (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009). Clearly, there is strong evidence suggesting the importance of investigating such populations and the potential for improving workforce transition. To begin, one potential path for improving job
outcomes—to better align with the skills of highly qualified individuals—is the study of leadership perceptions and practice within communities of MENA refugee and immigrant women after resettlement.

To this end, the purpose of this ethnographic study was to investigate the leadership patterns existing within a culture-sharing community of MENA refugee and immigrant women living in the Midwestern United States after resettlement. It is important to note that the idea of a culture-sharing group here is used to identify a community with similar shared experiences (e.g., migration to the United States) that has adopted similar cultural practices (e.g., wearing of the hijab or headscarf) after migration. Further, the similarity of experiences in conjunction with relocation to the same Midwestern town led to the creation of a community with a unique, shared cultural identity. The use of the term culture-sharing is in no way intended to imply that MENA culture is the focus of this study or that culture is homogeneously similar throughout all MENA contexts. Furthermore, the community of MENA refugee and immigrant women within this study existed as a subculture within the larger cultural context of the United States and the focus of this study was limited to that subculture.

In addition to investigation of leadership patterns, the present study sought to understand how women’s leadership experiences changed or remained consistent in the transition from their pre-migration context to their post-migration context. Lastly, this work explored the shared process of leadership emergence throughout the resettlement process. Specifically, this research attempted to investigate whether participants emerged as leaders within their respective communities and the process by which this occurred. Fully investigating these issues would be impossible without acknowledgement of those
intersecting factors undoubtedly contributing to the experiences of this population: gender, race/ethnicity, immigration status, and religion, among others. Therefore, this exploration attempted to investigate the following questions about leadership with careful consideration of these factors:

**Research Questions**

1. What are the leadership patterns perceived and practiced by MENA refugee and immigrant women living in the Midwestern United States after resettlement?
2. How are changes in the leadership experiences of MENA refugee and immigrant women described from the pre-migration context to post-migration context?
3. What is the shared process of emergence to leadership within this community?

**Importance of the Study**

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, 33,972 people are forced from their homes every day as a result of conflict and persecution (UNHCR, 2017). Forced migration results in deeply damaging social change by breaking up communities and diminishing cultural traditions as well as depleting economic resources (Castles, 2003). Beyond this, the number of displaced individuals worldwide is an astounding 65.3 million, only a small proportion of whom are successfully resettled each year (UNHCR, 2017). In the 2016 fiscal year (FY), the United States resettled 84,994 refugees, and the total number of immigrants living in the United States reached 43.7 million people (Zong, Batalova, & Hallock, 2018).

The current United States political environment has brought renewed attention to this topic from the American public and around the world. Interest was largely catalyzed by President Trump’s executive order banning the entry of immigrants from six Muslim-
majority countries and decreasing the ceiling of refugee admissions to be welcomed by the United States from 110,000 to only 50,000, (Parlapiano, Park, & Peçanha, 2017).

Further, the rhetoric embraced by President Trump has been particularly concerning as it reiterates anti-Muslim sentiment and misconceptions (Baker, Freishtat, & Casas, 2017).

Underscoring this point, research by Ali (2009) involving Somali refugees in Minnesota cited the decaying regard toward immigrants and refugees, particularly through the association of all Muslims with terrorism, unequal access to resources, and limited protections under law. Additionally, recent actions by the United States president, including the retweeting of anti-Muslim videos initially posted by an “ultra-nationalist” group (Landers & Masters, 2017), only serve to reiterate and bolster feelings of hate toward Muslims living in the United States today. Undoubtedly, recent political tensions have contributed to an increased polarization of views on immigration policy, especially involving individuals from Muslim-majority countries.

Through acknowledgement of the current political climate and the rapid pace at which the number of displaced individuals continues to grow worldwide, the importance of research involving those from Muslim-majority countries, specifically regions of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), is realized. Black’s (2001) work supported the notion of focus on particular refugee groups through his comprehensive analysis of research and policy involving refugees that documented 50 years of work. In this way, the specific findings within such groups could be applied to more general theories that already exist in order to further develop the study of immigration (Black, 2001).

Furthermore, Castles (2003) purported the mandate for research of forced migration from an interdisciplinary perspective in order to study the social, cultural, and
political aspects related to this issue (Castles, 2003). Refugees and immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) who have resettled within the United States come from a wide diversity of backgrounds and experiences. They vary greatly in areas of human capital (e.g., English language skills, level of education, job skills, etc.), reasons for relocation (forced vs. voluntary), time of arrival, and the ways that immigration policies have impacted them (Hannah, 2003; Newbold, 2002). A clear need has emerged for investigation that goes beyond broad generalizations and accounts for intersectional factors that shape refugee experiences. Yet, the impact of these differences in understanding the culture that forms amongst refugees after resettlement remains largely unexplored within existing literature.

Moreover, there is very limited research that has assessed gender as an intersectional component in navigating and making sense of one’s resettlement community. Cultural and religious practices may present unique challenges for women (e.g., avoiding interaction with unrelated men in public spaces), particularly when the culture of the post-migration context is different from the culture of one’s pre-migration context. Given that half of the immigrant and refugee population is comprised of women and girls (Zong et al., 2018), it is reasonable that research focus should be given to understanding how gender relates to these experiences. Castles’ (2003) work specifically identified the need for investigation of gender dimensions within migration research as well as community studies on settlement and inter-group relations.

An example of such research comes from Fenster and Hamdan-Saliba (2013), which provided insight into gender issues through a comprehensive review of literature involving Middle Eastern women. Among the many topics highlighted in their review,
issues that Arab women faced as refugees in the United States included factors of race, 
gender, sexuality, class, violence, and belonging (Fenster & Hamdan-Saliba, 2013).
Similarly, Casimiro, Hancock, and Northcote (2007) investigated the experiences of 
Muslim refugee women and revealed the complex impact of being non-native speakers, 
refugees, and Muslims in a non-Muslim host country. Changing definitions of public and 
private spheres also posed unique challenges for Muslim women. For example, laws 
requiring women to wear a veil or hijab in public spaces have been met with resistance 
(Fenster & Hamdan-Saliba, 2013). The implications of laws such as veiling have been 
debated among scholars; on one side, the hijab is viewed as a means of mobility in public 
spaces, while others perceive the forcibility of veiling as an act of oppression (Fenster & 
Hamdan-Saliba, 2013).

Other issues related to displacement involved challenges in education, patriarchy, 
racism, and differences in social acceptability within different geographical contexts 
(e.g., types of jobs undertaken by women) (Fenster & Hamdan-Saliba, 2013). The 
findings of such research point to the need for continued investigation involving Muslim 
refugee women (Casimiro et al., 2007; Fenster & Hamdan-Saliba, 2013). Moreover, the 
lack of recognition for diversity amongst “all Muslims” in previous literature emphasizes 
the need for research that investigates particular groups of Muslims (Casimiro et al., 
2007). Having only glimpsed at the complexity of intersecting factors that influence 
refugee and immigrant women, Chapter 2 works to further explore the existing literature 
to expand this understanding.

The justification as well as the significance of this research may be realized 
through understanding the need for work that both contributes to the knowledge of
refugee experiences and intersectional research, which expands the body of literature about leadership. First, this research provides insights to assist in better workforce transition for MENA refugee and immigrant women, especially within leadership roles. Additionally, this study provides valuable insights about the role of leadership and emergence of leadership practice after experiencing traumatic loss and adjustment to a different cultural environment, as in the case of this community of MENA women.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

The research plan is presented as follows. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth review of the existing literature, including women’s experiences as MENA refugees and immigrants and their workforce experiences. Additionally, a broad overview of women’s leadership research is included, followed by an exploration of leadership within MENA contexts. Within Chapter 3, an overview of ethnographic methodology is provided with strategies for data collection and data analysis. Findings of the research are provided in Chapter 4, including how each of the proposed research questions were answered. Lastly, Chapter 5 provides a summary of the entire study, comparison of the present findings with previous research, limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research.
Definitions of Key Terms

Culture: The beliefs and value system of a society that are shared and bind people together into a community. These include learned behaviors such as morals, customs, clothing, attitudes, and habits (Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Ember, Ember, & Peregrine, 2015; Jurmain, Kilgore, Trevathan, & Ciochon, 2014; Kottak, 2015; Shah, 2004; Tylor, 1889; White, 1949).

Deculturation: The loss of cultural identity, alienation, and acculturative stress experienced by an individual or minority group that can lead to ethnocide (Bhughra & Becker, 2005).

Forced migration: A term encompassing refugees, asylum seekers, and those internally displaced. It may also include individuals displaced due to development projects or because of trafficking across international boundaries for the purposes of exploitation (Castles, 2003).

Immigrant: Individuals who have chosen to migrate voluntarily for the purposes of career or educational advancement, among other factors (Bhughra & Becker, 2005). This is in contrast to refugees who have been forced to migrate for reasons beyond their control.

Integration: Defined here “as the ability to participate fully in economic, social, cultural, and political activities, without having to relinquish one's own distinct ethnocultural identity and culture” (Voltonen, 2004, p. 74).

---

1 A list of commonly used Arabic words and phrases is provided in Appendix D
MENA: Middle Eastern and North African countries, specifically Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Yemen (UNICEF, 2017).

Refugee: According to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (1980), a refugee is “any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality…and who is unable or unwilling to return to…that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or opinion….“
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to begin to understand the leadership experiences of MENA immigrant and refugee women, it is important to first look broadly at immigration trends in the United States today and at some of the challenges that impact the resettlement process. Following this, constructs including language, healthcare, culture and religion, community, family, and the workforce will be explored in an effort to discuss the issues that are shaped not only by one’s experiences of migration, but also by gender. Moving toward a more focused discussion of leadership, several of the barriers related to employment for refugee and immigrant women will be defined. Lastly, the broader body of literature about women and leadership will be explored, documenting the course of development that has evolved largely in Western contexts. This discussion becomes more focused toward women and leadership in the MENA regions, before finally exploring where research is lacking in the discussion of subcultural groups of immigrant and refugee MENA women after resettlement. Figure 2.1 (on the following page) provides an illustrated overview of the literature to be presented herein.
Figure 2.1. Literature review map.
Immigration in the United States

The current literature involving refugees has made little distinction between the terms *refugee* and *immigrant*, frequently using them interchangeably. One reason for this is that the number of those who have been granted refugee status may not accurately represent the actual number of those who have been forcibly displaced. For this study, the literature will include a wide range of terms including *displacement, refugee, immigrant,* and other variations. It is worth noting that the population for the present study includes both refugees who were forcibly displaced and immigrants who have relocated voluntarily. Beyond this, dedicated to learning about the experiences of MENA refugee and immigrant women in the United States, there is a dearth of research on this topic involving MENA women in the United States. As a result, much of the literature about MENA refugee and immigrant women included in this review comes from research conducted in Australia, Canada, European countries, and the United Kingdom.

More than 43.7 million immigrants currently reside in the United States, making up approximately 13.5% of the total United States population (Zong et al., 2018). While the majority of these individuals are new to the country, others are permanent residents, naturalized citizens, or have lived in the United States previously. Astonishingly, immigrants contributed approximately two trillion dollars to the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016 (CAP Immigration Team & Nicholson, 2017). Further, immigrant workers account for approximately 14.7% of the total United States economic output (Costa, Cooper, & Shierholz, 2014). More than 40% of the Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children, which in turn employed more than 10 million
people worldwide (CAP Immigration Team & Nicholson, 2017). Undoubtedly, immigrants are an important and vital part of the current United States workforce.

At the end of 2015, global displacement reached an all-time high of 65.3 million people, though only about 1% of recognized refugees worldwide are resettled each year (Zong & Batalova, 2017). Since the Refugee Act of 1980, approximately three million displaced individuals have been resettled in the United States (Krogstad & Radford, 2017). During the 2016 FY, applications for asylum to the United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) increased 39%, totaling in 115,399 affirmative applications, the highest number since 1995 (Zong et al., 2018). Today, the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees has classified 22.5 million people worldwide as refugees though there remains an estimated 65.6 million people who are currently displaced (UNHCR, 2017).

In the 2017 FY, a total of 51,392 refugees were admitted to the United States (Office of Admissions Refugee Processing Center, 2017). Yet, this was significantly fewer than had been projected under the Obama Administration in 2016, having set the cap for refugee admissions at 110,000. An article published by the Pew Research Center suggested that this was likely the result of the executive order which was signed by President Donald Trump on January 27, 2017. (Krogstad & Radford, 2017) The plan included new restrictions for refugees including a reduced cap of only 50,000 admissions, though there had been 84,994 refugee admissions in the 2016 FY (Krogstad & Radford, 2017; Office of Admissions Refugee Processing Center, 2017). The order additionally banned further admission of refugees from Syria as well as other majority Muslim countries to the United States for 120 days. To date, a third version of the ban has been
issued by the Trump Administration and appeals cases remain to determine whether the ban is a violation of one’s constitutional rights (American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, 2018).

Of the 51,392 refugees who were admitted, nearly 33% were from countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Office of Admissions Refugee Processing Center, 2017). Most notably were those from Iraq (6,740), the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) (6,509), and Iran (2,459), which make up 15,708 of the total refugee admissions in the 2017 FY. A full list of the countries which defined MENA for the purposes of this study may be found in the Definition of Key Terms (see p. 9). The map shown in Figure 2.2 (below) highlights the MENA region including these countries.

Figure 2.2. Map highlighting MENA countries.

Foad’s (2013) review of immigration trends from MENA countries to the United States over the past 100 years reported that MENA immigrants tended to be more highly
educated than Americans on average. Additionally, the most recent wave of immigrants tended to include more Muslims than previous arrivals. Foad (2013) noted three major waves of immigration from MENA regions that largely resulted from changes to the American immigration system. The first wave occurred between the 1800s and 1924, and a second wave followed between the 1940s and 1965. Most recently, passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act lifted restrictions on immigrants from Asian countries and resulted in the third wave, including a large influx of displaced individuals from Lebanon and Iraq as well as Syria and Afghanistan, among other countries’ (Foad, 2013). According to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (1980), anyone fitting the definition of a refugee (see p. 9) may apply for refugee or asylee status. Unfortunately, the process requires navigation of a complex legal system, often takes years to complete, and in many cases is ultimately denied for any number of reasons (American Immigration Council, 2016). For instance, one must file for asylum within a year of arrival to the United States, but many individuals simply lack the knowledge and resources to begin the process within this timeframe.

Immigration and Resettlement Challenges

Resettlement agencies are largely dependent on resource availability and the willingness of a community to accept displaced individuals (Forrest & Brown, 2014; Newbold, 2002). Because of such limitations, placement of refugees is often random and more likely in states with low populations that are generally not considered resettlement hubs (Forrest & Brown, 2014). This means communities receiving refugees may be ill-prepared and offer limited resources to help support resettlement transition for newly arrived individuals. Placement also depends somewhat on the status of the individual. For
example, in a concept commonly referred to as “chain migration,” efforts to reunify one’s family may be made if the displaced person already has family in the United States (Forrest & Brown, 2014; Schaefer, 2019).

A recent report published by the Migration Policy Institute (Capps et al., 2015) highlighted the challenges of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), specifically the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), to provide adequate support for the needs of incoming refugees. The report cited specific needs related to economic self-sufficiency (e.g., finding employment) including the lack of fluency in English and illiteracy in one’s native language. Additionally, challenges related to the large diversity and overall low educational level, including English skills, of these incoming refugees have continued to influence the lower level of wages experienced by resettled populations (Capps et al., 2015).

While the goal of finding employment placement is generally being met, the persistence of low earnings and dependency on federal aid programs are areas of concern (Capps et al., 2015). Moreover, a lack of resources at the state and local levels often resulted in less than ideal situations regarding affordable housing (e.g., communities with high crime rates), communication and language barriers, and a lack of community support for resettled refugees (Clayton, 2005; Forrest and Brown, 2014). Hannah (2003) discussed the vulnerabilities of refugee populations as they have left behind their homes, work, education, and, in many cases, friends and family. These factors make them susceptible to isolation and exclusion within the resettlement country. She also acknowledged the diversity of displaced individuals, noting that while their challenges as
refugees are often similar, these are people of vastly different backgrounds in terms of their social, political, and educational experiences (Hannah, 2003).

Connor (2010) asserted that refugees tend to face more significant barriers than other immigrants living in the United States, citing limited English language proficiency, lack of skills or education, inadequate family support, poor physical and mental health, and deficient living conditions as contributing factors to the economic disadvantage or ‘refugee gap’ that displaced individuals face after resettlement. Fozdar and Hartley (2013) noted many of these same challenges, elaborating on those related to cultural differences such as childrearing practices and gender-role expectations. Ghorashi and van Tilburg (2006) also pointed to cultural differences between Muslim refugees and their non-Muslim host country as the greatest obstacle to integration. Further, their research findings suggested that refugee women of Islamic background faced limited opportunities to become part of their host society (Ghorashi & van Tilburg, 2006). Because refugees frequently lose their assets and income as a result of forced displacement, they often arrive in a state of poverty as they face the prospect of adapting to their resettlement country (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013). Unemployment and underemployment present additional challenges as prior credentials and education are frequently not recognized within the host country (Clayton, 2005; Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya, & Gonzales, 2008).

Women’s Experiences as MENA Refugees and Immigrants

While many of the challenges one faces throughout the resettlement process have been discussed, it is important to acknowledge the experiences that are unique to MENA women. As an example, research by Casimiro et al. (2007) investigated the experiences
of refugee women from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia during their first five years in Perth, Australia. The findings of this study revealed specific issues Muslim women faced that limited their accessibility to pursue English classes despite their desire to learn the language (Casimiro et al., 2007). Lack of support from spouses, concern about mixed-gender classes, and discouragement from community members were cited as some of the ways that Muslim refugee women faced additional resettlement challenges beyond those typical of other immigrant and refugee groups (Casimiro et al., 2007). Additionally, increased racial tensions following the events of September 11, 2001, were argued as contributing to the difficulties that Muslim refugees faced in their non-Muslim host country (Casimiro et al., 2007; Schaefer, 2019). Their research highlighted the intersectional impact of gender, ethnicity, and religion that disadvantaged Muslim refugee women throughout the resettlement process. Furthermore, their work supported previous findings involving refugees that emphasized difficulties in learning English, finding employment and adequate housing, and navigating an unfamiliar and complex society (Casimiro et al., 2007).

In another study, Bauer (2000) closely followed the individual experiences of two Iranian refugee women, Sima and Shiva, which illuminated the challenges that existed in the desire to honor one’s cultural heritage while embracing the cultural norms of the host country. The responsibilities of Iranian women, particularly those to their households and community, presented unique challenges in this effort. The study noted, “Iranian women refugees are engaged in the project of reconstructing themselves, looking for ways creatively to balance commitment to family and community with pursuit of self-definition” (Bauer, 2000, p. 181). As in the cases of Sima and Shiva, dissonance in the
balance of these commitments risked reproach and even ostracization from one’s community (Bauer, 2000). Similarly, Sarroub’s (2005) ethnographic research documented the experiences of American Yemeni girls living in Detroit, Michigan and found “Living in two worlds was both difficult and constraining for the Yemeni American Muslim girls” (p. 23).

Research by Deacon and Sullivan (2009) and Fozdar and Hartley (2013) also documented the difficulties that women faced in adjusting to different cultural norms that may provide more freedoms but also added stress by necessitating the rebalancing of new and conflicting gender roles. The study by Deacon and Sullivan (2009) investigated the needs of 31 refugee women living in the Midwestern United States, several of whom were from MENA countries including Iraq (11), Sudan (3), and Syria (1). Interviews were conducted using a structured protocol with questions focused on understanding the women’s needs and whether current services were able to effectively meet those needs (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009). As with other studies, the findings revealed several barriers and needs related to language attainment, finances, community support, and the ability to access resources (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009).

These examples, and others like them, outline the intersectional influences of religion and gender (among other factors) that perpetuate the challenge of cultural duality that migrant women face as transplants in the Western world. In transition to a more focused look at the experiences of MENA immigrant and refugee women, discussion of the pursuit of integration is imperative. Drawing from Valtonen’s (2004) conceptualization of refugee settlement, integration is defined here “as the ability to participate fully in economic, social, cultural, and political activities, without having to
relinquish one’s own distinct ethnocultural identity and culture” (p. 74). Moreover, the specific goals of integration and many of the challenges that exist in reaching those goals are outlined herein.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2002) provides several goals of integration, including the restoration of security and independence, the freedom to develop one’s own path for his/her future in the receiving country, reunification with family members, and the establishment of supportive connections with others. These goals extend to greater social goals of rebuilding trust in government, minimizing racism, creating hospitable and welcoming communities to refugees, and developing leaders within refugee populations (UNHCR, 2002). Having noted this, the following paragraphs will work to highlight these areas that pertain to integration efforts and its challenges.

**Language Acquisition**

The importance of language acquisition is paramount to developing independence and the ability to connect with others and engage in the host society through employment, access to services, and other civic activities (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Benseman, 2014; Deacon & Sullivan, 2009). Research by Deacon and Sullivan (2009) involving MENA refugee women found that 87% of the participants believed language was a barrier to finding better housing. Further, Beiser and Hou’s (2001) longitudinal study involving Southeast Asian refugees in Canada revealed that English language acquisition was a strong predictor of mental health for women. This is likely because women who are unable to speak English experience isolation (e.g., inability to meet new people or find employment), which leads to feelings of depression (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Deacon &
Sullivan, 2009). Women are among the most at-risk populations for not learning English (Beiser & Hou, 2001). At least part of the reason for this is that English language programs for newly arrived refugees and immigrants are generally targeted for those most likely to enter the labor market. As men are more likely to pursue jobs, women may miss out on access to English language classes (Beiser & Hou, 2001).

Research conducted by Tarone and Bigelow (2005) investigated the relationship between literacy in one’s native language (i.e., Spanish) and the cognitive ability for oral processing in a secondary language (i.e., English). The study focused on adults learning English as a second language through the review of existing literature. The findings of this review revealed some inconsistencies in existing literature which suggest that second language learners must be literate in their first language in order to make sense of messages in the new language (Tarone & Bigelow, 2005). However, this assertion is largely unsupported as there are many illiterate people all over the world who have successfully learned to speak fluently in more than one language (Tarone & Bigelow, 2005). One possible explanation offered by Tarone and Bigelow (2005) suggested that illiterate learners can become aware of a simple set of syntaxes that they use in oral communication, but they lack the ability to understand more complicated structures that would be more commonly seen in written text.

Benseman’s (2014) study of 36 refugee and immigrant English language learners in New Zealand provided additional insights about learning after resettlement and highlighted some important points for future improvement of classes offered. While the population was diverse—originating from 10 different countries—the vast majority were not literate and had not attended any previous schooling. Many of the participants had
experienced significant trauma, such as torture, and some of the women had been raped. While their reasons for learning English varied, they shared a common desire for independence and the ability to complete daily tasks within one’s host society such as purchasing groceries or finding employment (Benseman, 2014). Several women also noted their goal to get a driver’s license.

Some participants expressed challenges to learning that included crowded classrooms and distractions (Benseman, 2014). Difficulty with arranging transportation and childcare also posed barriers to attending classes (Benseman, 2014; Deacon & Sullivan, 2009). Overall, Benseman’s (2014) study revealed several practices that appeared most effective in language instruction. These practices included frequent review of the material, variation of classroom activities, and the provision of a developmental approach to each learner’s needs and skills, as well as the availability of bilingual instructors for low-level learners (e.g., those not literate in their primary language). The study additionally pointed to the need for language teachers to be patient and relatable, and to understand that trauma may impact classroom experiences (Benseman, 2014, p. 100). While difficulty with language acquisition poses challenges to integration, another potential barrier exists in accessibility to healthcare.

**Access to Healthcare**

Social and personal support structures are of particular importance in the resettlement process, given the significant impact they play in overall health and wellbeing for refugees (Beiser, 2005). As with language acquisition, overall health, both mentally and physically, has meaningful implications for one’s ability to integrate successfully and to become independent. Yet, many women face difficulties in having
even their most basic of medical needs met. Beiser’s (2005) research of refugee and immigrant health in Canada, for instance, revealed major inadequacies in the continuance of support structures like healthcare services for refugees after resettlement, “more or less ignoring them” (p. 30). While major vetting procedures generally limited immigrant and refugee admissions to those most healthy, inadequate or missing assistance resulted in unpredictable health outcomes for many (Beiser, 2005). Beiser (2005) emphasized the need for improving the resettlement process as refugee health is a direct investment in a country’s human capital.

Furthermore, Bhugra and Becker (2005) asserted the need for adequate mental healthcare for refugees, particularly that which is culturally sensitive in its diagnoses and approach to treatment, noting that the process of immigration itself can be very stressful. Cultural bereavement, or loss of the familiar, and deculturation have the potential for lasting negative impacts on mental health (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). A recent meta-analysis of refugees living in Western countries purported that one in 10 adult refugees has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is about 10 times higher than other adults of the general population (Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005). Carswell, Blackburn, and Barker (2011) reiterated the need for a holistic approach in supporting each stage of the resettlement process. Their work with refugees in the United Kingdom supported previous findings that show a higher rate of PTSD among those who have experienced trauma, difficulties with adaptation, and loss of cultural identity (Carswell et al., 2011).

Similarly, research by Eisenbruch, de Jong, and van de Put (2004) discussed the stress of displacement before and after resettlement, underscoring the significance of both personal and cultural losses. Their findings advocated for coping strategies that support
acculturation while still maintaining elements of one’s cultural identity, particularly in meeting the mental health needs of displaced individuals (Eisenbruch et al., 2004). In close parallel with these findings, Fozdar and Hartley (2013) asserted that integration for refugees means preparedness to adapt to a different culture “without having to lose one’s cultural identity” (p. 3). For instance, research by Deacon and Sullivan (2009) noted that Arab women were significantly more likely to indicate that they were only comfortable seeing a female doctor. This could have strong implications for women who seek medical help but find cultural barriers in accessing that care.

Eisenbruch et al. (2004) further indicated a need for sensitivity to gender differences in understanding that men and women are likely to have experienced different types of trauma (e.g., rape) and often have different needs. Deacon and Sullivan (2009) discussed the impacts of warfare, observing that women are more likely to be victims of sexual assault and exploitation during war and while staying in refugee camps. Additionally, higher incidence of domestic violence may result due to resettlement stresses such as gender-role conflicts that may arise in a different cultural context (e.g., men may find difficulty in fulfilling their roles as heads of household when they cannot find employment) (Deacon and Sullivan, 2009). In all of these cases, access to adequate mental and physical healthcare is a determinant in one’s ability to recover and adapt within the host country.

**Culture and Religion**

Clearly, language acquisition and healthcare act as important factors in the ability to transition after resettlement, yet cultural and religious practices also play a central role. Work by Moghadam (2003) presented a look at culture and women throughout the
Middle East and the influence of Islam. Her research noted that while perceptions of women’s oppression are commonly associated with Muslim societies, the interpretation and influence of Islam varies widely throughout the Middle East. As an example, Moghadam (2003) pointed to Islam’s promotion of women’s right to own property; a legal practice within some Middle Eastern countries which predated the practice in European countries. From a historical account, the Middle East offered greater egalitarian practices with regard to gender. Industrialization, however, significantly changed this as the necessity for women’s contribution to the economy diminished and redistributed power in relation to gender.

Reemergence of patriarchal practices and the shifting familial roles within some Middle Eastern and North African countries are clear outcomes related to (recent) industrialization. Historically, the role of women as workers alongside their male counterparts was a necessity of life as a part of rural and nomadic living. Recent urbanization trends resulting from the availability of natural resources (e.g., oil); however, have lessened the need for women as contributing members of the economy. As their husbands entered an industrialized workforce, the role of women as caregivers was reiterated and a stronger sense of patriarchy emerged (Moghadam, 2004). Bouma and Brace-Govan (2000) also observed this patriarchal trend amongst Muslim immigrants in Australia, noting that leadership roles within their religious and larger social communities tended to be occupied by men. Additionally, Muslim women were more likely to see their roles through the lens of their primary responsibility to childcare while men viewed themselves through their participation in the workforce (Bouma & Brace-Govan, 2000).
Traditional gender roles within religious constructs, such as Islam, have also contributed to the patriarchal nature of most Muslim societies in the Middle East and North Africa (Moghadam, 2004). For instance, Islam emphasizes the role of women in socializing their children and raising them to become good Muslims. Roles within refugee camps have also contributed to the strengthening of patriarchal values as in the West Bank camps of Palestine where women are frequently viewed as little more than a means of reproduction (Moghadam, 2004). However, it is important to note that from the viewpoint of a Muslim scholar, the role of a woman as caregiver is not seen as oppressive, but as a divine role bestowed by God. Additionally, this bestowment does not mean that a woman is unable to work. Many Muslim women choose to work from home so that they are able to fulfill their caregiving roles while still contributing to their economic condition. This means then, that the realization of patriarchy within a community is largely based on the interpretation of Islam by its members as well as on influencing factors that are beyond a religious scope alone (Moghadam, 2004).

The shift in cultural and religious values that shape the laws of the land may also impact the experiences of refugee women after resettlement. The research by Darvishpour (2002) documented cultural conflicts of Iranian refugees after resettlement. His findings worked to explain the high rate of divorce following migration to Sweden. Interviews with both Iranian men and women took note of the cultural shifts that allowed women more opportunities to work outside the home and shifted power within the family unit. Conversely, in Iran, gender stratification and patriarchal practices afford men more power than women. This generally limits women’s options when confined within an unhappy marriage. Specifically, women may not have the right to request a divorce
without the permission of their husbands. Additionally, limited job options for women create severe marital dependency (Darvishpour, 2002). The involvement of children can further complicate the situation as men are more likely to be granted parental favoritism. In contrast, Sweden’s laws and job opportunities for women make the prospect of divorce a viable option, which is likely why the rate of divorce increased amongst Iranian couples after resettlement (Darvishpour, 2002). The impact of cultural and religious practices is of particular importance in navigating the process of resettlement for MENA refugee and immigrant women. Understanding of and sensitivity to practices such as the prioritization of one’s caregiving roles (e.g., being home after school, provision of childcare, sharing responsibilities with family members, etc.) may provide better support for integration within the host culture and open doors for future employment opportunities.

**Community and Family Support**

As seen with language, healthcare, and cultural and religious factors, the role of community and family is an important component in determining the success of refugees and immigrants after resettlement. Many refugees eventually move from their initial resettlement placement, especially in circumstances where they are not comfortable in their community or have failed to form relationships with family or other community members nearby (Forrest & Brown, 2014). Through interviews with members of a Somali population as well as investigation at the state and local levels, Forrest and Brown’s (2014) work revealed that one’s social network was the largest factor in determining secondary migration trends. This occurred through a form of chain migration in which individuals moved to locations where they had previously established connections with members of the local community.
Additionally, resilience after resettlement was largely influenced by what the individual or family had experienced prior to resettlement, such as their prewar lifestyle and time spent in a refugee camp (Weine, Levin, Hakizimana, & Dahnweih, 2011). Resources that were developed within such contexts become the foundational components of resiliency after resettlement. Practices such as shared parenting responsibilities or communal living, for instance, aided in the stressful transition from a long duration in a refugee camp to becoming acclimated to a different community environment (Weine et al., 2011). Research by Carswell et al. (2011) also demonstrated the significance of social support in determining mental health of refugees in the United Kingdom.

Similarly, findings of Deacon and Sullivan (2009) revealed that nearly all participants (97%) expressed their desire to have family living close by. Additionally, while most of the refugee women reported having at least one friend, 90% indicated that they lacked opportunities to meet others who spoke their language and shared their culture. Research by Weine et al. (2011) also revealed that family resiliency is best predicted by the existence of community and family supports that allow refugees to find living space, build gathering places such as churches, and share parenting responsibilities. Their research suggested the need to develop such resources in order to help support refugee resiliency.

**Women’s Workforce Experiences as MENA Refugees and Immigrants**

Having discussed many of the factors that are related to the general resettlement challenges that MENA refugee and immigrant women face, the focus now moves to a more purposeful look at issues related to employment. The discussion of immigrant and
refugee women in the labor market is particularly important because employment trends help paint a picture of the overall integration within the country of resettlement (Foroutan, 2008). Research by Fozdar and Hartley (2013) indicated that refugee populations tend to have a strong desire to participate in the workforce. While employment amongst refugee populations has shown valuable outcomes such as economic independence and opportunities to practice English, refugee women are at a significant risk of unemployment and underemployment (Bloch, 2007). The impacts of these may be damaging at an individual level in terms of diminishing perceptions of self-esteem and the inability to learn and practice skills (Bloch, 2007). Reasons for unemployment and underemployment vary and include limited access to training including English language classes, the inability to transfer qualifications, discrimination, limited access to social networks, lack of self-esteem, and family responsibilities such as childcare (Bloch, 2007; Clayton, 2005; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Fozdar & Hartley, 2013).

Research by Deacon and Sullivan (2009) revealed that 58% of the refugee women interviewed were unemployed. Bloch (2007) found that a large number of women choose not to look for work as a result of childcare and family commitments, the lack of English language proficiency, or the choice to pursue education instead. In a study involving 200 refugee women from Iraq, Somalia, Kosovo, Turkey, and Sri Lanka who were resettled throughout England, only 16% were employed (Bloch, 2007). Notably, of the total number of women employed, only 3% were Iraqi. Results of Chui’s (2011) research that considered all immigrant women in Canada showed significantly higher rates of
employment among women at 51.5% in 2006, though this, too, was lower in comparison to the 59.5% of Canadian-born women in the workforce.

Self-esteem and the struggle to articulate previous skills or qualifications may help explain, in part, the high rates of unemployment and underemployment amongst these women. For instance, Clayton’s (2005) research of immigrant and refugee women living in the United Kingdom revealed that many had attained relevant job skills from their day-to-day experiences, such as cooking, cleaning, driving, sewing, and the valuable interpersonal skills of conflict resolution and time-management. Yet, many of the participants failed to recognize these as transferable skills or lacked the knowledge and expertise to communicate them in such a way. Furthermore, those who had completed some sort of vocational training were more readily able to articulate their skills in a meaningful way (Clayton, 2005), which suggests the value and need for such programs.

**Education.** The discussion of education is particularly salient as research has clearly demonstrated the relationship of employment outcomes with levels of education and English language proficiency (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013). Generally, the rate of employability increases with one’s level of education. Yet, there are many cases in which highly educated individuals persist in low-paying positions (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013) A study of immigrant women in Canada revealed that they were more likely to have a university education than those women born in Canada (Chui, 2011). Additionally, individuals who migrated to Canada at a young age were likely to pursue post-secondary education because their parents tended to be highly educated (Chui, 2011). Interestingly, the women who pursued advanced education after migration tended to choose programs related to business, management, and public administration. These women were also
more likely to enter STEM related fields in comparison to Canadian-born women, whereas male immigrants were focused primarily in two major areas of study: architecture and engineering (Chui, 2011).

Fontes (2014) conducted a narrative study involving Somali women who were students at two-year colleges in the Midwest. The research explored factors that impacted these women in their experiences as students. Seven themes emerged from the analysis of the data: 1) family is central and supportive; 2) life was and is difficult; 3) lack of English language skills is a significant barrier; 4) education is essential for improving their lives; 5) helping others is important; 6) educational supportive assistance is helpful; and 7) cultural influences have an impact. The findings of this study provided some useful insights for college advisors and other administration working with refugee women.

Research by Benseman (2014) addressed psychological factors, such as past traumas or current crises, which may hinder one’s ability to learn. Hannah (2003) also noted the after-effects of torture or trauma that may physically or mentally interrupt one’s ability to concentrate on learning. Appropriate timing of education is particularly important among refugee populations as those who have not addressed physical or mental health issues are likely to experience difficulty in their pursuits (Hannah, 2003). Failure or the inability to progress may exacerbate these circumstances by further damaging one’s self-confidence or reiterating a sense of hopelessness (Hannah, 2003). Additionally, lack of confidence and uncertainty in an unfamiliar environment pose unique challenges to learning for immigrants and refugees (Benseman, 2014).

Lost human capital. Unemployment and underemployment may also have negative impacts on the host society in terms of limiting economic growth and the loss of
untapped human potential (Bloch, 2007). An example of this occurred in London where the high cost of living expenses has made it difficult to find public-sector workers (Dumper, 2002). However, Dumper’s (2002) review of refugee women living in London revealed that approximately 80% of this population had previously worked as doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, and so on, but were not able to find employment in London. Additionally, the small proportion of the women who were able to find employment were working in low-wage, low-skill positions. The primary reason this occurred was the result of them being listed as dependents because their husbands had been registered as the primary refugee or asylum seeker. This led to them being banned from obtaining a work permit until their refugee status had been granted (Dumper, 2002).

Lack of childcare and of training that would help women transition to the workforce in London also contributed to the low level of workforce participation and underemployment (Dumper, 2002).

**Low wages and other contributing factors.** Women who were able to find employment tended to work in low-wage positions such as hotel cleaning services (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009). Deacon and Sullivan (2009) found that marital status appeared to be a significant factor in employment, as only 20% of married women were employed, whereas 69% of those who were single heads of households were employed. Foroutan (2008) additionally found that immigrant women were less likely to participate in the workforce when they had spouses in high-earning positions. Further, the presence of young children in the home made it significantly less likely for women to work in contrast with those who had older children or no children (Foroutan, 2008).
Allen’s (2009) research involving Somali and Sudanese refugee women revealed that those who were members of ethnic communities were actually less likely to participate in the workforce. Interviews suggested that these women felt social obligations to their community (i.e., helping other families with tasks like childcare, cooking, and cleaning), which prevented them from seeking employment (Allen, 2009). Additionally, social pressures to maintain one’s cultural identity also tended to limit women’s participation in certain industries (e.g., workplaces where they could not wear traditional clothing) (Allen, 2009). Similarly, the social stigma of interacting with non-community members influenced the likelihood of women to pursue positions outside of the home (Allen, 2009).

Lack of trust for outsiders also impeded access to childcare, as only 12% of the women involved in Deacon and Sullivan’s (2009) study reported that they felt comfortable leaving their children with non-family members. While 47% of the women were assisted with childcare by close family or friends, many did not have nearby friends or family who could assist in this way. Adding further complication, only 50% of the women reported understanding how the American daycare system worked (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009).

**(Non-)Transferable qualifications.** Research by Chui (2011) cited the inability to transfer qualifications internationally, which results in a lower rate of education-job matches for immigrant women in Canada. In fact, credentials earned outside of Australia, Europe (or the European Union), or North America are typically not formally recognized or valued by potential employers (Chui, 2011; Clayton, 2005; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Foroutan, 2008; Yakushko et al., 2008). For refugee and immigrant women who
have established qualifications prior to migration, this frequently means accepting a position for which they are overqualified. Research by Ghorashi and van Tilburg (2006) found that many refugee women were forced to repeat their studies because their credentials were not recognized in the Netherlands. This can be particularly difficult due to high tuition costs faced by refugees who do not qualify for financial assistance and lack the financial means to pay for schooling (Ghorashi & van Tilburg, 2006). As a result, some women opted to change their field of study or shifted career paths to complete job-oriented education instead (Ghorashi & Tilburg, 2006).

**Workplace violence and discrimination.** The International Labor Office (Cruz & Klinger, 2011) discussed trends in gender-based violence at work. They identified refugee women who were at particularly high risk of abuse because of their vulnerable status as members of an intersecting minority group (e.g., ethnic minorities, women, migrant workers) (Collins, 2015; Cruz & Klinger, 2011). The work by Cruz and Klinger (2011) specifically pointed to economic exploitation—enslavement or forced labor—among other forms of workplace violence. Collins (2015) echoed these findings through her extensive research focused on the intersectionality of social inequalities and the complex system of power disparity created by these inequalities. While practices of gender-segregation may help combat workplace violence, such solutions often reinforce the roles of men in higher wage and upper management positions, while women continue to make up the majority of low power positions (Cruz & Klinger, 2011). The findings in this report demonstrate the clear need for better solutions to address workplace violence (Cruz & Klinger, 2011).
Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006) also documented cases in Western Australia where job candidates had strong qualifications and relevant work experience but were not hired due to discriminating factors on the basis of race or culture. Respondents reported use of terms like ‘organizational fit’ or ‘personality match’ by potential employers as evidence of these claims. Additionally, the findings of Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006) revealed a significant over-representation of immigrants and refugees in low-wage, low-skilled jobs of cleaning services, elder care, processing and industry type work, as well as taxi driving which may support claims of systemic discrimination.

Foroutan’s (2008) research, however, challenged the idea of discrimination against female migrants as part of the explanation for their overall low participation rate in the labor force, suggesting instead that it had more to do with time spent in the host country. Specifically, those who were residents for 10 or more years had a participation rate similar to that of native-born women in Australia (Foroutan, 2008). This was especially true for migrants whose native culture was significantly different from that of the host country, as in the case of MENA women (Foroutan, 2008).

Research by Ghorashi and van Tilburg (2006) also discussed substantial workplace challenges that Iraqi and Afghani refugee women faced in their attempts to enter and advance in the Netherlands’ workforce. Individuals who were perceived to speak with accents or whose language fluency seemed questionable were declined for hire by potential employers despite the fact that these candidates were highly educated and well-qualified (and in some cases even overqualified) for the positions (Gharashi & van Tilburg, 2006). Participants shared strategic approaches to overcome these barriers, such as accepting temporary positions or internships that would allow them entrance into
an organization. In several cases, women who were able to gain admission quickly excelled as their value became evident and language proved not to be an issue (Ghorashi & van Tilburg, 2006). This aligns with work by Fleig-Palmer, Luthans, and Mandernach (2009) that proposed resiliency and job search skills are the most important factors in finding reemployment, particularly among minority groups.

Tokenism was another factor that refugee women faced in the workplace as a small minority within the labor force (Ghorashi & van Tilburg, 2006). They were held to higher standards and were frequently isolated or excluded by other workers, leading to higher turnover as these women sought more hospitable work environments (Ghorashi & van Tilburg, 2006). Additionally, underrepresentation contributed to difficulty in career advancement as very few minority women were found to be in upper level positions throughout the Netherlands’ workforce. The findings of this study demonstrate the persistence and resilience of the participants and highlight the challenges that refugee women face in finding employment after resettlement.

**Influence of social networks.** Work by Calvó-Armengol and Jackson (2004) discussed the impact of social networks on job attainment, observing that access to information about employment opportunities was key to finding long-term job placement. Their findings showed the longer an individual was unemployed, the less likely he/she was to find job placement. The researchers conjectured that part of the explanation for this was the diminishing contacts with colleagues who would have knowledge of employment opportunities (Calvó-Armengol & Jackson, 2004). They suggested that groups who experienced difficulty finding employment were more likely to drop out of
the workforce because their opportunities for employment diminished over time (Calvó-Armengol & Jackson, 2004).

Further, the model developed by Calvó-Armengol and Jackson (2004) explained how expanding social networks amongst refugees may actually perpetuate unemployment by increasing competition for the same opportunities. The model shows how these dynamics of persistent unemployment impact communities over time to create inequality between refugee groups (Calvó-Armengol & Jackson, 2004). Research by Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006) adds to this finding, suggesting that individuals with low-English language proficiency or who lack human capital tend to rely on their ethnic networks for information about jobs. As other members of this ethnic community are also likely to face the same cultural barriers and tend to work in low-skilled and low-paying jobs, new members are also directed to these same ‘job niches’ that lead to labor market segmentation over time (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006).

Beaman (2006) proposed that the model by Calvó-Armengol and Jackson (2004) was incomplete, instead hypothesizing that while competition initially decreased employment opportunities within refugee networks, over time these social networks actually led to greater employment and higher wage opportunities for refugees arriving later and who had access to the established network. Social networks, as defined by Beaman (2006), consist of non-family members who have been reunified through settlement within the same city and who are from the same country of origin. The empirical analysis supported Beaman’s (2006) hypothesis, indicating that social networks that existed over time significantly increased the probability that newly-arriving refugees who were members of that social network had access to more employment opportunities
and higher wages than refugees who did not have the support of a social network. This occurs because the social network provides information about job opportunities to newcomers that would not otherwise be accessible (Beaman, 2006).

Research by Foad (2013) may help explain the discrepancies in understanding the impacts of social networks. His review of immigration trends from the Middle East and South Asia to the United States reported that enclaves, in general, have a negative impact on immigrant populations over time (Foad, 2013). However, the exception to this is in cases where members of the enclave are predominately highly educated and highly skilled. In these situations, enclaves tended to have a positive impact on members (Foad, 2013). In addition, new arrivals may benefit by having access to enclaves, particularly when they have low level of education and skills (Foad, 2013). Work by Schaefer (2019) further supported these findings by suggesting that social networks may serve to both hinder and advance the acculturation process within the host culture.

**Entrepreneurial pursuits.** Despite low levels of workforce participation overall, refugee women in Australia were found to have a high rate of entrepreneurial pursuit, which may have been in response to difficulties finding employment within the general workforce (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013). Work by Connor (2010) found that refugee women in the United States were more likely to work in skilled positions than were men. Interestingly, Foroutan (2008) also found that while MENA women had among the lowest workforce participation in Australia, they were almost as likely as native-born women to work in high level positions such as management. These findings suggest that while MENA refugee and immigrant women may face employment challenges related to
childcare and cultural expectations, those who overcome such barriers tend to be highly successful in the workforce (Foroutan, 2008).

**Women in Leadership**

Participation in the workforce and challenges to doing so are clearly important aspects of this discussion. Yet, further investigation is required in order to understand refugee and immigrant women’s leadership within MENA communities. Undoubtedly, many of these women have sharpened strong leadership skills through their resettlement journeys, having developed resiliency and flexibility as they adapt. Still, very little is known about the leadership experiences of MENA women after resettlement. In fact, studies that have investigated leadership, particularly of women, amongst refugees and immigrants within the host country are extremely limited. Thus, the best way to approach this topic is to investigate the relevant literature related to what is known about women and leadership.

**Disparities and the Labyrinth**

Investigation begins with the body of literature pertaining to the relationships between gender and leadership, though it should be noted that this work has been based overwhelmingly within the context of Western cultures. In a review of the developments of the gender equality movement from the 1980s onward, Friedman (2015) reviewed changes, primarily discussing areas that require greater commitment to change going forward. While her research found progress within education, it revealed areas that remain lacking in the workforce at large (Friedman, 2015). While women, including those who have children, make up nearly half of the labor market, a clear wage gap persists (Friedman, 2015). Even when controlling for human capital (e.g., education and
job training) and occupational segregation (e.g., male-dominated and female-dominated industries), women make an average of 9% less in wages than men.

Additionally, while an increasing number of women have entered historically male-dominated industries (e.g., business, medicine, law), the same cannot be said for men entering female-dominated industries (e.g., nursing, teaching) (Friedman, 2015; Schaefer, 2019). One reason to help explain this is that cultural expectations about appropriate male behavior (e.g., men are not supposed to be nurses because doing so is not masculine) seem to deter men from entering female-dominated fields. However, men tended to have an advantage in female-dominated industries, allowing them to advance at a much faster rate than their female counterparts (Friedman, 2015; Schaefer, 2019).

Acker’s (2006) work discussed these disparities as a result of inequality regimes that exist within all organizations. Essentially, inequality regimes are the “interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations” (Acker, 2006, p. 443). The impact of these practices can be seen in access to resources and power, as well as rewards and relationships. Acker (2006) also notes that the degree of inequality varies within different organizations and may change over time. Likewise, the types of inequalities that disadvantage people also vary. Sexuality and religion, for instance, are factors that may be more influential within some contexts than in others. Acker (2006) provides a particularly relevant sample to this research, noting that Muslims may be prone to discrimination due to religious practice deviating from the norm. Inequality regimes are complex and require significant effort and time to change the workplace. Unfortunately, well-intentioned efforts can actually enhance the lines of division and result in further
discrimination. Acker (2006) suggests that recognizing these inequalities by increasing their visibility to those with power may be the first step to finding possible solutions.

Overall, women represent a rather small proportion of the powerful decision-making positions within the workforce (Stainback et al., 2016). To help understand the struggle women face in leadership, Eagly and Carli (2008) offer the metaphor of a labyrinth, which they believe to be a more accurate depiction than the common conception of a glass ceiling. Their research proposed that women face a long journey toward leadership. It is fraught with many challenges and obstacles throughout, and women often lack the ability to predict how decisions will impact their next move. In this way, women’s leadership journey is a winding and often frustrating path, similar to a labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2008). For example, family responsibilities have been a long-standing struggle in maintaining the work-life balance for women (Eagly & Carli, 2008; Friedman, 2015). Yet, despite men’s increasing participation in domestic responsibilities, finding this balance for women is more difficult than in the past due to pressures for intensive parenting and greater work hour demands (Eagly & Carli, 2008). Family responsibilities present additional challenges as women are often excluded as candidates for advancement opportunities when they have children living at home (Eagly & Carli, 2008).

However, time constraints related to family obligations only present one facet of this challenge. As many opportunities to develop social capital occur offsite, the context can also pose difficulty. Examples of managerial meetings or retreats that have occurred at hunting lodges or exotic dance clubs demonstrate the types of meeting sites where women may not feel comfortable joining in or even be welcome to participate (Eagly &
Carli, 2008). Furthermore, the challenges presented by the work-family juggling act tend to negatively impact women’s ability to develop social capital. Eagly and Carli (2008) explain that the need for political skill and social networks are even more important for advancement than are skillful demonstrations of essential management responsibilities.

**Cultural Notions about Leadership**

Expanding on this notion, cultural expectations about what it takes to be an effective leader actually seems to disadvantage women despite the fact that women tend to have “the right combination of skills for leadership” (Eagly, 2007, p. 1). This appears to be related to the incongruity of stereotypes about women and leadership where the depiction of successful leaders is more masculine (e.g., assertive or competitive) and, in turn, gives men an advantage in pursuit of leadership roles (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). In fact, findings by Moss, Barbuto, Matkin, and Chin (2005) suggested that the gender of followers may be even more important to understanding the perceptions of leader behavior, noting that male followers frequently reported that their leaders used Exchange Tactics, while female followers reported that their leaders used more Consultation and Personal Appeals. These findings suggest that followers’ expectations about leaders, often shaped by stereotypes and experiences, seem to influence the way they actually perceive their leaders to act (Moss et al., 2005).

This means that even those women who are highly qualified candidates for leadership roles often face an uphill battle in overcoming preconceptions about women being ill-equipped leaders (Koenig et al., 2011). Eagly and Carli (2008) discussed the dilemma of the ‘double-bind’ in which women must work to overcome such perceptions, yet risk being seen as too masculine. For women, more masculine actions, such as being
assertive, are often received negatively by both their male and female colleagues (Eagly & Carli, 2008). Perhaps as a result, women tend to demonstrate transformational leadership more often than men. As one of the most effective methods for modern organizations, adoption of a transformational approach to leadership often means women experience greater success in comparison to their male counterparts (Eagly & Carli, 2008).

Expanding on the conversation of masculine traits and leadership, Moss and Kent (1996) conducted a study that looked at the likelihood of an individual to emerge as a leader based on gender. Their findings suggested that, overall, individuals possessing masculine traits tend to emerge more frequently as leaders (Moss & Kent, 1996). Work by Gershenoff and Foti (2003) added support to these findings, suggesting that women who emerge as leaders tend to demonstrate what are typically considered to be masculine behaviors (e.g., task-oriented behaviors).

However, a meta-analysis by Eagly and Johnson (1990) revealed that both women and men in leadership roles are able to lead effectively, though their leadership styles may be different; generally, men lead autocratically and women lead democratically. They also challenged prior stereotypical classifications of masculine versus feminine behavior (e.g., women are more interpersonal) and instead suggested that leader effectiveness depends more on the situation than on the particular style of leadership (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). What have been typically thought of as gender specific behaviors (e.g., task-oriented behaviors) were not observed to be significant within the study; however, both autocratic and democratic styles of leadership were found to be effective (Eagly and Johnson, 1990).
Context Matters

Work by Barbuto, Fritz, Matkin, and Marx (2007) observed discrepancies in past gender and leadership research, noting contributions that support both sides of the argument: those showing clear differences in leadership related to gender and those showing no differences. In an effort toward expanding and clarifying previous work, their research investigated the relationship between age, level of education, and gender in relation to leadership (Barbuto et al., 2007). Significantly, their work revealed the importance of consideration for context in the study of gender and leadership (Barbuto et al., 2007). Context was defined by the level of education attained by a leader. Their results indicated gender differences in leadership existed only at the lowest levels of education (high school) and diminished with greater education (bachelor’s or graduate degree) (Barbuto et al., 2007). Furthermore, their research highlighted the importance of investigating contextual factors within the study of gender and leadership (Barbuto et al., 2007).

Yoder (2001) also noted the relevance of situational understanding, proposing that the relationship between leader behavior and his/her perceived effectiveness is moderated by the leader’s gender and the context of one’s role. Workplace context was defined in terms of gender; specifically, those which were more masculine (e.g., hierarchical, patriarchal) and those which were more transformational (e.g., empower followers). A meta-analysis conducted by Eagly, Karau, and Makijiani (1995) investigated the effectiveness of leaders in relation to gender specific roles (the degree to which the job was perceived to be masculine) through the review of 96 studies. Overall, the findings suggested that men and women are equally effective. However, role congruence (e.g.,
men working in masculine roles) impacted perceptions of effectiveness in that men tended to be viewed as more effective in roles that were masculine and women tended to be more effective in roles considered to be less masculine (Eagly et al., 1995). Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, and Woehr’s (2014) meta-analysis of 95 studies reiterated these findings, showing that when the context is accounted for, men and women are equal in leader effectiveness.

Outcomes of Women in Leadership

Notably, past research has been a bit mixed in terms of outcomes related to women in powerful positions. For example, in some instances it appeared that women who were highly successful in male-dominated industries attempted to distance themselves from subordinate women (Stainback et al., 2016). Additionally, women are just as susceptible to adopting common discriminatory behaviors like holding themselves and other women to lower standards or devaluing their efforts and those of other women (Stainback et al., 2016). Work by Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) echoed these findings as women’s self-reported effectiveness exposed that women rated themselves significantly lower than did men.

In contrast, the results of Stainback et al.’s (2016) study indicated a clear positive relationship between women in decision-making positions and the proportion of gender integration within those organizations (e.g., the workplace was more equally comprised of both men and women). Researchers hypothesized that because women in top corporate positions are highly skilled at overcoming obstacles and achieving success, they are ideal agents for change (Bierema, 1996; Stainback et al., 2016). Additionally, just as research has shown in-group preferencing among men, the same is likely true for women in those
in positions of power tending to favor other women (Stainback et al., 2016). Overall, these findings suggest a clear benefit to increasing the number of women who occupy decision-making roles to achieve gender parity in the workplace. And, as past research has shown, gender integrated workplaces tend to be more supportive environments with less discrimination (Bierema, 1996; Stainback et al., 2016).

Women’s Leadership in MENA Contexts

To this point, the literature presented has not accounted for the impact of cultural or geographical contextual factors of the MENA region that may further expand understanding of women and leadership. Given that a goal of this study is to investigate the ways that leadership experiences change from one context to another, it is important to acknowledge research that has been focused on the exploration of women’s leadership within the geographical region of the Middle East and North Africa. This is not intended to imply that the participants in this study have experiences as leaders, but rather that leadership experiences and perceptions about those experiences may be formed even as outside observers or as followers, which emphasizes the importance of this focus. Furthermore, while the body of work about women’s leadership in MENA contexts is growing, it remains extremely limited to date (Metcalf, 2008). Acknowledgment should be given in understanding its limited generalizability as a result of the vast geographical region, diversity of people throughout the MENA region, and limited research availability.

MENA countries share a common dilemma of low workforce participation among women that, in many cases, has resulted in only half of the population contributing to economic growth and development (Moghadam, 2008). Not surprisingly, women are
significantly underrepresented in leadership roles within both public and private spheres (Metcalf, 2008). Lack of workforce participation not only stifles women’s progress within society but also inhibits greater contribution to the global market of countries within this region (Metcalf, 2008; Moghadam, 2008). Perhaps one of the greatest travesties is the untapped human capital that exists. Needless to say, this has resulted in huge gender gaps across MENA nations (e.g., limited access to education, restriction of industry options for employment, lack of representation within leadership roles, etc.) (Metcalf, 2008; Moghadam, 2008). While women today are better educated and healthier than past generations, they continue to face many barriers to entering the workforce (Moghadam, 2008).

**Cultural contextual factors.** Family-based laws common throughout the MENA region often differentiate between men and women, regularly making women dependents of their male guardians (Moghadam, 2008). Under male guardianship, women have limited ability to travel, apply for employment, or open a bank account without the support of a father, husband, or other male guardian (Moghadam, 2008). While such laws, typically based on Islamic precedent, were intended to protect women at a time when they did not have a means of providing for themselves, they are outdated and tend to perpetuate gender inequalities today (Moghadam, 2008).

Accounting for the influence of Islam throughout Middle Eastern and Muslim-majority countries is fundamental to understanding how religion not only shapes laws such as these, but also social and cultural practices. For women, this generally means prioritizing caregiving roles and maintaining one’s modesty and dignity (Metcalf, 2008). This can impact one’s availability to work during certain hours (e.g., when children need
care) as well as the conditions under which women are able to work (e.g., jobs that require certain dress codes that conflict with modest clothing). While many women embrace Islamic traditions, others seek to break patriarchal norms related to that construct (Metcalf, 2008). Perception is an important notion in understanding the influence of contextual factors as societal attitudes may pose resistance to women in leadership.

Work by Jamal (2010) purported that negative attitudes toward women in leadership are common throughout the Middle East. It is a common sentiment that men make better leaders than women (Jamal, 2010). Further, Middle Eastern countries tend to have a lower number of women in governmental leadership positions as well as lower rates of literacy, education, and participation in the economy among women (Jamal, 2010). Unequal representation, limited accessibility to resources and jobs, as well as social attitudes about women appear to perpetuate gender inequalities among Middle Eastern women.

Additionally, Metcalf (2008) acknowledges the gender and occupational segregation that exists at a high level throughout the Middle East, noting that this appears most pronounced in countries that are oil-rich. Where women are employed, they work primarily in the fields of healthcare, education, and social work (Metcalf, 2008). Occupational segregation is common throughout the Middle East and some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, have fully barred women from working in certain professions (e.g., many engineering and science-related jobs). Additionally, recruitment practices and the reluctance among organizations to employ women due to extra costs (e.g., provision of
separate working quarters, maternity leave) have limited the fields in which women pursue work (Metcalf, 2008).

**Activism and change.** Women’s activism throughout MENA can be traced to the 1980s, largely led by women who were educators and scholars (Moghadam, 2008). Throughout the Middle East, a growing number of activist groups and organizations continue to invest in the promotion of gender equality through education and increasing access to leadership positions within both the public and private spheres (Metcalf, 2008). While some of these efforts have seen success, many organizations are overseen by government entities and are thus subject to the objectives of those governments (Metcalf, 2008). More recently, efforts initiated during Hillary Clinton’s tenure at the United States Department of State have also focused on improving education and opportunities for young Muslim women throughout MENA by partnering with regional universities and colleges (Ranani & Kharazmi, 2017). Increasing trends of women in pursuit of entrepreneurial endeavors, particularly in Jordan, Egypt, and Bahrain (Metcalf, 2008), and the rising participation of women in Morocco’s labor market, provide a glimpse at the changing climate throughout the MENA region (Moghadam, 2008).

Research by Weeks (2009) depicted this change through the investigation of women business owners across five countries: Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates. The study involved a total of 1,228 face-to-face interviews, which included enterprises that employed 13-19 people on average, and were primarily focused in the service sector, retail trade, or consumable goods (Weeks, 2009). While many of the women projected optimistic outlooks regarding the future of their organizations, they also cited several barriers that make it difficult to start new endeavors or grow existing
ventures (Weeks, 2009). These barriers included limited access to training and education as well as access to networks of people who could provide mentorship or advice (Weeks, 2009). As more women throughout the MENA region pursue entrepreneurship as a feasible option, the body of literature about these efforts also continues to grow (see, for examples, Chamlou & Yared, 2003; Motzafi-Haller, 2005; Yusuf, 2005).

Morocco shows signs of change in some areas but continues to see resistance in others. For example, some activist groups have taken up the effort of redefining laws. With sensitivity to the context, many are using the Qur’an, the religious text of Islam, as a guiding principle (Moghadam, 2008). A recent example of progress in this effort can be seen in Morocco’s reformation of personal status laws that have worked to improve the lives of women and children (Jamal, 2010; Moghadam, 2008). Yet, it is important to note that while there is progress in some areas for Morocco, cultural barriers such as the media’s depiction of women in politics as unqualified and illegitimate work to undermine such efforts (Skalli, 2011). In many ways, women’s progress brings to mind that familiar saying, ‘Two steps forward, one step back.’ Clearly, much work remains.

A recent study by Wang (2017) documented the leadership experiences of Muslim women within the context of the Midwestern United States. This research is unique and significant to the present study as the participants were nearly all first-generation immigrants (Wang, 2017). The study focused on the activities of a community mosque where observations occurred, in addition to unstructured interviews with 23 women (Wang, 2017). The findings suggested that leadership roles were conveyed through duties within the mosque as well as through parenting (Wang, 2017). Additionally, the practice of gender segregation was discussed at length as many women
vehemently opposed it, while others held to the practice as sacred. Certainly, this provides some insight to possible emerging themes within the present study as an investigation of MENA women’s leadership in the United States.

**Summary**

Through in-depth investigation of the existing literature, immigration trends in the United States and challenges related to resettlement have developed greater understanding. The experiences of MENA immigrant and refugee women revealed common issues of language acquisition, access to healthcare, cultural and religious expectations, and the need for family and community support. Further investigation of the literature about MENA immigrant and refugee women in the workforce exposed many barriers and challenges that persist in today’s labor market. These included limited access to education, discrimination and violence, and the inability to transfer qualifications, among other factors. Finally, the discussion of women and leadership explored the larger body of scholarship before investigating the more limited contributions about women’s leadership within MENA contexts. Overall, the findings of this review of the literature consistently demonstrated that there is limited research that has investigated the leadership experiences of MENA refugee and immigrant women, particularly within subcultural communities after resettlement.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Having documented the research contributing to this study’s framework of immigrant and refugee women’s leadership in MENA communities, focus now progresses to discussion of the methodology. Recalling (from Chapter 1) that the interest of this study lies in expanding knowledge about the leadership experiences of refugee and immigrant women with consideration for the intersectionality of gender, religion, and other factors (e.g., race/ethnicity), a community located in the Midwestern United States was presented as an ideal site and population for study. Perhaps most importantly, the opportunity to observe and, in many ways, become part of this community provided an invaluable look at women’s leadership among MENA refugees and immigrants after resettlement. Finally, ethnography is proposed and discussed as an appropriate methodology for this study’s purpose and detailed description of the data collection and analysis process is provided.

Research Questions

1. What are the leadership patterns perceived and practiced by MENA refugee and immigrant women living in the Midwestern United States after resettlement?
2. How are changes in the leadership experiences of MENA refugee and immigrant women described from the pre-migration context to post-migration context?
3. What is the shared process of emergence to leadership within this community?

Population and Sample

The Midwestern community, where the present study occurred, ranks among the top 15 in the nation for resettlement of refugees per capita and has welcomed as many as
1,000 refugees per year. The influx of immigrants and refugees from around the world has largely contributed to the developing diversity of this community. These refugees represent 56 different countries and 48 spoken languages. Immigrants and refugees have been welcomed primarily from parts of Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and Southeast Asia. During the 1980s, more than 5,500 refugees, primarily from Vietnam, were resettled to the area. A large proportion of the resettled population remain in the area long-term, and the city is also home to many secondary migrants.

Within this diverse Midwestern community, the Helping Hand Community Center, which provides free, basic English and computer skills classes, served as the site of the present study. The center provided funding for a program which was founded on the idea of assisting refugees and immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa. Additionally, an aspect of the program’s mission emphasizes enabling women to become independent. The location was selected on the basis of its role within the community as a source of support for newly arrived refugees and immigrants. Additionally, because the Helping Hand Community Center provides classes, which are limited to women only, and serves members from a number of different countries, it was an ideal site for investigating the influencing factors discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

At the Helping Hand Community Center, a sense of comradery developed among displaced individuals of different origins, though primarily from regions of the Middle

---

2 The names of the place, research site, and other related information have been changed in order to protect the anonymity of the research subjects. Pseudonyms were used throughout the entire research and writing process. Some identifiable background information about certain individuals has also been modified for this purpose. However, these changes do not have perceivable effect on research findings and conclusions.

3 The reference used to obtain information about this community has been omitted to help protect the identities of participants in this study in accordance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Nebraska and guidelines provided by the American Psychological Association (APA).
East and North Africa (e.g., Iraq, Iran, Morocco, and Egypt). The women who attended the classes were of various ages, ranging from their 20’s to those in their 70’s. Many of the women were married with children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren, while a smaller number were single, never married, divorced, or widowed. Their stories varied greatly, many spent several years in refugee camps prior to arriving in the United States, and their time living in the ‘States’ ranged anywhere from a few weeks to several years. While a few of the women were immediately resettled within the present community, the majority of them had moved from somewhere afar as secondary (or even tertiary or beyond) migrants, in search of something better.

**Defining Qualitative Research**

Babchuk and Badiee (2010) presented qualitative research as a means to answering the present research questions in order to “better understand an area, where little is known, to make sense of complex situations, contexts, and settings, to learn how participants construct their worlds, to gain deep, rich and detailed descriptions of cultural scenes, to help empower individuals to share their stories and enact meaningful social change, and to generate theory where little exists” (p. 27). Certainly, having acknowledged that so little is known about the experiences of MENA immigrant and refugee women’s leadership within the host country after resettlement lends itself to ideal study through qualitative investigation.

Creswell and Poth (2018) focus on five contemporary qualitative approaches in their influential and widely read text: Narrative Research, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, and Case Study (see Appendix D for a comparative table). Among all five approaches, common threads include the collection of data within a natural setting
and the researcher as the key instrument (as opposed to a questionnaire, for instance); the use of multiple approaches to collect data (e.g., observations, interviews, artifacts); and complex reasoning to develop patterns or themes and to understand nuanced meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Richards & Morse, 2013). Additionally, the focus of qualitative research is to understand the participants’ meanings through a holistic account, which includes multiple perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Geertz, 1973; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Richards & Morse, 2013).

**Ethnography**

While a clear definition of ethnography has been debated among disciplines, Lareau and Schultz (1996) called it “a holistic approach” in which an investigation of a community is told from the perspective of the participants (p. 3). It includes special consideration for cultural and contextual factors that allow for the development of a rich understanding of the studied community (Lareau & Shultz, 1996). Nearly all definitions of ethnography agree that both observation as well as interviews with key informants are necessary tools of investigation; however, length of time varies (e.g., Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Richards & Morse, 2013; Sluka & Robben, 2012). Moreover, scholars typically view ethnography as the study of a culture-sharing group or some aspect of a culture-sharing group (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016),

Unlike other methodological approaches, ethnographers are interested in the *meaning* of behavior (Lareau & Shultz, 1996). Creswell (2013) reiterates, "ethnographers study the meaning of the behavior, the language, and the interaction among members of the culture-sharing group” (p. 90). According to Agar (1996), ethnographers are primarily
concerned with the search for patterns. Agar (1996) further summarizes the process in
two parts: the first is to immerse oneself in the environment in order to learn, and the
second is to identify patterns based on what is learned.

The nature of ethnographic study, specifically that there is much unknown about
the culture at hand, mandates the surrender of preconceived notions, expectations, and
even detailed planning of the “experiment” itself (Agar, 1996). Instead, the process of
research evolves organically over time as one cannot predict in advance all of the
possible group interactions that will occur, whom will emerge as key informants, and
what patterns of behavior will be discovered (Agar, 1996). This process requires that the
researcher not only immerse and experience events through firsthand encounters, but that
he/she establish him/herself within the environment for a significant duration of time
(Agar, 1996).

Justification of Method

Given the practical challenges of conducting quantitative research in working
with displaced persons (e.g., limited previous research, language barriers, difficulty in
selecting appropriate surveys or in completing surveys, etc.), the need for rigorous
qualitative research approaches such as ethnography are necessary (Castles, 2003).
Adding credence to this claim, a review by Jacobsen and Landau (2003) investigated the
methods and ethical considerations of 20 studies, all of which involved research with
refugees or internally displaced persons. The findings of this review revealed several
issues with vague or unsupported modes of investigation as well as questions about
ethical practices (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). Issues with methodology included limited
or missing information about participant selection processes, failure to address how the
issue of language was managed (e.g., whether an interpreter was used), and the use of vague qualitative research approaches (e.g., unstructured interviews) that were not well-documented or supported by the literature (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). The study also highlighted issues of validity specifically related to the operationalization of constructs such as 'discrimination' or 'marginalization,' which must be clearly defined and understood within the context of the study.

Further, Jacobsen and Landau (2003) identified the need for rigorous qualitative research practices--such as taking the time to develop trust with participants--to help mitigate researcher bias or the possibility of erroneous initial impressions. Their research suggested that studies occurring over six months or longer tended to have higher validity because inconsistencies were more likely to be exposed over time. Qualitative research provides an opportunity for achieving internal validity at a depth difficult to achieve with quantitative approaches (e.g., long-term immersion in the cultural setting, designed to elicit thick and rich description). However, Jacobsen and Landau (2003) also raised concerns about the potential for losing objectivity, particularly when the researcher lives or works amongst the participants. Accordingly, the more involved a researcher becomes in the refugee community, the more subject he/she becomes to the potential for ethical dilemmas (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003).

Lastly, it is challenging for a study involving refugees to be generalizable to the larger population because the sampling procedures often used to locate participants (e.g., membership to a particular organization) do not provide equal opportunity for all refugees to be included in the study (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). In such cases, Jacobsen and Landau (2003) state the importance of acknowledging the limitations of one's study.
and realizing that the findings cannot be applied beyond the context of the study. Importantly, however, generalizability is typically not a goal of qualitative research and technically does not represent a limitation in the design and implementation of research. Jacobsen and Landau (2003) called for rigorous methods in conducting research with refugees and internally displaced persons in order to provide high-quality information to help scholars enter into better conversations and policy makers to implement better-informed strategies. Additionally, the authors insist on the following principles: 1) an openness to being wrong, 2) the need for explicitness in one's account of data collection procedures, and 3) the implementation of rigorous research methods (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003).

Phenomenology, ethnography, and case study were all considered as possible approaches to answer the research questions presented. While there are overlapping aspects of data collection and analysis among these approaches, the focus and type of problem addressed in this study informed the approach selected. Specifically, phenomenology is used to tell the lived experiences of a specific event, whereas case study is used to describe a particular issue within a bounded system or a bounded system in general (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Richards & Morse, 2013). While participants were identified through their participation at the Helping Hand Community Center, the purpose was not to investigate a particular issue within that context. Additionally, in-depth interviews with key informants and observations made over time (key components of ethnography) allow for the development of a deep and rich understanding of the shared patterns within this culture.
Data Collection and Instrumentation

Ultimately, ethnography was selected because of the unrestrictive fluidity that allows for the study of an entire culture-sharing group. This is particularly important given that immigrants and refugees have not lived through the same circumstances. Further, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the leadership experiences of the culture-sharing group of MENA women within the Midwestern United States. To be clear, the term “culture-sharing” is used here to describe the immediate community that has developed an identity distinguished by similar practices and beliefs after migration to the Midwestern United States. It does not imply that the culture-sharing group is meant to include all MENA women, but rather that this particular community has formed its own unique cultural identity.

Researcher Positioning

Within qualitative studies, researchers are described as “the creative artists [who] have the common task of making fabric” (Creswell, 2013, p. 42). Using the analogy of a loom, Creswell and Poth (2018) define qualitative research as a process that is constructed by the weaver (i.e., the researcher), whereby the fabric will contain many of the same elements, but will undoubtedly vary depending upon the researcher and his/her selected approach to study a particular phenomenon. Similarly, Denzin & Lincoln (2018) provide the metaphor of researcher as a bricoleur; the creator of something whole and complete from diverse sources. Agar (1996) provided a clear role of the ethnographer as an apprentice of sorts. The researcher should always be in the mode of learner, challenging assumptions about members’ interpretations by developing them into testable
questions (Agar, 1996). More specifically, the ethnographer is interested in understanding
the world from the perspectives of one’s participants (Agar, 1996).

Castles (2003) also raised this concern, stating that cultural and political practices
shape the perspective of researchers and the ways in which they conduct research.
Knowing this, researchers should recognize the importance of self-awareness and make
efforts to set aside personal values and beliefs when interpreting the occurrences within
the cultural context of study. In order to do this, a researcher must spend a significant
amount of time learning from one’s informants and observing firsthand the events
creating these patterns (Agar, 1996). While this may lead to concerns for loss of
researcher objectivity or bias in terms of favoritism toward one’s informant(s), for
instance, the very nature of ethnographic research demands this investment. Without
taking the time to learn about one’s participants through multiple observations and
interviews, it is unlikely that the depth and richness of such research can be attained.
Moreover, there is risk of damaging consequence if the researcher’s interpretation falsely
depicts the culture of the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations include assurances of anonymity and confidentiality for
participants. Permission to participate in the study were obtained from key informants by
way of informed consent (Appendix A). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) did not
deem it necessary to obtain informed consent for all of the individuals present during
observations due to the public nature of the Helping Hand Community Center. To protect
the identities of participants, pseudonyms are used for the names of people, locations, and
organizations included in this study. Though participants did not receive any direct
benefits for being a part of this research, their willingness to contribute provided valuable insights and understanding about leadership within MENA communities of refugee and immigrant women living in the Midwestern United States after resettlement.

**Ethnographic Process**

In qualitative research, the data collection process frequently includes interviews and/or observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Deegan, 2007; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, artifacts and other documents, such as participant writing samples, may be used to help develop a more comprehensive investigative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Richards & Morse, 2013). An important consideration in conducting such research is the issue of gaining access to a research site and developing rapport with one’s participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Spradley, 1979).

In almost all instances, participants must grant permission for their involvement in research and anonymity should be provided (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Wolcott (2009) writes, “One of the opportunities--and challenges--posed by qualitative approaches is to treat fellow humans as people rather than objects of study, to regard ourselves as humans who conduct research among others rather than on them” (p. 17). Taking the proper steps to create trusting relationships and to protect the confidentiality of individuals is key to uncovering honest and thoughtful insights that contribute to the richness of ethnographic studies.

The present research occurred over the duration of three years between 2016 and 2019. For the purposes of this study, the process of data collection and analysis occurred in three defined yet overlapping phases (see Figure 3.1 below). To begin, a great deal of
time was spent in the role of a learner in order to become familiar with the activities of the Helping Hand Community Center. This was documented through observation and carefully detailed fieldnotes as well as reflective memos, which provided opportunities to reflect on such encounters. This initial phase was of particular importance because it allowed for the development of trust with members of this community and the opportunity to identify possible key informants.

Figure 3.1. Overview of data collection and data analysis process.

Essential to the ethnographic process, key informants provided valuable insights and diverse perspectives that helped to construct the researcher’s understanding of this community of immigrant and refugee MENA women. The second phase involved checking this knowledge through the development of questions posed to key informants during one-on-one interviews. While data analysis occurred throughout all phases of the research, the final stage (phase 3) involved the emergence of overlapping patterns and themes that could be triangulated through both observation and interviews.
**Fieldnotes and coding.** To align with the process developed by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) for writing and analyzing ethnographic fieldnotes, brief fieldnotes (called *jottings*) were taken during all observations. These notes then served as a primary reference to assist in the development of detailed fieldnotes, which included the depiction of scenes and *sketches*, or still life depictions through imagery. Additionally, while composing each set of fieldnotes, the researcher added reflective insights, called *in-process memos*, which occurred as asides or commentary about the occurrences of a particular observation. These in-process memos allowed for opportunities to make conjectures about future observations (e.g., participant behavior) and helped focus the attention of the researcher to test these conjectures by, for instance, posing testable questions (Emerson et al., 2011). In this way, data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection, which was unique to the ethnographic approach.

The fieldnotes were then analyzed through careful, line-by-line coding of the occurrences of each observation. For the purposes of this study, the data analysis program MAXQDA was used to assist in the process. During the coding process, *analytic memos* assisted in identifying specific categories within the fieldnotes, and later *integrative memos* were used to help clarify and connect these categories by identifying patterns and common themes across the collection of fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2011). Once possible themes or patterns were identified, code memos were made to help identify particular phenomena or categories and were included within the continuous integrative memo process (Emerson et al., 2011). Finally, the integrative memos provided the basis for thematic analysis of the researcher’s fieldnotes.
Interviews and coding. Beyond the development observational fieldnotes, interviews were conducted with key informants as a fundamental component of ethnographic study. Key informants provided crucial insights and perspectives to help develop understanding of this culture-sharing community and to further clarify meaning. Locating good informants is a common challenge for ethnographers. According to Spradley (1979), a good informant has deep insight and understanding of their culture; they should be members who are fully *enculturated*. Additionally, the length of time an informant has been a part of the community may be helpful to consider, as good informants need to have been a part of the setting for at least one year.

In all, seven key informants were identified and multiple interviews occurred with each. Following Spradley’s (1979) recommendation, a minimum of five to seven one-hour interviews occurred with each informant. These interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed, resulting in nearly 36 hours of interview transcripts for analysis. While the interviews were generally unstructured or semi-structured and largely shaped by the occurrences during observations, examples of the types of questions that were asked are provided in Appendix C.

Several of the overall approaches to qualitative data from Saldaña (2016) were applied in managing the data analysis process. For example, while initial coding involved a line-by-line assessment of the fieldnotes and interview transcripts, large pieces of text were later coded as “lumps” in an attempt to capture the overarching ideas and the underlying nuances contained within this data. Throughout the coding process, existing codes were applied whenever possible, which assisted in identifying patterns and commonalities throughout the data. Additionally, during the entire coding process, the
practice of creating codes from sub-codes was used to help in the organization and development of themes. In many ways, this aligns with Wolcott’s (2009) recommendation for thinking about how each piece of data fits into “folders” of commonality (discussed later in this chapter). This continuous approach toward organizing and reorganizing the data to see how each code and each piece of data fit within the greater context of this study greatly assisted in the development of the emergent themes, which evolved from this research.

The initial coding process involved the identification of the most essential pieces of text within the data by giving particular attention to the data most relevant in answering the research questions. Portions of text, which were recognized as ‘significant statements’ or ‘critical statements,’ were then reevaluated for deeper analysis through first and second cycle coding. The process of writing analytic memos also assisted significantly throughout the process of data collection and analysis as deeper understanding developed with every encounter and immersive experience. The ideas captured within these analytic memos were instrumental in allowing for the integration of member checking throughout the entirety of this study by testing conjectures. Feedback from key informants provided a means to check such ideas and would often allow for further expansion or clarification, or, in some cases, would help with correction or reevaluation.

Because of the complex nature of the data, particularly in terms of the existence of intersectionality (e.g., culture, gender, religion), multiple approaches for first and second cycle coding were used in the analysis of data for this study. Together, the first cycle coding involved an eclectic approach (Saldaña, 2016), which included simultaneous
coding, in vivo coding, and process coding for the purposes of this research.

Simultaneous coding allowed for the application of multiple codes to a single qualitative datum. This approach was appropriate for analysis of data within the present study as both explicit and implied meanings existed within much of the text (Saldaña, 2016). Two additional coding approaches were used during the initial coding process as a part of the eclectic method. This included in vivo coding which was used to capture the notion of culturally specific ideas that were best expressed in the unique words of the key informants. An example of one such code is to “cut off your wings,” which was a phrase used to express oppressive behaviors within the subculture’s immediate community.

Process coding, sometimes called “action coding,” was also used because the research questions could be best answered through understanding processes within the subculture (e.g., what are the actions of a leader?). “Finding ways to cope,” for instance, was an early code which described part of the process for empowerment. It was later one of many concepts which evolved into the category of mental healthcare within the subtheme of resources.

Following eclectic first cycle coding, pattern coding provided an approach for second cycle coding. Pattern coding allowed a process for understanding how these initial codes led to broader themes and provided greater depth and understanding of the data. This process involved a method by which initial codes were grouped together into subcategories (Saldaña, 2016). For instance, three common codes: people looking down on you for certain jobs, being judged, and people “cut[ting] off your wings,” could be grouped into one subcategory which captured notions of judgement and oppression. The category titled, “cut off your wings,” was then grouped within the broader theme of
powerlessness. Using the processes of eclectic coding in first cycle coding followed by pattern coding in second cycle coding, five themes emerged as well as several subthemes and supporting concepts which will be fully discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

**Data Organization and Interpretation**

Wolcott (2009) suggested thinking of one’s data as a series of snapshots in which there is a clear place and time as well as key actors for each. One by one, the key actors may be identified and introduced as a way to begin sorting data toward a descriptive analysis (Wolcott, 2009). Additionally, the process of continuous reflection, writing of analytic memos, and coding of the observational fieldnotes and interview transcripts simultaneously works to integrate analysis with collection in an effort to assist with the organization and interpretation of one’s data.

Wolcott (2009) further recommended a strategy called the “empty folders” approach for organizing data throughout the analysis process (p. 47). In this way, pieces of data are sorted into folders that will eventually become the individual chapters or themes of one’s final writeup. Wolcott (2009) envisioned this process as involving physical hanging folders containing various sets of relevant fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and other artifacts such as photographs. However, the practice can easily be adapted as a virtual process for sorting material on one’s computer. Using this approach helps ensure that each of the themes included will incorporate an array of the varied types of data collected throughout the ethnographic process.

Beyond this, it is important to note Wolcott’s (2009) discussion of data management, which notes that a great deal of collected data will not be included in one’s completed draft of the research findings. A researcher must keep this in mind as he/she
determines what is most important and relevant to the purpose of the study and sets aside the rest of the data. Having stated this, inclusion of data for the purposes of this research was determined on the basis of its relationship to leadership so that the research questions were directly addressed. Through use of these approaches toward data management and sorting, the culmination of this work presents an integrative collage of the participants’ stories along with dynamic contextual detail and in-depth analysis of the major themes that emerge to answer the research questions.

**Validation Strategies**

For the purposes of this study, validation measures included triangulation, member checking, peer review, and thick description. While these strategies overlap in some ways, each approach brought a unique and important means toward validation that improved the quality of and assurance of accurate representation for this study. The validation strategies chosen were those best suited to ethnographic research, the present population, and the analysis approaches selected.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation involves the use of multiple sources of data to corroborate the findings of a theme, perspective, or pattern to validate one’s research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Deegan, 2007; Denzin, 1978). The use of both observational fieldnotes and informant interviews, for example, provides two primary sources of data for the purposes of triangulation (Deegan, 2007). According to Guest (2014), the inclusion of multiple perspectives also provides a means of triangulation. The significance of diverse perspectives is understood through an example of three blindfolded men who are each touching a different part of an elephant (Guest, 2014). If only one man’s perspective is considered, the elephant is defined by its trunk (described
as a snake) because the researcher has only obtained a very limited (and inaccurate) understanding of the situation. Similarly, Wolcott (2009) presented the analogy of a tree in which each method of data collection provides only one branch, or a single vantage point, to view the study. It is the intent of this research to use both means of triangulation presented for validation: two primary sources of data and multiple perspectives.

**Member checking.** Member checking was used to ensure that interpreted meanings are accurate representations of participant perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Harvey, 2015). This occurred primarily through continuous discussion with the key informants about findings as they emerged to confirm accuracy of the researcher’s accounts. In an effort to go beyond what has been broadly thought of as member checking, Harvey (2015) presented a more collaborative approach in which each sequential interview is used to permit a deeper exploration of the participant’s meaning. In this way, the researcher and participant both actively engaged in the member checking process throughout the duration of the present study.

**Peer review.** Offering an external perspective, peer review provides yet another layer of validation through examination of the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The peer reviewer does this by checking methods, meaning, and interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To help check for consistency in analysis of both fieldnotes and interview transcripts, peer review was conducted by a professional with both scholarly and personally relevant experience. For the present study, the peer reviewer offered expertise through knowledge of the specific community of study and past experience in conducting similar qualitative research. This is particularly important in ethnographic research as one’s interpretation and analysis of
data draws largely on his/her understanding of the particular context. Thus, the peer reviewer's immediate knowledge of that context was critical to his/her ability to check for consistency across analysis.

**Thick description.** Finally, “rich, thick, description” is used as an additional means of ensuring validity (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). This is accomplished, in part, through the use of fieldnote features outlined by Emerson and colleagues (2011), including vivid description, characterization, sketches, episodes, and vignettes. Geertz (1973) explained the concept of thick description as much more than the mere documentation of an event or circumstance; it is to provide the detailed context and background information needed to convey the meaning of what is being described. A simple example is the difference between what may be described as rapid shutting of one’s eyelid. This does not tell us whether the subject is winking or blinking--similar acts with different meanings (Geertz, 1973). As ethnographers, the challenge of providing thick description requires an investigation of the particular (Geertz, 1973). Rather than making broad generalizations, ethnographers are interested in understanding the symbols and meanings shared within a cultural group and in ensuring, to the best of one’s abilities, that these interpretations are accurate representations of the individuals’ perceptions.

**Summary**

The Helping Hand Community Center located in the Midwestern United States was presented as the site for research investigation. Through an overview of the five popular qualitative approaches to research, justification for the use of ethnography was demonstrated to address the present research questions investigating the leadership experiences of MENA refugee and immigrant women after resettlement. The process of
data collection and analysis was presented as three primary, but overlapping phases that included: 1) observational fieldnotes, reflective memos, and identification of key informants; 2) development of research-based questions and interviews with key informants; and 3) completion of data analysis and triangulation of overlapping themes and patterns. Lastly, validation strategies including triangulation of multiple perspectives, member checking, peer review, and thick description were discussed.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

Having explored the body of existing literature relevant to the present study and discussed the methodological approach of ethnography, the research findings are presented herein. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to investigate the leadership patterns that existed within a culture-sharing community of MENA refugee and immigrant women living in the Midwestern United States after resettlement. In addition to an investigation of leadership patterns, the present study was interested in understanding how women’s leadership experiences changed or remained consistent in transition from their pre-migration context to post-migration context. Lastly, this work explored the shared process of leadership adaptation throughout the resettlement process. Specifically, this research attempted to investigate whether the MENA women identified within this study emerged as leaders within their community and if so, whether there existed a common process by which this occurred. The present research questions asked:

1. What are the leadership patterns perceived and practiced by MENA refugee and immigrant women living in the Midwestern United States after resettlement?
2. How are changes in the leadership experiences of MENA refugee and immigrant women described from the pre-migration context to post-migration context?
3. What is the shared process of emergence to leadership within this community?

Five major themes emerged through thematic analysis of the data: (1) cultural context, (2) powerlessness, (3) empowerment, (4) unethical leadership, and (5) ethical leadership. Cultural context factors were found to be of particular importance because they had overarching influence within all of the remaining themes. Based on the themes
discovered, a model of leader emergence was developed to answer Research Question 3 through illustration of the shared process from powerlessness to empowerment to practice of leadership. Through comparison of unethical leadership and ethical leadership, Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 were also answered by understanding the perceptions and practices of leadership observed within this shared cultural community. In answer to Research Question 2, while the leadership practices and ideology of the participants did not appear to change from the pre-migration to the post-migration context, ethical leadership was clearly perceived as better supported within the post-migration context than the pre-migration context. Furthermore, in answer to Research Question 1, the participants identified an individualized practice of ethical leadership. The themes which emerged from the data and the ways in which those theses worked to answer the research questions are further discussed within the findings presented later in this chapter.

**Reflecting on Observations, Focus Groups, and Interviews**

As intended, my data collection phase began with weekly attendance at the Helping Hand Community Center during which I observed and took jottings (see p. 66) that were later completed as detailed fieldnotes. I attended Friday classes, which were limited to women only. The classes were two hours long. The first half included English language instruction, followed by another hour dedicated to culturally relevant topics such as enrolling one’s children in school, making an appointment to see a doctor, or locating other important resources in town.

Over time, I became more immersed in the activities of the Helping Hand Community Center and the context of itself. During the summer months when English
instruction was not formally offered, I occasionally taught the first-hour English class. The women who attended the regular Friday classes became familiar with my presence, and though we were often restricted by language, on occasion someone would ask for my assistance to sort through documents, or to draft a letter, or to ask about the process for enrolling in college classes. In addition to my attendance at these weekly classes, I also spent a significant amount of time with the director of the program.

On many occasions, I stayed after the women left in order to ask the director questions about the immediate community or about cultural norms or even about events that had occurred during class earlier in the day. She was always willing to answer my questions, and eventually these meetings became much less formal. We often met over a late lunch or while shopping for groceries. I generally included reflective memos within my fieldnotes based on these conversations with her. I wanted to learn as much as I could in order to truly understand this community and the women within it, which would have been impossible without the contributions of the director in this way.

After attending the Helping Hand Community Center for nearly two years, I was given the opportunity to ask some questions of the women during one of their regularly scheduled classes. The first occurrence was essentially unplanned and I quickly asked some impromptu questions based on my observations and the discussions that had occurred during my time visiting the center. This event evolved into an informal focus group from which I received valuable feedback and information about the perceptions and practices of leadership within the community. Additionally, the women appeared fully engaged in the content of our conversation, and I was provided with two additional opportunities to ask further questions thereafter. Though these informal focus groups had
not been part of the initial plan for data collection, they were invaluable in helping me to develop questions for interviews with my key informants. Furthermore, these occurrences assisted in identifying ideal key informants within this community.

Beyond these focus groups and my weekly attendance at the Helping Hand Community Center, I attended a number of events (field experiences, if you will) that were not originally planned but became part of the context that helped shape my understanding of, and even my own place within, this community. These included fundraising events, engagement parties, lunches, shopping trips, and gatherings following a death. I was frequently invited to such events and attended whenever possible. In the interest of total transparency, I occasionally questioned the value of my participation at these events because I was not sure that they contributed to my understanding of leadership within this community, which was, after all, the focal point of this study.

Now that the study is complete, I can see with great clarity that my presence at these events not only greatly enriched my understanding and appreciation of the cultural context and dynamics between the participants (e.g., their relationships with one another and the roles they played within the community), but also allowed me to build rapport and to develop trusting relationships with the participants far beyond what would have been possible had I only ever interacted with the participants within the context of the Helping Hand Community Center. One such event was an engagement party for the daughter of a woman who regularly attended Friday classes. As one can see from the photographs (Figure 4.1 below), the event was similar to a typical American wedding celebration in many ways. It included a tiered cake, party favors, and a buffet-style table filled with food. The bride-to-be wore an extravagant dress resembling a wedding gown,
though aqua in color, with a full skirt and intricate beading on the bodice, waistline, and hemline.

*Figure 4.1.* Photographs from an engagement party.

This event was limited to women only, many of whom wore formal evening gowns and removed their hijabs (head scarves) once we were inside the private confines of the event’s location. For me, it was the first time I had seen many of them without the hijab, and I found it difficult to recognize a few of them without their hair covered. The meal we ate together consisted of what they called sandwiches but reminded me of a Greek gyro. Cans of Pepsi, bottled water, and dates were also served, followed by cake and candies for dessert. Some of the youngest women, likely teenagers, in the room assisted with serving the food and drinks and taking plates to each table in the room until everyone had been served.
After we had finished eating, we pushed the tables out of the way to make a large space at the front of the room, and then there was a great deal of dancing by virtually all ages of women. Most of the women seemed to enjoy the event though a few of them, most notably Suha, became irritated when the younger girls, the bride’s friends I presumed, took over the music selections. Even so, no one appeared eager to leave when the party ended around 11pm that evening (when the room rental expired); I am quite certain the party would have continued into the early morning hours had it been an option.

After nearly two years of attending the weekly classes and immersing myself within this cultural context, I began interviews with key informants. I quickly realized that the Helping Hand Community Center was not an ideal place to meet because it was generally busy and filled with distractions. Other public locations, such as coffee shops, were imperfect for the same reason, though they did work on occasion. Early on, many of the women began expressing that they would prefer I come to their homes for the interviews. This was a logical request because transportation was an issue for many of them. Additionally, I recognized that most people would feel more comfortable having private conversations within their own homes. As a result, I submitted a change request to the University of Nebraska - Lincoln’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this project and was able to conduct interviews in participants’ homes.

To provide a better idea of what these experiences were like, several photographs of food are provided in Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4. Figure 4.2 includes a radish (far left) which Bushra cut to look like a flower. She seemed to have many plating skills like this and tended to present intricately prepared food. Within this same series of photos (to the
immediate right), there is a cup of tea on a tray, a platter of plum chicken, and dried flowers (type unknown) which were used for making a particular type of tea. The large tables of food (see Figure 4.3) are excellent examples of typical meals that were prepared, and the trays and neatly set tables (see Figure 4.4) are perfectly indicative of the careful attention to detail as a part of the hospitality I experienced.

Figure 4.2. Examples of food and beverages prepared by key informants.

Figure 4.3. Traditional dishes prepared by key informants.
While this made for ideal interviewing conditions, at-home interviews had the unintended consequence of making our meetings quite the event. The women wanted to cook when I came to interview them. They wanted to cook feasts and bake many desserts and make homemade juices and herbal teas (as one can see from Figures 4.2, 4.3, & 4.4). In fact, one of the women had mentioned to the others that I was allergic to rice and they all began cooking alternatives such as barley, couscous, and pasta. They would say, “This one for you,” and immediately begin filling my plate, piling it high with food.

Of course, this was a lovely and flattering sentiment, but I was concerned about creating an undue burden either financially or by taking time that could be used doing other things. I always insisted that they did not go to this trouble, even attempting to schedule my interviews at odd times of the day that were not close to meals (e.g., three in the afternoon). But my attempts failed miserably and they always prepared food regardless. I also tried refusing to eat, providing the excuse that I had just eaten and was

*Figure 4.4. Examples of table settings and plating as prepared by key informants.*
full. However, refusal was insulting as it went against the practices of etiquette within this cultural context. And on the rare occasion I was allowed to refuse food, my host would inevitably make me a plate (or a few) to take for the road.

Eventually, I learned to come with an empty stomach and not to rush the process. Practicing patience was important as we ate, and I tried not to rush the beautiful meal that had been so laboriously prepared. After our meal, we would move from the dining area to the living room, and my host would graciously serve tea or occasionally coffee. This was usually followed by dessert over a coffee table meticulously set with cakes, cookies, wrapped candies, dates, and a variety of nuts. Usually, at least an hour had passed by the time we would begin the actual interview. I learned it was best to clear my afternoon schedule on days that I had planned an interview. Yet, I came to look forward to these gatherings and the delicious traditional cuisine that had been prepared with such great care. In fact, these interview sessions really took on a life of their own. Almost immediately, it became apparent to me that I needed to adjust (and in many ways, relax) my approach to these interactions.

Beyond observing the importance of time, I came to learn other practices of etiquette for these events as well. For instance, it was important to always remove one’s shoes before entering a home. For women, greeting each other involved an embrace along with kisses (pecks really) on the cheek(s). I struggled a bit with the greeting because I kept forgetting which cheek to begin with and how many kisses one should give. I now know that a person always begins with the right cheek and then alternates cheeks if exchanging more than one kiss (this is the part that I found most confusing). Most women exchange three kisses (right-left-right), but some only kiss once and others
twice (right-left or right-right), and still others several times. An elder within the community once told me the more kisses you received from someone, the more that person had missed you. I came to believe that there was some truth to this notion, though she had said it to me jokingly (or at least I thought it was a joke).

In all, I interviewed seven key informants for this study, each on at least five separate occasions. Five of the women requested to have an Arabic-English interpreter; Dahlia and Suha were the only two interviewed in English. The women were interviewed individually, with the exception of Sama, Jana, and Deema, who were interviewed together on all occasions. I had never specifically intended to interview these three women together, but there had been an incident at the Helping Hand Community Center that prompted my initial request for an interview with Sama. Though each of them would have likely become key informants regardless, interviewing the three of them together directly resulted from this incident.

During one of those many Friday English classes, Sama broke down in tears and then did not return to class the following week. I wanted to meet with her to ensure she was okay and to discuss the incident because I did not understand exactly what had occurred. As she did not know me very well (at this point), and given that this had clearly been an emotional experience, she invited Jana and Deema to join her for support. As a result of this event, the three of them were inseparable from that point forward, insisting that they be interviewed together.

The environment was always a bit chaotic when interviewing the three of them together with an interpreter. However, an unforeseen benefit of this appeared to be that the women were able to hear each other's answers. They would sometimes remember
something new or be able to expand further on ideas after hearing the others' responses. This allowed the conversation and rapport between them to form a deeper discussion than may have occurred if the interviews were conducted individually. One other benefit was the fact that they took turns hosting me in their homes, which seems to have lessened the individual burden of preparing food and such for our interviews. Though a bit unorthodox, interviewing the three women together seemed to work well for the purposes of this study and did not appear to negatively impact the data in any way.

In managing the translated responses from interviews, for the purposes of clarification and consistency, all segments are presented in first-person accounts. While most of the responses appeared this way within the transcripts, on occasion the interpreter would flip between third person (she said) and first-person (I said) responses. Aside from this, all excerpts are provided verbatim in an effort to capture the most authentic voices of the key informants. Grammatical errors, pauses, and filler words (like “um”) have typically been included except where indicated by brackets for the purposes of clarifying the participants’ intended meaning.

The primary sources of data analyzed for this research include the fieldnotes from the three focus groups and transcripts from interviews with the seven key informants. Moreover, while the majority of my observational fieldnotes were not used as a primary source because they did not directly contribute toward answering this study’s research questions, they greatly contributed to my personal knowledge, enrichment, and deep understanding of the themes that emerged through immersion and development of rapport. In total, nearly 36 hours of interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed. Over 4,600 pieces of text were coded as significant, and nearly 500 unique
codes were identified. After limiting codes to those occurring only 10 or more times within the data, investigating each of these at a deeper level, and grouping the codes by commonalities, five major themes emerged: (1) cultural contextual factors, (2) powerlessness, (3) empowerment, (4) unethical leadership, and (5) ethical leadership.

**Meeting the Key Informants**

Before exploring the themes that directly worked toward answering the research questions at hand, it is necessary to first introduce the participants. In all, seven women were identified as key informants. They originated from regions of the Middle East or North Africa, specifically Egypt (1), Palestine (1), Morocco (1), and Iraq (4). Apart from one woman, who was Palestinian, all came to the United States seeking asylum as the result of war and/or a realistic fear for their lives. For this reason, these six were considered refugees, while the Palestinian woman was considered an immigrant, for the purposes of this study. This distinction did not appear to alter the findings of this study in relation to the present research questions. All of the women have lived in the United States for more than 10 years with the exception of Bushra and Sama who have lived in the United States for less than five years. In introducing each participant, their place of origin as well as other identifying factors are not disclosed to protect their anonymity. Because of the diversity of this group, providing details such as their ages, or the locations they have lived could make them easily identifiable as their stories are very unique.

The women I interviewed were defined by their strength, resiliency, mental toughness, kindness, compassion, empathy, and love. While they shared the commonality of experiencing significant loss and migration to a country of a different culture from
their own, they were unique individuals who discovered their own paths through powerlessness, empowerment, and finally, to leadership. Yet, there were undoubtedly commonalities throughout their stories. They were daughters, mothers, and, in some cases, grandmothers. They all played roles as pillars within their post-migration community through mentorship, advisement, and provision of care.

**Bushra.** Bushra was the very definition of resiliency. She refused to be discouraged by whatever circumstances she faced in life. Her husband had struggled with severe depression and even attempted to commit suicide shortly after arriving in the United States as a refugee. Her husband was disabled and did not work at the time of this study. Bushra had taken multiple jobs in order to support their family, often working in minimum wage positions. She had several years of experience as a personal cook and prided herself in her knowledge of diverse cuisine, including Moroccan and French dishes.

At the time of this study, Bushra and her husband had a teenage daughter who had been the victim of bullying incidents outside of school and struggled with self-harming behaviors in the past. Bushra had attended mother-daughter workshops to help her daughter learn coping strategies in facing these issues. Every decision she made was focused on what was best for her family.

**Dahlia.** Clearly a strong symbol of leadership within the immediate community, many people trusted Dahlia with their darkest and most intimate secrets. Though she would never admit it, she was often burdened by the troubles of the those who confided in her. Being deeply empathetic, she tended to take their problems on herself. Her knowledge and experiences were invaluable to the community. She moved seamlessly as
a sort of social liaison between her immediate cultural community and the larger local community in which she lived.

She was always willing and ready to help those in need but was frequently overwhelmed with the requests and demands of her community as a result. She felt pressured to uphold an image of perfection because many people looked up to her. These unrealistic expectations left her with a fear of sharing the human and ordinary realities of her own life. At times, she expressed feelings of loneliness and isolation, believing that she must keep her problems to herself as a result.

**Deema.** Deema lived in a small apartment by herself, though she loved to entertain guests. After the death of her husband several years ago, she did not remarry, and her children have since become adults. Her skills and knowledge were extremely diverse. She played many valuable roles within the community, including providing driving lessons for women and teaching Arabic language instruction for children. Her time spent in the United States and knowledge of the local area were also assets as she frequently helped people find the resources they needed.

**Lemma.** Lemma was disabled and completely unable to work at the time of this research. She suffered from diabetes and other maladies. While she had applied for federal assistance, she was awaiting approval when I last spoke with her. As a result, she did not have health insurance and could not afford many of the medications she required. Her teenage son lived with her and was attending college while he worked in a fast-food chain to support them. Her husband had died suddenly in a car accident several years before. She clearly remembered him as the love of her life and still wore his wedding band. Always willing to lend a helping hand, Lemma was known by neighbors and,
virtually all in the community, for her caring qualities. People frequently sought her advice or help to locate resources, such as food, when they were in need.

**Jana.** Jana took immense pride in caring for her three daughters and husband. Her house, like many of the homes I visited, was immaculate and meticulously decorated. She was soft spoken and shy, but incredibly kind-spirited. Over the course of our interviews together, I found her reservations begin to fade. She became more comfortable and trusting of me; more open and willing to express her ideas, though it took some coaxing at times. While she was hesitant to view herself as a leader, her friends and family members often came to her for advice and guidance, which clearly spoke to her role as a leader. She readily acknowledged her shyness and expressed a desire to be more assertive. In one conversation she even expressed envy for her young daughters whom she viewed as bolder and more extroverted than herself.

**Sama.** Tragically, Sama's son had been killed by United States troops during a training incident in her home country. It occurred in a soccer field where children in the neighborhood frequently played together behind their home. Sama witnessed the entire event, which haunts her still today. The trauma of this loss impacted her overall health and was never far from her mind. Her son’s death played a significant role in making the decision to move to the United States as she and her husband feared for the safety of their remaining child, also a son.

Sama lived with diabetes, which onset suddenly following a stressful event involving her other son after coming to the United States. He was recently married, and Sama confided during one of our interviews together that she felt a great amount of angst and sorrow in letting go of him. She was hesitant throughout our conversations to view
herself as a leader though she clearly played various leadership roles within her family as well as her immediate community.

**Suha.** Fiery did not begin to describe Suha. She was opinionated and even a bit brash. Always dependable in providing comic relief when needed, she did not shy away from saying exactly what she thought, often fully unfiltered. She tended to put people off because of her forceful nature and boldness. In reality, she wore a hard-exterior armor to protect herself. She faced many hardships and betrayals throughout her life and was incredibly mindful and skeptical as a result. Those who were able to penetrate this armor found a deep and caring friendship defined by loyalty. Suha lived with her only daughter and her son-in-law along with their two small children. While her home was full, she frequently expressed feelings of loneliness and isolation.

**Findings**

Through analysis of the data, five themes emerged in all: (1) cultural context, (2) powerlessness, (3) empowerment, (4) unethical leadership, and (5) ethical leadership. Using these themes as a guide toward answering the present research questions, a model was developed, which helped to trace the shared experience of the participants from their initial experience of migration resulting in powerless, to empowerment, and finally, emerging as leaders within their immediate community (see Figure 4.5). This process worked to directly answer Research Question 3 (*What is the shared process of emergence to leadership within this community?*) by explaining the shared experiences of developing a personal practice and perceptions of leadership after resettlement. Additionally, though the theme of cultural context may appear to be at the periphery of this study, it was
integral to interpretation of the findings as its influence could be seen within every other major theme.

![Model of adaptation to leadership](image)

**Figure 4.5.** Model of adaptation to leadership.

The theme of ethical leadership was key to answering Research Question 1 (*What are the leadership patterns perceived and practiced by MENA refugee and immigrant women living in the Midwestern United States after resettlement?*). Ethical leadership clearly emerged as an idealized approach toward leadership in both the philosophy and the practice of the participants. Moreover, the supporting concepts within this theme demonstrated the shared patterns of leadership within the immediate subcultural community. In answer to Research Question 2 (*How are changes in the leadership experiences of MENA refugee and immigrant women described from the pre-migration context to post-migration context?*), it is important to understand that this individualized philosophy did not appear to change from the pre-migration context to the post-migration context. However, the participants articulated perceptions which demonstrated how unethical leadership was widespread within the pre-migration context (e.g., political
instability and corruption), while the post-migration context provided a better support system (e.g., legal system) for an ethical approach to leadership. In beginning to look at the subthemes and supporting concepts within each of the five themes, cultural context is of key importance.

**Cultural Context**

Integral to the entirety of this study was the theme of cultural context as it shaped and contributed to the framework for understanding the remaining themes to be discussed. Within the theme of cultural context, three ideas emerged including family, image, and gender norms (see Figure 4.6). Gender norms was a rather complex subtheme which included three supporting concepts: patriarchy, interaction limitations, and covering.

*Figure 4.6. Cultural context theme.*
Family. Indisputably an important cultural value, family emerged as a concept encompassed by the theme of cultural context. Within the immediate community of this study, prioritization of family was at the heart of all decision-making. Loyalty to one’s family was of great importance, and conversely, breaking trust within one’s family was viewed as a deep betrayal. Both extended family (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles) and the immediate family unit (e.g., parents, brothers, sisters) played important roles within this community. As a result, marriage and having a family of one’s own were esteemed and crucial life events for all of the women.

On a particularly warm and breezy afternoon, Suha and I sat on her back porch watching young rabbits eat dandelions from her yard as we spoke. She explained that her father had viewed her birth as a monumental event. Not only was she his first-born child, but she also fulfilled a much greater void in her father’s life. Early in his own life, he suffered the loss of his entire family with the exception of his younger brother. She recounted:

My father, he wanted me my whole life…Because my mother, when she was delivering me, [my father] was away…. He come back …. “Oh my God, oh—a daughter, oh my God! She is my mom, she is my sister, she is my sister, she is my love, she is my light.”…And my father, he doesn't have a sister and he lost his mom when he was six years old…so, he felt really like I'm his sister—I’m everything for him!

Her description of her father’s words many years later reflected the joy that he felt on the day Suha was born. Being everything for him reflected the extent to which family was wholly important to her father; having a child was everything. Throughout our time
together, Suha recalled many stories that demonstrated the extent to which her father doted on her. Without question, he adored her, and his love for her exemplified the deep importance of family. She went on to describe the party that her father gave in celebration of her birth (the entire account had been retold to her by her father many times throughout her upbringing):

[My father] made the party for four days and he invited everybody... after the baby becomes seven days old—and they make a Sebora: The big party... [She then began to sing a tune clapping her hands along with great animation to the words, “Listen to your mom” “ba-ba-ba” “Listen to your father” “Ba-ba-ba-ba”] ...and like that and they make candy and everything. And they have a clay jar, this clay jar is covered with all gold...and around the gold, they cover the clay vase, a big one. It’s as much as you have money, you make it bigger and bigger...And around, candy and peanuts and all kind of goods. Yeah when the kids go around me...they go around me [she sings a song in Arabic, demonstrating the types of songs the children would sing as they danced around her].

While Suha’s story helped to clarify the importance and value of family, Bushra shared a very different account to demonstrate how she prioritized family in making her own decisions and in giving advice to others. In this instance, she described her process for providing marital advice to her sister:

…because I used to have the same kind of things and I was patient with my husband and stuff because I could have been divorced a long time ago. But I took it in one day at a time and I said, well...when problems
happen…I remember the good days that we had, and I tried to work with it. So, I tried to give her advice from my own experience and from life because I'm not young, you know…I've been through so much and I've seen so much…I don’t know how many times…I said, “I'm done. I want to divorce my husband. I'm so tired. I can't take it anymore.” But when I go home, I pray and I read my holy book and I think about my kids, “If I get divorced, what's going to happen to my children? They're going to be lost. What's going to happen to me? I'm not going to remarry.” You know, it's better to have at least a husband. It's called a husband. It's better than being a single mom or something, culturally, you know?

Bushra’s account clearly reflected the priority of family in making decisions, particularly those that impact other members of her family, and especially her children. In addition, her reference to the culture reflected the social stigma associated with being a divorced single-mother and the unlikelihood of her ability to remarry should she choose to divorce her husband.

The importance of family further supported the notion of collectivism, as loyalty and protection of one’s family were central to this concept (Hofstede, 2011). Moreover, Hofstede’s (2001) work highlighted societal practices associated with collectivism including the value of cohesion and group harmony. One aspect of maintaining harmony may be understood through the idea that, “collective interests [are] supposed to prevail over individual interests” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 251). Though collectivism did not appear as an independent concept within this post-migration cultural community or emerge as an explicit theme, it is discussed here because the family unit was the single most important
factor in virtually all decision-making. That is, what was best for one’s family outweighed the interest of an individual member of that family. In addition to the importance of family, undercurrents of collectivism are found within the themes of this study and noted where appropriate. While the prioritization of family clearly emerged as an important value within this cultural context, another important concept was that of image and reputation.

**Image.** I heard notions of *image*, particularly that of cleanliness, echoed throughout the entirety of this study. The idea of being *clean* will be further discussed as a part of ethical leadership later in this chapter. However, the essence of its meaning in relation to status implied integrity and morality as part of one’s religious practice. For women, this was indicative of virtue or purity, maintaining virginity, and virtuous behavior. Dignity, especially that of one’s family, were closely tied to one’s individual image. Having some overlap with the concept of family, it is important to understand that a threat to one’s own reputation was realized as a threat to his/her entire family’s reputation.

On an afternoon in Bushra’s living room, not a single item appeared out of place. The interpreter and I sat together across from Bushra on cream colored couches. She had made us an herbal tea from a type of dried flower I did not recognize. The hot liquid was a dark shade of magenta and tasted strong and bitter without sugar. Bushra shared her view of the importance of one’s personal religious practice and discussed how the perception of image impacts behavior:

When we got, started brought up, as soon as we opened our eyes, we saw our father and my mom prayed. But some of my brothers and sisters, they
don't pray. They don't practice. Now some of them, like an older, they go, they're coming back to religion and stuff. Because most of the time back home people like, all of their life, they don't, they stay away from God when they weren't at the time that they feel like, “Oh, now the pleasure is less. I don't have that desire anymore for, I can't keep up with the partying anymore and all these things, or the money runs out. Now where do I go? God.” So now people go back to God, you know, to pray and stuff. So, my sister, she never prayed. You know, God rest her soul, she died. Some of my brothers, they don't. Some of them went back to religion and they pray on time and stuff. So, it depends. I think sometimes it's the family dynamics. Some people just go for prestige that, like my, my friend, his father went now to Mecca for pilgrimage. He never, he never prayed ever. He always drank…

For Bushra, the importance of one’s religion went beyond that of image. Yet, her words suggested the significance of this notion as a part of the cultural context. The example of her friend’s father showed a man who never really practiced Islam, but he completed the pilgrimage to Mecca seemingly to bolster his image. In another example, Dahlia explained how people within her immediate cultural community, especially Arabs, tended to be fearful of using services that could threaten their image:

…The culture here, a lot of the morals of Islam is here found in the American culture, but they're not Muslims. You know, back home we have a lot of Muslims, but they don't practice Islam the way they're supposed to be. Because here, people like when, as I talk to people about
going for psychiatric help or to get food and clothing or like Goodwill is having 99 cents [sale] this week, you know, “Go get some,” “Oh no, we don't go to these places.” They go behind other people's back. I could have people sometimes call me, “Is there any Arabic people upstairs?”

Dahlia’s example revealed how people would even sometimes call her to ask if other Arabs were at the Helping Hand Community Center because they did not want to be seen using these services. She expressed frustration with this mentality, not just on this occasion, but repeatedly in our conversations. She felt that people were often so concerned with their status or image that it hindered them from seeking the help or resources they badly needed. She was not frustrated by the concept of image itself, but with people’s distorted interpretation of it that extended to things such as not using resources because they were commonly associated with poor people. Clearly, the idea of image or reputation was complex and played out in many ways within this community.

**Gender norms.** Another important concept related to the idea of image was that of gender norms. Three distinct ideas emerged that made up these gender norms: patriarchy, interaction limitations, and covering. The gender practices observed within this cultural context are based largely on religion, as in the case of interaction between unrelated members of the opposite sex and rules for covering. However, cultural practices not specifically based on religion also played a role in shaping these norms. Additionally, interpretation and observation tended to vary slightly from one individual to another.

**Patriarchy.** It is difficult to fully describe patriarchy within the constraints of this work because the influence of gender and patriarchy within many Arab cultural contexts is such a vast topic. For the purposes of this study, patriarchy was used to reference the
general privilege of and preferential treatment towards men. In many ways, this notion afforded greater power to men. This concept was important as it played out in ways that largely impacted accessibility for women.

In a demonstration of this, Suha recalled an incident many years ago when her husband (now ex-husband) learned she was pregnant and expressed his wishes for a baby boy. The circumstances under which the child had been conceived were not ideal. The marriage had been arranged between her father and a close friend with a son near her age. Suha’s father passed away before the marriage occurred, and she had tried unsuccessfully to break off the engagement. Based on her account, after being married only a short time, her husband gave her a substance without her knowledge that made her dizzy and very tired. He took advantage of her while under the influence of this unknown substance, and the child was conceived as a result. She recalled his words about her pregnancy:

“Suha, I need a boy. I’m gonna call him Mohammed … I want a son to call Mohammed.” [She pauses.] I say, “ʾIn shāʾ Allāh (God willing), I’m gonna have a girl. No no no, it’s not gonna be up to you, it’s up to God. Go talk to Him. [I] tell Him, “Al-ḥamdu lil-lāh (thank God)!” when I have Maha (a daughter). [My husband] was in Suez Canal. [She pauses.] He was working, he have a good position in the company, very good company. Suez Canal, it’s canal all the ships from around the world passing by…He got good salary. After that, he never give me a penny.

Unfortunately, her story is not one that is especially uncommon. Preference for male offspring is expected primarily because men want an heir to carry on the family name. Suha was able to divorce her husband after her daughter, Maha, was born and
negotiate to have full custody. According to Suha, Maha’s father never made any attempt to be a part of his daughter’s life.

As another consequence of patriarchy, Sama explained how after her sister’s husband passed away back home, her father-in-law and mother-in-law attempted to assert their power through their teenage grandsons. As discussed previously, the importance of extended family means this type of outside intervention is not particularly uncommon. This situation was also complicated by the fact that elders tend to be respected within the cultural context (though this did not emerge as part of the cultural context theme presented here), which meant their opinion came with a significant amount of weight.

Sama shared:

[My] sister, she lost her husband….about a year and a half ago. So, and her kids are teenagers and she's back home in Iraq. And uh, their grandparents from their dad's side, they tried to get the kids to, to be growing up, more than what they, like before their age. They’re teenagers, but they want them to become like men to, to make sure like they are in charge of the household, make sure their mom is not doing anything, anything! They should be the men of the household. They should want everything. Even though they are young, they don't have experience, “make sure your mom doesn't do this, make sure your sister doesn't do that and make sure like this and that.”

Even though the boys in this example were only teenagers themselves and still had a great deal of maturing to do, their grandparents’ assertions to take authority within their household demonstrated the privilege afforded men within the cultural context.
Because of the physical distance between her and her sister, Sama felt limited in her ability to help with the situation. She and her husband, however, attempted to ease tensions by speaking with the boys and urging them to listen to their mother and to respect her. At the time of this interview, Sama’s husband was still calling the boys, often daily, via video chat to help provide positive guidance to them. She confided her fears that they may be prone to the influences of their peers and could partake in drugs or other illicit activities. Unfortunately, their influence was greatly limited by the distance between them. In addition to patriarchy, interaction limitations between men and women also arose as a common idea within the theme of cultural context.

**Interaction limitations.** Yet another important practice that impacted both men and women were the constraints around interacting with unrelated members of the opposite sex. These rules were based on Islam and essentially stated that unrelated men and women should not be alone together. However, there exist differences in interpretation as to whether this should be applied in large gatherings of many unrelated men and women, or only in settings where one man or one woman would be alone with members of the opposite sex. Depending on the context and the interpretation of this rule within that context, men and women may be fully segregated, as is the case in Saudi Arabia. In virtually all public spaces, including educational institutions and public transportation, men and women have designated areas, which are separate from each other (Baki, 2004). Examples of such interaction limitations demonstrate the importance of understanding these practices and the value of skillful navigation among MENA women, especially when living in a cultural context that is different from their own.
On one of our many afternoons together, Suha shared her thoughts on some of these rules. Here, she noted her belief that they were often difficult to fulfill:

I read a lot, I see a lot, I learn a lot about Islam now, and it’s a lot of things you have to be careful of. Shaking hands with men. So, [She pauses.] when you got angry with your husband, okay, just go say sorry and this not right. [She pauses.] Sorry word is not gonna clear everything between you and your wife…Yeah. It’s a lot of things really, really difficult! But this is supposed to be…it’s supposed to be. Did you know the cousins they can’t sit together? In one room? [She pauses.] …For old women like me, who cares? It’s my cousin, I’m not gonna hug him and kiss him and attack him. [I chuckle at her remarks.] But this is the Islamic rule. Yeah. [She pauses.] So, you better be careful. I hope you have two boys. [I chuckle again.]

She also mentioned that Muslim women are not supposed to shake hands with (or in any other way touch) unrelated men. Additionally, her comments about marriage may seem a bit unremarkable at the surface, but there exist many rules about the duties of husbands and wives in Islam. She provided the example of not going to bed angry. In this context, it is not simply that saying sorry falls short of conflict resolution, but also that intention is essential to everything in Islam. In fact, the practice of criminal sentencing within many Muslim countries is based on individual intent. Did he/she intend to do this? Or was it a terrible accident? All of this is to say, when Suha made mention of “sorry” not being enough, she was highlighting that simply saying the words is insufficient. One
must actually be sorry and have the intention of remorsefulness, which often requires action beyond only speaking the words.

In the last few lines, Suha also seemed to poke some fun at the fact that she was an elderly woman but must still follow such rules even with her male cousins (again, the interpretation of whom is unrelated may depend a bit on the specific context). In this, she hinted at the idea that some rules may be a bit extreme. Her last comment to me about hoping for two boys was based on the fact that she knows of my marriage to a Muslim man. Here, she was acknowledging that my life and the life of my children within an Arab-Islamic family would be easier if I had boys. Her comment not only spoke to the level of rapport between us, but also reiterated the notion of patriarchal thinking within this context.

Dahlia also discussed some interaction limitations as she responded to one of my questions about the major adjustments she has had to make since coming to the United States:

…Traveling some time by myself. That's a big thing. Back home, women usually don't travel by themselves, they have male escorts with them. Working with men, talking to stranger, like men, that are not my family members. That's a big adjustment…. Sometimes, even eating in the classroom with the students, male and females that’s sometimes a big adjustment. Just talking to them, that's a big adjustment because not everybody view you that you're honest and you're nice and you just, you know, that's the way you are. You don't mean anything by it. It's just a class picnic, you know, we're all going to sit in class and eat.
In her role as a sort of cultural liaison both formally and informally, Dahlia was often required to interact with unrelated men, those who were both members of her cultural community and those who were not. I observed her many times during such interactions and came to recognize some of the ways she has adapted her behavior to work within this role without jeopardizing her image or reputation. For instance, when a man puts his hand out to shake her hand, she will cross her right hand over her heart and simply say something like, “Oh, I’m very sorry sir, but I don’t shake hands with men. It’s very nice to meet you.” She was very skilled at these types of practices, making them virtual non-issues, and always ensuring those around her felt welcome and comfortable.

Another key point came from Dahlia’s comment about not knowing how people will view her. This was a clear reference back to the importance of reputation within the cultural context. As discussed earlier in this chapter, image, as in this case, was complex and added another layer within this theme that required skilled navigation. Dahlia once shared with me that she would occasionally be contacted by the police to request her services as an interpreter. While she had done this many times in resolving things such as domestic disputes, once or twice they had called her in the middle of the night. Within this cultural context, one might already be viewed as pushing the boundaries of gender norms through interaction with unrelated males and working alongside men. To further test these norms by going out in the middle of the night alone (even if it is to help the police) would be extremely ill-advised. Of course, Dahlia understood the potential threat to both her personal image and her family’s reputation were too great to risk taking such actions. As with interaction limitations, covering was another focal point within the theme of cultural context.
Covering. The final concept related to gender norms was that of covering, which refers to modesty. Another Islamic-based practice, the rules for covering depended somewhat on the interpretation of its religious observers. In common practice for women, it is important to cover one’s body from the neck to one’s wrists and ankles, only exposing one’s face, hands, and feet. Additionally, women usually wear a scarf called a hijab that covers her hair and neck (see Figure 4.7 below). In contrast, men are only required to cover the section of the body from the naval to the knees.

Figure 4.7. Woman wearing hijab (stock photo by Imat Bagja Gumilar on Unsplash).

For women, the practice of covering was significant because it meant that they were instantly identifiable as practicing Muslims. Bushra shared her feelings of fear in this regard and explained how she planned to wear something more like a turban or hat so
she would be less identifiable while still preserving her religious practice. She reflected on the negative social perceptions associated with Muslims, particularly since Donald Trump’s presidency and the enactment of policies like the Muslim Ban:

Now people look at us like, oh these people are all terrorists because of what [President Trump] always say because what he, how he reacts to Muslims and stuff. So, he doesn't act like that. Now…I go to work; I don't wear a scarf. I would like the turban [like] Suha [wears], ‘cause I don't want people to talk bad about me….

I asked Bushra how she felt about not being fully covered (because her neck would be exposed), and she explained that in her home country, the customs for covering are a bit more relaxed. This allowed her to feel that she was still honoring her faith as she shared:

…In [my] culture, if you just cover your hair like this, that's fine. [She gestured to show that just her hair could be covered without covering her neck.] That's covering that doesn't, doesn't include this or include this [gesturing to her neck and her chest]. So, it's fine for [me]. We come from culture, even back home we'll have some people, they still wear like mini…like shorts. Not short shorts, but shorts… close the bottom of their leg and the arm. That's fine to [us], you know? So, it just depends ….Yes, when [I go] to work, I feel, I’m afraid if I put the scarf on, so that when the turban gives me a little bit more peaceful going to work…

Bushra’s experiences demonstrated how rules about covering left her feeling fearful due to anti-Muslim rhetoric. Fortunately, she was able to find an alternative that allowed her some comfort without violating her personal religious practice. In one of my
conversations with Dahlia, we discussed much of her time spent in a refugee camp prior to coming to the United States. The location of the camp was in a country with a strict observance of gender-based laws, stricter than those Dahlia’s family practiced. When she first arrived in the camp, she was only 15. By the time her family left to come to the United States three years later, she was married and had a newborn. She described the enforcement of the rules for covering when they arrived at the camp, which included the use of a tool similar to a cattle prod if anyone refused to conform:

…The treatment [she pauses and then speaks in a hushed and serious voice], it was bad. As soon as the United States troops left and it was just [the natives] now, oh. [She pauses.] They call you very nasty names, they look dirty at the women. Now you have to cover your face. If you don’t cover, the zzzt [she makes a zapping noise and gestures with her arm as though to poke me with an imaginary stick] … You have to cover your face, “you’re Muslim,” they say, “you’re committing a sin [she takes a deep breath], you know you have to cover.” My mom said, “I’m not gonna cover my face. I’m covered top to bottom, only my face and my hands. That’s what, that’s what God said. No!” And [she blows a long breath out through her lips and shakes her head] yea [she’s silent as she reflects]…Of course I have to cover and everything. Got there, there was so many people in the same and we’re of course always an army personnel with us, driver, and another person always have his gun drawn, just in case we get a runaway or something….

Dahlia’s account, while extreme, helped to express the seriousness with which covering is taken. And even amongst Muslims, there tended to be disagreement as to how
these practices are supposed to be observed. Nonetheless, they are important practices within the cultural context, and they effect women in terms of making them identifiable as Muslims and, in some cases, the targets of religious discrimination.

Taken together, the cultural contextual themes presented within this section helped shape an understanding of the complex layers that existed within this study. The remaining themes to be presented are related to the research questions through their focus on both the perception and practice of leadership. However, the cultural contextual factors of family, image, and gender norms are deeply related to and integrated throughout these other themes.

**Powerlessness**

All the key informants within this study shared the common experience of migration to the United States. While their paths differed in terms of their personal experiences (e.g., ages at which they migrated, number of times relocated, family members who were able to migrate with them, etc.), they all experienced significant loss that resulted in a state of powerlessness. Some women spent time in refugee camps prior to their arrival, while others came directly from their home country. Even the Palestinian woman—who came in order to provide a better life for herself and her family, not as a refugee--experienced the loss of virtually everything in this process. Several factors emerged within the theme of powerless and are represented in the model included below (Figure 4.8).
As is the case for many refugees, most of the women in this study came to the Midwest after being placed in another state by the United States Office of Refugee Resettlement. They relocated to the Midwest due to lack of resources or the inability to find employment. When this occurred, any funds or resources designated to the family by that state were completely forfeited. This left them fully dependent on friends, family, or other local non-government agencies to help find housing, food, and other resources to survive after moving to the Midwest. This also resulted in the loss of any friends or other connections they had developed within those original locations, requiring them to once more start from essentially nothing.

Dahlia was among those who had moved following her initial placement, selecting the Midwest because her husband had a friend who lived in the area. She discussed the dependency on this family friend and their struggle to make it after moving.
I asked if most refugees were aware that they will lose their assistance for living expenses and medical care when they relocate to another state. She explained that there is so much happening when one first arrives, in addition to coping with any traumatic experiences they may have had along the way, that it is easy to simply lose track of what is happening.

Yea, all at once, boom! All this information! We’re not computers here, you know. And then plus, you have, maybe a loved one back home, some things were bad, you came from refugee camp. Did you fly right away to come here because of certain situations? Were you in prison all these times? Were you tortured before and you cannot still comprehend all these? It depends, you know, so it’s hard. It’s hard coming and settling and moving on and do everything right, you know?

In addition to the initial culture shock and feelings of being overwhelmed, some of the women faced further losses after migration. This was the case for Bushra, whose husband struggled with severe depression that left him unable to work. Likewise, Sama’s sudden onset of diabetes drastically weakened her overall health and required that she give herself shots in the stomach daily. In Lemma’s experience, the death of her husband shortly after arrival to the United States left her wondering how she would survive. In her own words, she shared:

[I] was in shock, but I was really scared. My faith is good even then at the time. But because of the shock of it, you know, because of the what happened, it sort of like shook [my] faith a little bit. Just a little bit…I feel like, I felt very weak; poor. Especially with my husband when he died ‘cause that's when I, I was shocked with his loss and I felt like all I have
no power. While I was powerless, I couldn't do anything. But then I remember God is with me and I started going out with my friend's, going to my doctors. I had to regain that. But it's...an awful feeling. You have to go through that.

Lemma's experience reflected her feelings of fearing the unknown future while relying on her faith to get her through a difficult period. Having faith emerged as a subtheme of empowerment and will be discussed later in this chapter. In yet another account, Bushra shared her feelings of frustration during an afternoon that we met at the Helping Hand Community Center to talk. We were able to use a private room where the board frequently met. The basement room seemed dim despite it being lit by overhead florescent lights. Background noise filled the space, as the rooms were not well-insulated. The room seemed particularly cold as Bushra, our interpreter, and I sat at one end of a table large enough to seat 10 or 12 people. Despite this, Bushra was open and candid as she had always been:

…When you come here, life is much different. Here in America, if you don't work, you don't eat. So, you have to have a job and [to] get a job is very difficult. And if you get a job and then the government is always on your case, “how much do you make? We're going to cut this. We're going to cut that. We're going to do this.” …So, it's always like, they're always like holding you by your neck. Like “don't, don't drink too much, don't swallow too much, don't do this.” …If you sit and you don't work, you have no future. If you, if you work, then they count every penny on you.
There's too much taxes, there's too much this and too much that, you know? So, it's like, what do you do? When you don’t have an education?

Bushra’s words demonstrated the frustration felt by many of the women. A common sentiment was the perception that overcoming one obstacle simply meant facing yet another, unforeseen hurdle. It is indicative of the saying, “Two steps forward, one step back,” where progress was slow and difficult because there are so many factors one must overcome. The next concept within the theme of powerless was based on Dahlia’s words, “you’re weak,” which helped to elaborate on the understanding of being without power. Powerlessness is complex, and by its very nature, self-perpetuating; the less power one has, the more difficult it is to gain (Seligman, 1992).

“You’re weak.” During the same interview with Bushra at the community center, she explained how she perceived powerlessness and its impact both physically and mentally:

…When you don't have power, people get sick, get very weak. They get depressed, they feel very lonely. No one is listening to them. No one even care for them. And that's very hard on the body. That's very hard on the person because when you feel weak and you're unwanted, that's, that's a very sad thing to feel this way. But that's how people feel like, you know? … And where do you go? What do you feel? That's, that's what you feel.

Bushra describes powerlessness as an illness, linking it to depression which may have psychological as well as physiological consequences. Here, her words may be simultaneously metaphorical and literal, as in both cases it accurately depicts the sense of loneliness and, perhaps, worthlessness she associated with not having power. Dahlia’s
perspective of powerlessness was similar in terms of individual weakness but alludes to a greater sense of personal ownership:

You're weak. People take advantage of you. You don't know what's going on. You can't decide even for yourself, for your family. You let people run your life I think. And if they're good people, hopefully they run it in a good way. If they're bad, they take— they’re gonna take advantage of you big time. A lot of people going to take advantage of you and abuse you, which is very sad. But, uh, that's when you don't have power. You don't have a voice; you don't stand up for yourself. People take advantage of you most of the time, you know, take advantage of your money, your health, your time, your education… Or [it’s] like being in prison far away from people, far away from technology. You’re far from the world, you don't know what's going on around you, and all of a sudden they say you are released and you come and you can't recognize nothing around you, because it's like- you feel like you've been locked up for a long time. Sometimes we choose to lock ourselves into those situations. And then when we come out, we don't know what to do, how to act. So, you know, we need time to adjust.

Dahlia’s description provided the visualization of a prison to represent powerlessness; a prison in which people sometimes choose to hold themselves. While she acknowledged that powerlessness is weakness, her perspective was not one of helplessness but rather circumstances where an individual has a choice in surrendering his/her power. This was reflected in statements such as “you let people run your life,”
“you don’t stand up for yourself,” and “sometimes we choose to lock ourselves into those situations.” Her view seemed to suggest a greater sense of internal locus of control, which is another concept to be discussed as part of the empowerment theme.

“You are naked.” Another In Vivo code which emerged as a theme, the concept of being naked was indicative of not having enough to ensure essential needs are met, particularly money. Statements from Suha and Dahlia clearly demonstrated this concept in relation to feeling powerless. I met Suha for lunch, and we elected to go to a local Chinese buffet that seemed to be a favored location within the community of women. It was a busy afternoon, and a child at a nearby table cried throughout our interview, but Suha seemed unbothered by this. At one point in our interview, she even stopped and cooed at the child, smiling and clapping as she attempted to ease the child’s cries. She shared with me a lesson about having enough to protect oneself that she had taught to her own grandchildren:

...We don’t learn that way because, when you have new language in new land, it’s so difficult. You can’t have $5.00 and give somebody $5.50. You don’t know what’s gonna happen to you tomorrow... I teach like that, this my way. I told [my grandkids], when you have money it’s like a blanket; cover you from whatever’s gonna happen. Rain, snow, hot, any kind. So, you have a cover. Don’t be naked, nothing! Naked, without money, you are naked.

Dahlia, further elaborated on her own perception of powerlessness, which she expressed as a function of dependency on others, describing each factor as a rope that binds, leaving one with less and less power:
If you don't drive, you rely on other people. So, you're going to have limitations. If you don’t have a job and have no money. You can’t practice your English; you can’t practice your driving. So, you become like, you know, so you can’t become stronger at driving and speaking. That all puts more limitations on you. Like more, more ties like you're tied. Like maybe, some people, like have like one rope around them; the language. And the other rope; somebody’s telling them they can’t drive. They don’t have a job; that’s another rope. So, imagine, some people have so many tied… you need to open these ropes and relieve yourself of all of that.

Dahlia went on to express a viewpoint with which I have become familiar: if going ‘back home’ was an option, it would be the only option. Life in the United States was overall better than living in a war zone or fearing for one’s life, which meant it is an improvement from the lives these women left behind, but it was not idyllic. They mourned their previous lives, their homes, being surrounded by the familiar, having friends and family nearby, and living within a cultural context that was their own. From my own experiences, I found this is difficult for most people to comprehend unless they have lived in a culture different from their own for an extended period. With conviction, Dahlia shared her thoughts on the subject:

Because when you don't know whether you’re going to have the income or not to pay your rent and utilities, you’re gonna be out on the street, you're not going to be able to sleep. You're not going to eat, so drive you nuts. And I think that's what [President Trump’s] pushing people for that, you know? [She pauses.] And then the border, all of that. And it's like, every situation you look at, you know. People
come here. People in Mexico or South American countries, if they have it better
than that back in their own countries, why would you sacrifice all of that to come?
I'm sorry, Tiffani, to be honest with you, there is not life here. We’re almost like
robots. We work all our lives and when we get to those people's age, people over
there [she gestured to some elderly people who were sitting at a table nearby], the
life that passed us. Yeah, you didn’t enjoy your life. Then you’re going to have all
of these diseases, they’re not going to be enjoying food as before or you don't
have the energy to go out anymore and vacation. Like you just work and pay
taxes, work and pay bills and we’re like the hamster wheel.

Dahlia’s use of the hamster wheel as a metaphor along with her description of
people as robots alluded to feelings of degradation in describing life in the United States.
From her perspective, a life focused entirely on survival was not the quality of life she
wished for herself or others. A conflating factor that emerged as an additional code was
loss of federal and state assistance programs. Both Lemma and Suha expressed desire for
the continuation of such programs and better availability for those in need.

**Losing assistance.** Suha’s words captured a common feeling of fear that changes
under President Trump’s administration could result in the loss of government programs
such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (commonly referred to as
food stamps) that help supplement the living expenses of refugees and others in need:

Listen, if you start something you have to continue, don’t stop it. ‘Cause
these people, they have to, they have to leave their country. Pushing them
to leave the country. They don’t come over here by self…No, this is the
only country open her arm, and welcome everybody…No, because you
start something, don’t stop it. Like food stamps, I hear Donald Trump, he want to cut the food stamp and he want to cut the one, what you have, what you call it? Welfare? Go find a job, where is the job? They know people graduate from college and they can’t find a job. What are you talking about? [She pauses.] Why you have to stop this system? It just isn’t, United States build on this system for many years. [She hits table for emphasis with her hand.] Don’t do something stupid. You want people hate you?… Is [President Trump] a person you can trust? …No don’t ruin anything. Don’t ruin any system. This system, it been many years. Don’t cut anything for anybody. She pauses.] You open your arm, you gonna accept people, give them something to live. That’s it…

Clearly, her remarks expressed a viewpoint of value for government assistance programs like these. Additionally, she believed the discontinuation of such programs would undermine the trust of immigrants and refugees who have come to see the United States as a country of refuge and support. Her words also touched on the broader theme of trust, which will be discussed within the section on leadership. Similarly, Lemma shared a more personal perspective of helplessness and her desire for more accessible assistance:

[I] feel like [President Trump] should be more merciful to people. The people who are sick, as soon as he came to power, they cut off some of our food stamps. As soon as my son worked, few hours, he's not making much. They cut off my Medicaid. I can't walk that long. I cook for half hour; I have to come and sit and then get up again and do dishes or cook
again or do something. Last year, I tried to walk from here to the Arabic store. I couldn't. I had to sit in the middle of the street because my legs start to go numb and I couldn't finish. So, my son said, “Mommy, get up. You know, you're embarrassing me. I feel like you're like a homeless person sitting on that.” I can't because I'm sick. I can't control it…[I] felt like [President Trump] should be more merciful to people because if you're more merciful to people, God will love you and care and care about you and people will love you. So, if you're not being merciful with people, that's too bad… [I don’t] know what they did to me. Like, they cut off the food stamps or Medicaid or is it because of the presidency? Because of his policies? The new policies? Is it just the government? Maybe it has nothing to do with him. I don't know.

Lemma’s experience demonstrated both frustration and confusion in not fully understanding why her own benefits including SNAP and Medicaid had been discontinued. When I last met with her, she was in the process of filing for disability benefits but had not yet received a determination notice.

Stress. The combined stresses of moving to an unfamiliar cultural environment in addition to the fear of not having the means to survive created significant pressure and contributed to a sense of instability described by many of the key informants. Dahlia spoke to this and the increased regulation of assistance programs during one of our meetings:

Like food stamps, a lot of it, agency has put a lot of new rules on caseworkers. Until now, they’re almost like, almost like kicking people
out of the benefits and sometimes people have no other means to pay rent and live in this country [than] by being on welfare because of their situation. I think we're all pushing people to beg. We are pushing people, like to beg on the street or to be thieves to steal to survive, or pushing people to be the more mentally unstable, be more stressed.

Though there are social stigmas related to the idea of seeking mental healthcare, both in the United States and perhaps even more so within Arab communities (Dardas & Simmons, 2015; Zolezzi, Alamri, Shaar, & Rainkie, 2018), some of the women sought guidance to manage stress. As we sat in her living room during our final interview session, Lemma shared how she struggled to cope with her feelings of fear and nervousness:

Going to the doctor was, it's always good, but sometimes I tell my doctor, take the medications, go to the sessions, it helps me a lot. But sometime, I try to be as much as much as possible to be patient, but I'm scared a lot. I get so scared, very easily scared of the unknown. So sometimes I feel like, the things happen, and I get so nervous and I start shouting, I start screaming. So somehow, I don't want to do that because my blood pressure will go up, diabetes will go up, other things will go up. So, I just take some time, my cup of tea and go to the site, can garden and go to any garden. Like, so see the greenery, the flowers, water, and that will help me a lot to calm down. And then after that I'm fine. So, yeah, sometimes that makes me, you know, the nervousness and the scaredness that makes me feel uncomfortable…. Yeah. It's hard. They said what you, you've been
through with your husband, of course, makes anybody lose their mind. You know, it's tough. It's very, very hard. So, it's not easy losing a loved one. Losing your husband in that short period of time, coming into a new country. And especially if your husband was a good, a good man, he took care of you and he cared about you. That makes, that makes a big difference.

Lemma’s account reflected the day-to-day impact that this type of stress has, not only on one’s mental state, but also one’s physical condition. She faced a battle each day to set aside her very real fears in order to protect her overall well-being through practices she had learned during therapy.

**Diminished health.** As with Lemma, who also struggled with physical manifestations of her stress including high blood pressure and diabetes, several of the women discussed illnesses that impaired their overall health. In an afternoon shared with Sama, Jana, Deema, and our interpreter, Sama shared a traumatic experience that resulted in lasting implications:

Sometimes, we lose control. Sometimes, we are too nervous or too emotional and sometimes you don't know what to do. My son was, one time, he had a car accident. The next time he was stopped by the police, he didn't have his driver's license with him or anything and one of the lights wasn't working and it was at night and the police stopped him. He gave him a ticket, but we didn't know that he, I thought he's going to be taken away to prison and that's how I became diabetic right away. I fainted. I fell. All my body was turned blue.
Sama’s response to the significant stress regarding her son is emblematic of a common physiological effect (i.e., one’s level of blood sugar can fluctuate in response to stress) (Carlson, 2019). Her account showed just one example of the high risk of physiological damage that can result from the types of stress commonly endured by refugees. Conversely, Jana’s story revealed a different type of illness. Her example reflected symptoms of post-partum depression, which is not especially uncommon, but the situation may be compounded when resources are limited and access to help is not always readily available. Jana shared:

After I gave birth to my children, I get really depressed for the longest time. And I was seeking help, but I didn't think it helped me or even the medications helped me. It comes and goes on its own. When it's done, that's it. I’m just like a new person again. Like, I go back to the old [Jana]. But when it's here, no one can change anything…. I don’t change my clothes, I don’t brush my hair, I don't do nothing. I don’t leave the house and I get very, very depressed. Depression after, after every time I give birth… I was in a different world than them. I was too scared to stay by myself, but I don't want to listen to anybody. I want people to come and talk and be around me. But I'm way out there like my, my body's there, but my brain is somewhere else. And the medication, most of the time that makes you sleepy, but for me, even it didn't make me sleep so I can relax….It didn't.

In Jana’s case, despite her ability to find professional help, nothing but time seemed to help ease her depression. Both instances shared by Sama and Jana reiterated
the importance of access to all types of healthcare. Beyond the concept of diminishing health, yet another commonly shared experience was that of trust violation.

**Violation of trust.** Throughout my research, I heard countless stories where trust had been blatantly violated. As a result, the women felt deeply betrayed and hesitant to trust others. In the examples provided herein, it becomes clear how the violation of one’s trust contributed to a sense of powerlessness. On an afternoon when we met at Sama’s home, Deema provided a metaphorical visualization of this common obstacle:

> When I came here, I was a blind person and I ran, and I hit a wall and I ran again, and I hit a wall again and hit the wall on my other side. From all the sides of my body. People kept taking advantage of me. Scaring me, kept threatening me; they're gonna report me to immigration, they're gonna report me to this….

Her perception of being blind and running into walls on all sides perfectly illustrated how violation of trust contributed to the overarching theme of powerlessness. During this same interview, Deema went on to share how her own trust had been broken by a friend:

> [I] trusted somebody back home and gave them full power of attorney over my things that I owned back home; a full release….And that person removed all my belongings to his name; whatever I owned back home. And he took it. And now he is really, really poor. He lost everything and he said, he told people, “Please tell [Deema] not to seek God against me or pray to God against me, because I don't want something to happen to me,
because I did something bad to her. And I took all her assets and I then, I violated her trust.” But I can't, that's, that's what happened.

In the same way, Lemma shared her own account in which a friend tragically exploited her trust during a time when she was especially vulnerable following her husband’s death:

I put my trust in one of my friends, male friends when I was in Chicago. Once I got my other settlement from my husband's death and…he said, “What are you going to do with [the money]? I don't want you to waste it. Let's think of something. You still have young son, uh, let's, let's open a business together with your money and I can run the business.” And he lost the money. Lost the money. I lost the money.

In both Deema and Lemma’s accounts, as in many others, the individuals who had betrayed their trust were close friends. Consequently, the lasting impacts of such experiences tended to be that of distrust. This was particularly true given that a common characteristic of many Arab cultures is low propensity to trust (Jamal, 2007).

**Distrust.** A general sense of skepticism, or in extreme cases even paranoia, tended to exist within this community of MENA refugee and immigrant women. As the excerpts below reveal, distrust is something that was both culturally embedded--commonly a part of one’s upbringing--and also reiterated by instances of violation to one’s trust. Deema shared a piece of her upbringing indicative of the beliefs many of the women grew up learning:

[My] mom, she told me like before, you don't want to talk to anybody because that person will come later on and they are going to point these
things at you, like certain things. And you're going to go and dig a hole in
the ground, and you talk to that hole. Put all your feelings in there, pull
everything and then dump it, dump the dirt back there…. Before you just
give your, the trust to anybody. You think everybody's nice. Like they're,
like they're wearing a mask and you think they're trusted person, but
they're not. As soon as they remove their mask, then you get to see the real
person. Before you just come in and you just give your trust to anybody.
You just jump in. Now, after thorough study and sitting with that person
and eating with them and going out with them and like, then you can see is
that person trustworthy or not. Am I going to tell them that information or
not?

Keeping one’s problems to one’s self was a familiar practice. In speaking with
Dahlia, she shared a similar practice that her mother had taught her to vent her emotions
in the bathroom and nowhere else. As she put it, “You go talk to the wall when you have
problems.” Like Deema, Suha also shared her feelings of distrust towards others, even
going so far to suggest that sometimes one’s friends or other members of the community
may actually be spies (for the government). I found that this was not an uncommon idea
and frequently heard notions of it echoed during my time spent at the Helping Hand
Community Center.

On occasion, other speculations of conspiracy became intertwined, suggesting, for
instance, that the government was tapping phone lines and tracking individuals in other
ways. Suha discussed her own fears and inability to trust others, even friends, fearing that
they may be spies. In an afternoon interview, we sat at Suha’s small, retro dining room table as she shared some of these beliefs:

You can’t say anything loud, no. People, they can’t be honest with each other because your friend may be spying on you. And if you say anything, he gonna go, you know? So, no trust too, no trust! People they always afraid…[of] saying or doing anything. Of course, you want to. No, no, no. You know what? When I opened the Kindle to see Facebook, people were all, “Hi, [Suha], hi.” I never write down comment. I never answer them. Just I watch. I read what they say. That’s it. Because one day, one day maybe the table’s gonna turn, they gonna be in trouble. I always keep myself from trouble. I don’t like to be in trouble…

Suha’s words not only reflected fear that she could be exploited in some way, but even her association with others could be of potential threat to her. Bushra’s view, like that of Suha, echoed distrust, especially because of the language barrier that existed and made her more vulnerable:

Because of my limited English, I have to go to the right people; people I can trust, and I know they can keep a secret. They keep everything confidential. And I go to them to ask them because if I can do it on my own, I wouldn’t go to someone else to help me because of limited English. I have to go to these people, you know, different people so they can read my letters, helped me with advice, you know? Like mail….My experience from asking different people to help me, my brother-in-law, when we first came here, we used to ask him for help. Like to read our mail if we’re in
trouble or something. He always put us down, always feel, make us feel like we're not worthy of anything. We're always in trouble. We're not good people. Why are we here? … So it's, you know, it's, it's kind of tough one, you don’t go ask the right person and then later on that…bad person, like you might think at the time because you have no source.

Bushra’s words displayed how not speaking the language and not knowing where to go for help can leave one dependent on those who are not necessarily trustworthy, as she discovered with her brother-in-law. Beyond notions of distrust, both Suha and Bushra noted their desire to stay out of trouble. In following with this notion, fear of doing the wrong thing was another common sentiment emerging as part of the experience of powerlessness that resulted in a constant state of fear.

**Living in fear.** Throughout my time conducting research, I found that many of the women feared the police as well as other authority figures. It did not appear that this was related to a specific type of person (e.g., American men), but rather reflected a fear of those in positions of power. From their stories, I realized that their fears were not unfounded. Their experiences both back home and in the United States left negative impressions of law enforcement and those in power. Bushra shared an account in which her sister was wrongfully accused of stealing money and decided to leave her job as a result:

[My] sister was working one time for this lady, her husband, he's from Saudi Arabia. He's a prince and she's Moroccan, beautiful lady. And she had a villa in Saudi Arabia and Morocco, and she own an apartment building…. [My sister] was a cook and she was working there. And [the Moroccan woman’s] sisters, they
weren't, they were mean to their sister… and at one time they stole from her 10,000 Riyals, Saudi Riyals. And they put it on my sister. They blamed my sister. So, the police came to our home…and they came, and they searched. They couldn't find anything. So, my sister left them afterwards. Otherwise, that's what people sometimes do. They put you in trouble and they say, “you're a bad person, you stole from us,” and then you go to prison, they butcher your name in the community, and then you can't regain anything back…that's why I always keep that in my mind and I leave right away as soon as I know that something is going on.

Bushra demonstrated the theme of living in fear through her explanation that she would choose to leave a job (which I am aware she did on several occasions) whenever she sensed that a conflict might arise. The concept of avoiding trouble will be further discussed as part of the theme of empowerment located later within this chapter. In an instance similar to that of Bushra’s sister, Suha recalled an incident in which her brother was mistaken for a thief and had a confrontation with authorities. Her account came as she shared with me the reasons people fear helping others:

They afraid! Afraid to help somebody. So, they gonna be in problem, okay. My brother, the one in New York, when he was in Italy… he used to selling newspaper, you know…. He find a lady, very old lady coming up from the bar and she fell down and he run that way. He left that newspaper on the sidewalk. And he went to help her. Somebody saw he help, but he think he doesn't help her. He think he's stealing something from her. So, he called the police. The police came right away. He was in trouble…. 
While Suha’s brother was able to absolve himself of this matter, she noted that he was fortunate in his ability to speak Italian in addition to having connections with local community members who could attest to his good character. While she indicated that her brother would not be likely to help others in the future as a result, she confided that she would continue to help people when possible. Though in another conversation she told me that she only helps those with whom she has established a trusting relationship.

The stories shared by Bushra and Suha helped establish how fear of those in authority may further limit one’s power. Another facet of this fear is based in understanding perceptions of exclusion. Moreover, there was a consensus among the women who expressed feelings of being outsiders regardless of the amount of time they spent in the United States. This added to their reservations about law enforcement and others in power as they tended to believe that their side would never be favored. Expanding on this, Lemma shared how the notification of her husband’s death further exacerbated her own fear:

No matter how long you stay or stayed before, this is not your country.
You will never feel like 100% you belong here. No matter how hard you work, you know the degrees you get, how long you live here, you have money…. You always feel like you're an outsider, so you always want to be on your best behavior. You don't want to get in with the, with the wrong people with the law and they will like, you know, mistreat you or something or you put yourself in that position. So, I always try to be a good on good behavior and try to stay away from them as much as possible, but still their images scare me…. I always associated [the police]
with my husband when he died because they're the ones that came and told me the news. So, I always associate that and that makes me really, really nervous and scary, you know? Because I feel like if they come to me again, who's dead, you know? …A lot of people are fearful of the police, but they, they try to be helpful. They try to help people as much as they can, but it's just, I don't know why. Even everywhere, I think people have this image of police. They're scared….

The accounts shared by Bushra, Suha, and Lemma reiterated the sense of living in fear commonly expressed by the women within this cultural context, as well as other immigrants and refugees (Jordan & Dickerson, 2019). Aside from fear of external forces such as the police, the women also shared a common barrier existing within their immediate cultural community.

"Cut off your wings." Yet another aspect of powerless that worked to limit accessibility to power was the concept of cutting off one’s wings. Lemma explained the notion as part judgement, part suppression. She further clarified that this is a concept that exists as part of the immediate cultural community:

Because people can't be like you. So, they tried to, we say they tried to ‘cut off your wings’ because they don't want you to be better than them. So, in the culture people will love it, “Oh, you’re going to school, what are you going to be?” You know? “You're going to die soon.” You know? “Few steps, your grave is already dug.” And like people just make, try to make, like comments will be like a bad comments; hurts, but they don't care. So, here more doors open for [me]. So, more opportunities.
While Lemma felt that she was affected by this behavior, she noted that the opportunities afforded to her now living in the United States outweigh this negative rhetoric, thus allowing her to pursue avenues to empowerment. Dahlia demonstrated how this idea could further discourage individuals from pursuing even employment opportunities:

> We come from a culture, that when you do like cleaning jobs, people look very down on you. That’s really, really bad. You’re poor, you need to live. Work is gonna pay your wages to you. It’s gonna help you move on. It’s gonna help you stabilize your life. It doesn’t matter what it is! I’m not saying, “Oh, go work in a bar.” Like for us, you know, or “Go stripping or something.” It’s like, “Oh, this is not for us, it’s for other people,” Who says?! It’s a job in a restaurant or whatever, on the streets painting, you know? Garbage picking. Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy. It’s like the whole community will end up getting benefits and they don’t care. But when you’re working, they come to me here and they come to my office and sometimes they say, “Why are you working?”... When a woman works in our community pushing carts, they are gonna think, one: “Where is her husband? Is he not providing? How come she’s pushing carts?” And two: “That is a very bad job, how come she’s pushing carts?” If they work as a cashier at Walmart or Supersaver, the third thing is, “Where is she from? “Where is her father? Her brothers? She is doing a very degrading job.”

Dahlia’s example revealed how these negative opinions may deter individuals from pursuing available employment opportunities, even though many of them are
desperately in need of income. This was particularly true for the women within this group. They tended to be mindful of any risk to their personal reputations or to that of their families. Dahlia noted the hypocrisy of this notion; the alternative to having a source of income was reliance on federal aid.

The contributing factors discussed in this section helped to reveal the complexity of powerlessness. Overcoming powerlessness involves addressing not one, but many layers of such influences. The rope metaphor provided by Dahlia perfectly captured how powerlessness is multifaced and requires breaking through many barriers. Tools for overcoming powerlessness in order to become empowered will be further explored in the following section.

**Empowerment**

Empowerment emerged as perhaps the most important and complex theme within this study. Three major subthemes emerged as a part of empowerment: (1) having faith, (2) internal locus of control, and (3) resources. Each of these were important and critical to finding empowerment. Several examples are each theme will be discussed within this section. Figure 4.9 (below) demonstrates this theme and its complexities.
Having faith. Two supporting concepts of finding empowerment were related to the notion of having faith. Within the context of this study, all participants self-identified as Muslim. Though their personal beliefs varied slightly, overall, they agreed on the important of trusting God, which was captured in the concept named “ʾIn shāʾ Allāh” (God willing). Complementing this is the idea that every action results in just consequences, which has been termed “God’s justice.”

"ʾIn shāʾ Allāh." The literal translation of “ʾIn shāʾ Allāh” is God willing, or if God wills it. Spoken frequently within this community, it was used in discussion of everyday matters as well as those of great significance. For instance, if someone invites you for dinner or coffee, you may respond, “ʾIn shāʾ Allāh.” In the same way, someone
may ask if you plan to have children or if you will get married, and you may also respond, “ʾIn shāʾ Allāh.” As a concept within the theme of empowerment, its meaning was broader here because it implied a total and absolute trust in God and his plan as well as acceptance of that plan. Living out this belief allowed the women to move beyond the tragedies of their lives, to view them as opportunities for growth, and to find peace in sense of purpose. Suha’s words during one of our many interviews together helped to further define the meaning of “ʾIn shāʾ Allāh”:

Whatever God give you; you've got to accept it because there is a reason for it. Any kind of situation you go through, you have to accept it and you have to fix it. And God he will fix it for you if you can't fix it.

In other conversations, she would frequently say things like, “God likes me, he’s always by my side” or “God has blessed me,” which further demonstrated the extent of her faith. She trusted that she was living out the plan for her life just as it was meant to be. In like manner, Bushra shared how her trust in God allowed her to remain patient even while she was unemployed:

I try not to do anything that makes God mad at me, you know…right now because my income is very low and I don't have a job, I'm missing a lot of things, but still I'm being patient. Some people, sometimes can't take that and they will go mad, you know? Because, how come I don't have this? How come God didn't give me this? How come I didn't get that? Some people like will start to steal or do things, you know, bad or manipulate other people or take advantage of people. But no, because I fear God, I stay patient and I know God, in the end, He is going to reward me…. Al-
ḥamdu lil-lāh (thank God), God has been blessing me with a lot. So, I’m really blessed…

Acceptance and positivity were central to the understanding of this idea. As the examples from Suha illustrated, feelings of being blessed were frequently expressed as a part of the notion of trusting God. Additionally, as with Bushra, I often heard statements of fear about making God angry, as the women believed this could lead to further hardships. Thus, the importance of diligent praying, reading of the Holy Book, fasting during Ramadan (a Muslim holiday which involves a period of fasting for one month), along with other religious practices, were vital to the concept of faith. The belief that there was justice for all things that occur in this world was an equally important concept.

**God's justice.** This concept reflected the notion of cause and effect; all actions have consequences, some positive and some negative. Belief in God’s justice centered on both action and intent. It was reminiscent of Suha’s observation that just saying sorry was not enough (presented toward the beginning of this chapter). During another interview, Suha told of an occasion in which she had helped a friend in need while living on the East Coast. She began by sharing a conversation between her and her friend:

…“Why nobody come to help you?” When I used to be there, when I go every weekend to stay with her, I swear to God, I clean up her fridge, behind her fridge. It’s plastic bags and all garbage, and by myself. She didn’t ask me to do, no!...She was sick! And she’s old. I tell you whatever you do for anybody, don’t regret, because what comes around, goes around. I never regret to do something, never!... ‘Cause if you don’t got
appreciate from your friend or whatever…it’s gonna come from God.

Don't be upset.

Suha’s example demonstrated how all acts, including those of good will, receive appropriate tribute in time. This same belief was echoed in an example Deema gave about the man who had violated her trust, explaining how she believed his bad fortune was the direct result of God’s justice:

When that person violated [my] trust….I only trusted that person, that's it. [If] I give you something, if I say, “Tiffani, I trust you with that bag of money I'm going to go 10 years. When I come back, please save my money.” Only God knows, me and you, and that's it. So, I came back, and you say, “Oh, [I] have no money and you never gave me anything.” I have no legal paper that you signed something, no documentation, no legal documentation between us. I have nothing. So, he lost his son in car accident, because he lost his sight, because he was diabetic, right away he got diabetes. He lost his money. He can't have any more children. His family come, because I went to him and I said, “Well, I gave you this.” He said, “No, you have nothing--leave my house.”

While belief in God’s justice could perhaps sound vengeful on its surface, it was not the way in which participants in this study articulated the idea. Rather, it is the belief that everything will work itself out. Wasting energy on being angry or seeking justice is unnecessary because God will bring justice in the end, one way or another. In addition to having faith, internal locus of control emerged as another subtheme.
Internal locus of control. Several of the supporting examples of empowerment could be categorized within a subtheme of internal locus of control. This overarching concept spoke to the sense of self each woman expressed, specifically in their belief that they were in control of their own destinies and had the power within themselves to become whole once again. This did not conflict with the previously addressed concepts related to having faith; instead, these ideas were fully integrated with each other. Specifically, while the women believed they maintained the internal will to change their lives, they also believed that will was given by God. This subtheme helped to support cultural values--such as family and collectivism--because the concepts of empowerment through self allowed for empowerment beyond self, specifically toward the betterment of one’s family and community.

Strength. Strength was key to the embodiment of being empowered. During one of our early meetings, we met at favorite Chinese buffet-style restaurant, which soon become a favorite meeting location. We conversed as we gorged ourselves on stir-fried vegetables, baked salmon, and buckwheat noodles, to name a few dishes. Suha helped define the notion of strength as described her process of discovering her internal strength:

I start to realize that whatever happened to me, I still had, and I will have a good life. But in all these mistakes, it's not by my fault. It's not, but it makes me more stronger, and more to face anybody for anything. I don't want to leave anybody out, thank God. I have food on the table. I have a roof over my head. I have a family. I have money in my pockets. And that's what I wanted. That's it! I don't want a boat. I had a car with a chauffeur. I had a house. Everything! But when I come here, I start from
scratch! I start working in a career that was not mine. Everything new! But I go through it. I've been around. We're traveling a lot, I've been around a lot of different people, different languages different culture, everything. That's why I prepare myself to go any other places. I'm not afraid.

For Suha, strength was emblematic of fearlessness and being able to face the future head-on. During an afternoon meeting at Bushra’s house, we sat again in her living room and sipped lightly sweetened tea, which had the strong aroma of mint and was my favorite way for her to prepare it. Through her story, she spoke of channeling her own strength and hard work in order to define her own destiny:

With your own arm, like with your muscles, with your power, that's what gives you, that's what makes you can stand for and face of anything. The example of when I was in Libya, I worked in a family, they were really mean to the workers. … I went there, the family was super nice to me. They made me like, I'm a person. Like I belong to them. I sat with them, watch TV, I made food for them. They were so super nice. She gave me money, the lady. I had free time to come and go whenever I want. [I] get up at eight o'clock in the morning instead of five. The other girl, she gets up at like a five, the other worker. And I earned, I earned it with my own muscles, with my own sweats, with my own hard work to show like that's how you get power. Not like, you use other people to get power, no. It's you make your own…. I have 100% control about my destiny because I chose my destiny. I know where I was going. I changed my life. I want it to go for the better, and I walked that path every step of the way. I wasn't
controlled. I didn't [let] life control me. I control my destiny. I know
where I was going.…

Bushra’s account exhibited how her hard work in the previous years led to a better
employment opportunity with fewer restrictions and better benefits. She worked for it in
order to make a better life for herself. Both Suha and Bushra provided examples of
finding their inner strength, yet another important facet of internal locus of control
emerged: self-confidence.

**Self-confidence.** Belief in oneself and one’s own abilities emerged as an
important facet of empowerment. Suha explained, at a local coffee shop late one
afternoon, how self-confidence was belief in oneself and self-respect. Suha enjoyed
coffee with lots of cream and sugar while I sipped spiced chai tea. During one of our final
meetings together, she explained:

So, I think it depend on you…. It doesn’t matter what you have. First of
all, don’t let anybody tell you what you have. [She pauses.] If you
educated woman, you have to show yourself first, you are a big one, you
are a good one, you are a winner, all the time. [She pauses.] Be comfort in
yourself….Yes, you have to believe yourself…. Don’t let anybody put you
down. If anybody put you down this mean [you] have no respect for your
own self, your own inside you. Even if not 100% issue that you gonna do
this or win this or get this or you’re gonna, you’re gonna get this. It’s no,
you always think positive. Think, “Yeah, I will do it, I will do it, I’m
gonna win.” But even if I don’t win, at least I tried.
Clearly, Suha’s view of self-confidence required a positive mindset. Confidence in one’s own abilities, even in failure, is something to be learned. Comparably, Lemma’s view drew from the notion of strength and reiterated the idea of believing in one’s self. During our final interview together, we ate a meal she had prepared that was rich in vegetables and fish and smelled of cumin and other spices. Afterwards, she shared the importance of self-confidence:

I became here more stronger. I believe, because here, I had to believe in myself and I have to be strong for my son, for myself, and rely on myself because here there is no one else I can lean on back home. Because my husband had died. When I was back home, I could have leaned on my mom, my sisters, my brothers, they could have took care of my son. They could’ve taken him to school or daycare. They could maybe pick [up] food for me from the grocery store. They help me maybe do certain things. I could maybe decide on my own how to run my life. I have to rely on them. Here, it was all up to me, so I have to survive with the way that I know, but like getting new tools to help me in life so I have to rely on myself.

From Lemma’s perspective, this concept of believing in yourself/having self-confidence, was defined by self-reliance, or learning to be independent. Though she admitted going back home after the passing of her husband would have been an easy path, she confided that she chose to stay in the United States because she believed it was what her husband would have wanted. Additionally, it provided her son with the best opportunities for his future. Yet another concept which emerged as a part of empowerment in addition to strength and self-confidence, was that of self-motivation.
Self-motivation. In our very first interview together, Bushra told me a great deal about her upbringing and life prior to arrival in the United States. She shared a story of a time when she had decided she would no longer work in housekeeping positions, instead she decided she would pursue a job as a cook. While she had no formal training and no experience, she had been carefully observing the cook in a house she cleaned. For several months, she had been watching carefully and taking notes of the ingredients used, compiling details within a hidden notebook she kept in her bedroom. Her account of this event demonstrated her own self-motivation:

I told my mom, “Pray for me. I'm going to go. I'm going to go to the big shops where they sell the nice afghans, like very expensive stuff. We see if people want a cook.” I knocked, I knocked on the door of one of the stores, went inside the store, told the owner, “Do you need a cook?” She said, “Who taught you how to be a cook?” I said, “My brain, I just—" She said, “Oh yeah, I don't have time to cook for my family. I'm going to try you. Do you have an ID?” I said, “Oh yeah, I do have it with me.” She thought I didn't have it with me, so she said, “Go home and get it.” I said, “No, I have it here.” And she took me to her house. I asked her, “What do you want me to cook for you?” But I was so scared and so nervous because I never cooked before. So, I was just praying, I said, “Please, God, help me.” And I went inside and made beef with something and salad and they were so happy because the food was clean, it was fresh, all the like nice ingredients. Nice presentation. So, they were so happy with me.
This example from Bushra not only showed her strength and self-confidence, but also displayed a willingness to take a big risk, which is exactly the meaning of self-motivation. Similarly, Suha told of a time she took a personal risk and was able to negotiate a partnership as a result. She had completed design school and enjoyed fashion, always wanting to work in the industry. One day she was shopping and noticed an opportunity worth pursuing:

When I have an idea, I design a dress. So, I need, I need everything to be, I need to keep my mind ahead of what I’m doing, and I need to make sure what I’m doing isn’t like everybody [else]. And how much time it will take to become the piece I want. So, I take a picture to the piece. And I put in mannequin [but it sounds like she says, “money can”]….I went to buy a dress from a store. So, I took the dress, I look around, “Okay, do you have a pencil?” I add something, only that dress. Dress for ready to wear it. I make something [in] pencil and… I read the name of the, like the tag in the back. I pay, I put the dress in the bag and then I go to the [location of the shop]. I go to person, “Good afternoon.” The lady she is, I say, “Who is the owner?” “It’s me.” I say, “Oh, okay, is this your dress?” “Yeah, oh yeah.” I say, “I don’t like it, it’s supposed to be that way.” [gestures to show that she revealed the pencil sketch] “Oh my God, you did that?” I said, “Yes, I did. Give me piece of paper.” Long piece of paper [she pauses], in 15 minutes, the same dress I had, and I add what I add, and she liked it. So, I made like pantalones (pants). She said, “Go bring- what color do you think?” I said, “Black, then you put all the color” … So, she
bring black and she have a big scissor with a machine, and she called a
guy to come and I make pantalone and she put on the material “tack-tack-
tack-tack,” for like three hours. Finish it, she put on mannequin, “What do
you think?” “Oh, my God, [in a whisper] I want to kiss your hand”… In
1970, I work with her.

After they successfully created what I imagine was a rather striking black jumper
from Suha’s sketch, the owner was incredibly pleased and immediately offered Suha a
job. Suha declined to work for her and instead said she wanted to be her partner. They
were able to negotiate a contract and the business was still thriving even when Suha left
to come to the United States, though she eventually sold her share of the business. The
concept of self-motivation required action, just as the following concept of voice required
action.

**Voice.** The action of *voice* involved channeling one’s confidence and self-respect;
of learning to not remain quiet. On one particular afternoon, we met at Jana’s house,
which always smelled of incense and cardamom. We ate sweet cakes and traditional
desserts including Kanafeh, a dish with a filling similar to cheesecake that is sandwiched
between two layers of shredded filo dough, then topped with a sweet syrup and chopped
pistachios. We sipped tea as Deema explained the importance of voice, sharing the
detriment of women’s tendency to remain quiet within this community:

If you stay quiet, people just walk all over you. So, you speak up when
you can, with respect. Because they are shy, especially women, that’s why
they let people walk all over them. You stay quiet, you stay quiet, you’re
too shy, you stay quiet, and then after that people just walk all over you.
Clearly an important aspect of empowerment was finding one’s voice in order to protect oneself; not allowing people to walk all over you. Similarly, Suha’s words demonstrated the importance of voice in the ability to defend oneself:

Power is very important. First of all, if you are a woman, to defend yourself. If somebody come and attack you …if you can't defend yourself, he’s gonna eat you to pieces. [She pauses.] Even if he knows and he's very strong, just with your tongue, you can say some word to keep him away from you. So, you have power in your tongue to stop all the shit around.

You can go call police or do something….

Suha’s example demonstrated how having voice may manifest as the ability to speak on your behalf or even call the police. Her words further showed how this concept provided the ability to defend oneself just as in Deema’s example. In the following section, the accounts expand on this idea through learning to avoid trouble.

Avoiding trouble. As the discussion of living in fear was shown as a feature of powerlessness, learning to have foresight and to manage situations in order to avoid such circumstances also work to empower a person. Bushra’s account helped establish how these skills assisted in her own empowerment:

When I was working in the houses, cooking or doing other things, I had a lot of problems that would happen. A lot of the men sometimes will look at me differently or they try to take advantage of me or something, but I always leave them. To their families, I try to pray for them, and I leave the household because I don't want to make problems for the family. So, I just walk away from that, from it, and hope that it will get better. So, that's
sometime that's what happened…. A lot of people can't, sometime I feel
like I can't even stay there like in somebody’s home more than a month if I
see something from them bad. So, I try always to leave and leave in
good…with good things and that's it.

Bushra’s ability to perceive a potential threat allowed her to leave the situation
and avoid circumstances of potential trouble before they occurred. Her confidence in her
ability to move on and find another job further supported a sense of empowerment that
she had come to know. Similarly, Suha spoke of her ability to avoid trouble as we sat
together on her back porch:

Thank God, thank God, I've been here from 1982 up to now, thank God,
knock wood [she taps the table to show this]. I never been in a police
station, I never held with any policeman, I never been in big trouble.
Never! [She whispers as she shares with me.] If I see trouble come that
way, I'll go the other way. I turn my back…If I think about for a little
minute, two minutes, “okay, if I got involved with this fight, what I'm
going to earn?” I have to earn something anyway. Not just money or
something, no! [She pauses] … “Oh, I'm going to be in the fight. I'm going
to be in the police.” No, no, no. I turn my back and I leave. Even if she is
my friend! ‘Cause she put herself in that situation…. And [when] she
finished fight, I let her know she is stupid to do that. And I will tell her,
but I would tell her, “I saw you, I didn't come to help you. You did that—
you fix that. That’s it. I don't want to be in trouble with you.” I tell them!
Not just, no. I will tell her, next time be careful…. Why have to be in
situation like that? That’s it. And I wish her everybody not to have any problem.

As with Bushra, Suha credited her ability to stay out of trouble with the skill of thinking ahead and weighing the potential consequences. I heard this concept echoed through many accounts during my time with this community of women. I believe this is partly due to the regard for reputation, thus even the possible threat to one’s image was not worth becoming involved in a risky situation.

However, there are potentially damaging consequences that come with this notion. In some instances, people are so fearful of becoming involved that there is no one available when help is needed. For instance, a woman was knocked down and berated in front of the Helping Hand Community Center on a day I was not present. She did not speak English, and despite her requests to several individuals who were gathered nearby, no one would call the police for her. She had to go inside the community center and find the director to assist her with calling the police. As with many other concepts discussed, the notion of staying out of trouble was complex and could work to empower some while perhaps contributing to the powerlessness of others.

**Resources.** In addition to having faith and internal locus of control, there were a number of resources that emerged as a part of the empowerment theme. Such resources provided accessibility, peace of mind, and emotional support, among other things.

**Real friends.** The importance of friends was especially significant for providing emotional support. Having someone to talk to was empowering because it provided a means of decreasing stress, as both Lemma and Dahlia described in their accounts. During one interview Lemma shared how having friends nearby helped to ease her fears:
When I have people in my house that helps a lot, friends with people. Yes, yes. When I am around people I don't, I don't get stressed, especially at night. I'm so scared that at night somebody might open the door and come and hurt us. If I hear any, any, any noise that scares me a lot. So, at night that's what the most of the time it's a stress.

While Lemma still experienced fear and stress, her experience showed how having friends helped provide peace of mind, a sense of security. Similarly, Dahlia expressed how friends improved the quality of her own life and added the importance of being a good ally in return:

[Friends are] very important in life. To me, it's very, very important. I have to have friends…. I have to have people to talk to, either my family or friends, coworkers. I want to feel comfortable when I go to work. I don't want to feel like stressed going to work. And then the stress of the clients, you know, adding that to me, no. I want to make sure, like I have good friends at work. People I can rely on in case I'm going through tough time, or not, you know? I'm happy, I'm sad, I'm stressed; I can rely on them. At home, same thing. Or my friends or the same thing happens to them. They can rely on me. I can't just rely on people when they need me on, “Sorry, I'm busy.”

For Dahlia, part of having real friends meant that they were available when she needed them; they actually showed up in times of hardship. In return, she is available when they need her; it is a reciprocal relationship. A similar notion, termed “helping people,” emerged within the theme of ethical leadership and will be discussed later in this
chapter. In addition to real friends, an overlapping and equally important concept of resources was that of having a support network.

**Support network.** A layer beyond the notion of having real friends was that of having a support network. These were not just individuals who spent time with, or perhaps, listened to another’s problems, but were differentiated by empowerment as those who already had access to resources and could help in meaningful ways. As we sat in Sama’s immaculate living room around a coffee table lavishly covered in homemade desserts, wrapped chocolates, and a variety of nuts, Jana described such an instance:

One time when I first met Sama, they helped me a lot. My husband got sick, really sick. So, [Sama] and her husband, they stepped in and they made sure [my husband] got to the hospital and make sure we were taken care of. They stayed with us for a few days and all of that. They made sure we got food or our basic needs, you know, taken care of.…. 

Jana’s account exemplified the importance of having others she could rely on who had access to resources (like food as in this case). On yet another afternoon not long after this, we met at Jana’s house. Coincidentally, Jana and Sama lived near each other in similar duplexes, which were nearly mirror images of each other in every way. Both of their homes were decorated with great care and attention to detail, filled with a mix of American and traditional Middle Eastern decor. On this occasion, Sama further explained the characterizations of a support network:

Of course, you need them for everything. If it's not just for moral support, for financial health, just somebody to talk to, transportation, coming and visiting you because here you're by yourself. So, visiting, talking, eating
together, share things. [Your] kids can rely on one another. At least I can feel like there's a family friend I can rely on and feel safe with. I have been driving and Jana has been the GPS for me because she knows where, how to get places and I drive.

These examples show how support networks provide valuable information, services, and even goods in order to help to those in need. In these cases, members of the support network were also close friends. However, I heard many accounts that revealed support networks are not always made up of friends. Sometimes these networks included members of the larger community, local churches, or other agencies that provided the support structure defined within this concept. While having friends and a support network clearly contributed to reduction of one’s stress, yet another commonly discussed resource within this community was that of mental healthcare.

Mental healthcare. One resource of particular importance was access to mental healthcare. Many of the women shared positive experiences that resulted from contact with psychologists, psychiatrists, or counselors. During an early interview, Sama opened up about her own experiences with mental healthcare following the death of her son:

[I] liked to go to see the psychologist or the psychiatrist, whatever you call them. Um, he listened to me, he didn't cut me off when I was talking. Everything kept confidential. He under, he understood what I’m going through. He knew my feelings were true 100%. He didn't judge me like the others…When I lost my son, the others, like if I cry, I didn't feel comfortable crying in front of them because they thought I was playing this role of like, “Oh, mom just like lost her baby. It's too much. He's dead
and it's gone.” … I would encourage [others] to go and seek help because…in our culture back home, especially, if you say that people always say, “Oh, she's crazy. Are you crazy? Why do you seek that help, that mental help?” No, nobody's crazy. But we need physical doctor and we need mental doctor.

As addressed within the theme of powerlessness earlier in this chapter, negative perceptions around mental healthcare are prevalent. Of the women who shared they had sought professional help, all stated that they would openly recommend that others get help if needed. They also expressed a willingness to share their personal experiences. Though only hypothetical, I felt their convictions were sincere and courageous. They seemed willing to do whatever necessary to begin breaking down such stigmas because the alternative was unbearable. In an excerpt from one of our earliest interviews together, Lemma’s words demonstrate this sentiment:

I tried to tell people it's okay. You know, here, if I see somebody's stressed and stuff, go please. It's not. It's okay. It's not shameful. It's not like back home. People will [not] take advantage of you or like point at you and say that you're crazy. It's, it's fine. Here, because we learned as we've been living here for a while, and sometimes people lose their animals, not even their loved ones. And they get stressed over it and they cry and they go to, to get help.

Lemma revealed an observation that mental healthcare is more commonly acceptable within the greater cultural context of the United States than it is back home. Her words showed her care and concern for those within her community and some of the
strategies she used to persuade them to seek help when needed. In addition to those specific resources already mentioned, many of the women spoke of the overarching resources provided by living in the United States that differed significantly from those back home.

**Living in the United States.** While life was imperfect and often a struggle for the women within this community, many of them expressed that living in the United States provided greater advantages than living elsewhere. During our final meeting together, Jana spoke to the vastness of the United States, which afforded many options for relocation as well as the perception of a better acceptance of immigrants overall by the American people:

> Coming here to America or other countries is the same for the refugee person. Sometime, that's why they seek refuge because it's not safe for them back home. So that's why the people come here. Sometime, here the only good thing, Tiffani. Or different from other countries is the United States is so big, it's like almost like 50 countries together here. Here, if you don't like the cold weather, then you can go to the hot. You don't like the middle, you can go to the south, you can go to the north, you can go east, you can go west. So many diversity that you sometimes, maybe you can't find in other countries. Sometime, people here are more open minded because this country was founded on refugees, on like immigrants. So, that's why it's meant something. Maybe, it's more welcoming than other communities, other like countries. People are not much racist toward
refugees. You know, you don’t find that same time in other countries, you know?

For Jana, the history of immigration within the United States added to its overall diversity and, ultimately, its value as a place of resettlement for her and her family. Within this same thread, Lemma discussed several of the valuable services available to immigrants within the United States which worked to empower her and others:

Here, the help that we get from the government, it's tremendously huge and we need it. The food stamps, the housing, Medicaid specifically for medications and stuff and seeking doctor and you know, tried to get help. It's otherwise, you know, as you, we both know it's very, very expensive. That makes a big, big difference. Yes, somebody helps you with paperwork and all of that. So, there is a lot of help around, you know?

Lemma had faith in the government assistance programs as well as other services provided to immigrants even though she had lost much of her own assistance at the time of this interview. Her words were indicative of many of the women to whom I spoke, reiterating that such assistance was valuable in helping to empower people. For many of the women, such assistance provided tools to eventually develop a source of income, which was yet another important concept discussed.

**Money.** Undeniably, one of the most vital tools of empowerment was having money. While there was disagreement about the amount of power money alone could afford one, as with all of the concepts that emerged as a part of empowerment, it was one facet that assisted in moving from a state of powerlessness to one of empowerment. As an
example, Jana shared a culturally based perspective on the relationship between power and money:

> Usually, it comes from our culture. That's a thing, that if you have money, even though sometime you'll have, you have less education, maybe you are not a good person, but because of your money, people always think, think of...you look like you're big. You're bigger than anybody else.

Jana’s perspective suggested that one had the potential to gain power with money alone, while Dahlia spoke to the importance of money among other tools of empowerment. Dahlia noted the value of money as a unique resource that can be used to empower others:

> I think more education, maybe more money, a little bit-- to help more people who needs money. They come to my office and you can see them, like they're in really bad, in sad situations and your hands are tied. You have limited funds. Sometime, you have nothing. You just have the word of like; you comfort them, and you give them advice. Try to calm them down. I wish I have more. I wish I had the magic wand, you know, to help people. And I think education, money, maybe more connection in the community, that would help a lot too. So, your voice is being heard. People pay attention to you when you talk, you know? I don't know, that's what I think.

Dahlia shared how money, among other valuable resources like education, could provide the power to be heard. In itself, this concept emerged as a part of understanding the entirety of empowerment.
**Being heard.** The notion of being heard is one that involved having the power to defend oneself or others. It is different from voice, which was discussed previously as a part of the empowerment theme. Though similar, the examples of voice demonstrated how they were related to internal factors, specifically one’s locus of control and self-discovery of one’s own ability to not stay quiet. Being heard existed as an external validation that derived from the respect given by others, especially those with more power than one’s self.

On a morning toward the beginning of Ramadan, we met within the comfort of Bushra’s home. Though Bushra and our interpreter were both fasting, she had prepared a plate of food for me. I refused to eat because I did not like eating in front of others when they were fasting. I was polite and accepted some tea. She sent me home with a few of her homemade baked items. They resembled savory kolaches or miniature pizzas, one made with a tomato-based sauce and the other containing a blend of herbs called zaatar (which tastes mostly like thyme) mixed with olive oil. As always, they were delicious.

On this occasion, Bushra shared an account of leveraging her own power when starting a new job. The recollection validated how she had spoken up and been heard, not only for herself but also for those who worked alongside her:

There was four of us workers. I'm the cook, two ladies, they clean, and the gardener. ‘Cause [our boss] lives in a huge villa, she owns so many buildings…money everywhere. And she used [to] not feed even her workers at home. That one, they stayed with her and nothing like you cook two chickens for example. What's ever left? Maybe it's just bone and skin. That's all you get to eat. You don't eat nothing. I pay you. You go get your
own food…. When I came, I told her, “If I come here and I work for you, I want to eat. So, if I, if you guys used to just make two chickens, I'm going to make three and those, the third chicken, it's going to be between four of us, the gardener and those two ladies…. If I cook anything, we're going to eat. Don't tell us no.” She said, “Oh yeah, that's fine.” You know, the other ladies who were so happy when I came there, and I worked …[Our boss] was so stingy and she was just bad. So, I left my job there after a month. I just couldn't do it anymore. It was just too much. Some people just take advantage of poor people because they think they have money…they own you.

In this example, Bushra asserted her needs and those of the other workers. While Bushra left this position in the end, she had clearly been heard by her employer who allowed Bushra to cook additional food for the workers. Dahlia’s perspective shared a similar sentiment; her established and respected position within the community allowed her to defend other MENA refugees and immigrants like herself:

I don't know. Like, maybe through my work, you know, when I speak up for my community, I tried to show, I don't know if I'm a leader or not, but like I tried to show to give the correct view. Maybe not the right view, but to give the correct one. We’re people like anybody else. We have faults, we have good people and bad people in our community. But a lot of the people that they come here; they're struggling. They tried to make it here. They tried to live here with dignity. They tried to live in this country and think this is their home too, because they are staying here, paying taxes,
working, um, having their children…born here in the country. So, I think sometimes people just view us differently and they think we just want to stay on welfare forever and we're not good people, we’re going to cheat.

Dahlia’s ability to be heard allowed her to speak at events at churches, community centers, and other organizations within her larger community. As a result, she was provided a platform to directly contest stereotypes and misconceptions about refugees and immigrants within her own cultural community. Both Bushra and Dahlia’s examples establish the importance of being heard, particularly when speaking up for others. In addition, having knowledge provided an important tool towards empowerment.

Knowledge. The concept of knowledge emerged as a personal element of resources. The notion broadly encompassed educational opportunities as well as access to other types of information As Deema described, knowledge may come from many sources and is a valuable instrument toward gaining empowerment:

Sometime, it could be knowledge from school, like they have higher education. Sometimes it's not an education, but because they grew up around other people, powerful people, and they got so much knowledge from them, because of certain situations. Back home, Tiffani, we have people who grew up in bigger families, which is maybe their father or grandfather was the, is the tribe leader. So, he grew up in…that culture, seeing and hearing since they were little. They get that power from everybody and they get that knowledge. So, it's not always by schooling, [but] by observing.
Deema suggested that one may have opportunities to gain knowledge simply by taking the time to observe those around him/her within the community or even within one’s family. During our very first interview together, Suha shared her perception of knowledge and the importance of being open to receiving it; a lesson she feels stronger about since coming to the United States:

You see this opened my vision that you don't have to be very tight. You have to know a lot of things different here. Knowledge, knowledge is not going to hurt you. It is not going to change you into being another, no!

You have to know about others. I know many different things.

Suha purported the importance of learning about others, as well as the fact that gaining knowledge is never harmful; it does not change one’s core sense of self. On occasion, I sensed an undercurrent of fear about interacting with those of different beliefs and cultures. In general, when I heard such remarks, it was in relationship to the concept of maintaining one’s image, which was discussed as part of the cultural contextual factors earlier in this chapter. Specifically, a woman might say to me that her husband did not want her to befriend American women because he feared she would be influenced by their way of life (e.g., dressing immodestly, having male friends, drinking alcohol, etc.). However, these notions were not expressed often, and overall, I found that perceptions about interacting with those outside of the immediate cultural group (such as myself) were positive. While knowledge was clearly important to empowerment, learning opportunities emerged as a fundamental means of accessing knowledge.

**Learning opportunities.** Upon arriving in the United States, both Dahlia and Lemma discovered nontraditional opportunities for learning, which they described as
instrumental to their paths of empowerment. A teenage mother with another child on the way, Dahlia described how she was able to attend an American high school within a traditional setting despite her unusual circumstances:

Yeah, so that was an experience coming here, ya know? When I came here and my family arrived after that, they said I can go to school. I said, “I can go to school?! And I’m married?! And pregnant?! And have already a baby?! Who’s going to take me to school?” They said “Well, you have to learn.” So, I went…and they said, “You can go to school, again high school, because of your age and you can learn English.” …Yeah. It was nice experience too. I didn’t like it [at] first, but then the last year when I was going through classes and stuff and toward the graduation, I cried every day, ‘cause I didn’t want school to end, you know?

Dahlia’s educational experience turned out to be positive and provided her with the opportunity to learn English along with other subjects, which greatly contributed to her own empowerment. Lemma similarly found that she was afforded a variety of opportunities to learn after coming to the United States:

[I feel] like when I came from [back home] …I never changed. But what changed for me, like more opportunities opened for me. More doors open here for me. I started driving here, so that opened more doors for me. I start speaking English a little bit, going to school. And at my age, back home, I went only to school [until] sixth grade. And then, I started going to school and then I just sat home or I was working or something because
back home, like when, if you go to school, when you're...not school age, people make fun of you. People discourage you.

Lemma recalled how moving to the United States provided opportunities to learn to drive and speak English, in addition to other forms of knowledge beyond those available back in her home country. This was particularly true for her because her age meant additional social scrutiny for pursuing educational opportunities. After relocation she found that such critical views were less common. In both Dahlia and Lemma’s experiences, the acquisition of English language was mentioned as an important component within these learning opportunities. The opportunity for learning English was expressed as a valuable resource that could help empower women within this community.

**Language.** During one of our interviews, Dahlia shared how language attainment felt incomprehensible when she first arrived in the United States. She told me stories of her experiences as a high school student often nodding along as a teacher spoke to her, but in reality, having no comprehension of what was being said. In other conversations, she shared how strangers had sometimes yelled at her, and she did not know if they were berating her or greeting her or trying to relay some sort of important information. Not speaking the language was commonly a great frustration as it required reliance on others and often resulted in confusion or simply fear. Dahlia’s account exemplified empowerment from learning the English language as a refugee living in the United States:

When I would see American people, who weren't my teachers, or my friends and I just look at them like this [she stares blankly at me as though she is fully oblivious]. I don't know if they're talking good about me or
bad. I couldn't comprehend in my brain, one day I would be speaking like
them, understand what they're saying. I can tell them why I'm here and
told them about my story, what I feel. Why don't you know? Would I
agree? Do I disagree on all of that stuff? I never thought I'm going to
conquer it and speak one day and have friends and talk and laugh and cry
and share, you know, share something with them….

Her definition of language as the ability to share her story and to express herself
was wholly the embodiment of becoming empowered. For Bushra, beginning to learn the
language acted as a catalyst for gaining other valuable resources like learning to drive and
finding a job. She shared her experience:

What makes you more powerful? I'll give you power, power the language
here. If you gained a little bit language, it makes you powerful because
then people look up to you and you don't need to use anybody else.

Driving, that gave me power. I’m learning in [English] language. I’m
driving now. So, that gave me more power and money. I’m working and I
have money in me pocket. And, like before, it was very difficult…to gain,
like to get any money to pay anything…

Though only a single tool within the totality of empowerment, learning the
language was undoubtedly an important and powerful tool toward becoming more
independent and self-reliant. One of the most common notions discussed throughout the
interview process was that of cooking skills, which clearly provided a gateway for
empowerment.
Cooking skills. As I discussed at some length toward the beginning of this chapter, food and, therefore, cooking were an important part of the experiences within this cultural context. Food was central to virtually everything. In fact, I cannot recollect a single event from my experiences in which food was not somehow involved. Moreover, having the ability to cook traditional food provided the women with the ability to build and foster their cultural community and to pass down important cultural traditions to their children. Cooking skills were discussed as an important facet of empowerment because these skills provided opportunities to teach and mentor other women along with the possibility of generating income or other resources. Bushra shared an account in which she was able to teach others to cook because of her own valuable skills:

One time, [I] worked in somebody's home and I was cooking food they never seen before…. Then later on, those girls who come and work in the, in that house or that villa, they clean and they dust and stuff. They told me, they said, “We never learned how to make a dough, how to make bread, to make other dishes. Could you please teach us?” …Some of them were young and they said, “We'll follow your lead. We believe in you because we know you're not going to teach us wrong. You're going to teach us. You have even permission to hit us if we don't do the dough right or if we don't help to shape it right. Just go like this. It's okay. We're not going to be mad at you.” And that's what I did. Some of them, they never touched dough before…

Bushra demonstrated how her cooking skills granted her a position of power within this role through her ability to teach others. In a different account, Dahlia spoke of
an annual fundraising event she organized with other women in the community. Through her own cooking skills and those within the immediate community, this event provided an annual source of funding to help support the efforts of the program she directed. She explained how the fundraiser initially emerged as a working idea:

When we decided to do [the fundraising event], from the beginning or when we had our first fundraising for the swimming classes that will be used to do it at the [gym] and we, [the Helping Hand Community Center] gave us funding for [one year]…. The second year, we had no money so they had to do fundraising and all the ladies, they listen to what's going to happen. There's going to be no more swimming classes. So, we have to think of something. What are we good at? And then, we started like brainstorming and stuff and then, we said we're good at cooking and baking and all these things. I said, “How about if we do like a fundraising food thing? We could sell tickets, people come. Or we can sell cookies, we can sell pastries for the holidays and people can get a plate for seven bucks and we can sell so many of them that will get us some money.”

Over time, the annual event developed and many of the women who were members of this community contributed by helping prepare traditional dishes from their home countries. I was fortunate enough to attend this event twice during my research and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Both Bushra and Dahlia helped demonstrate how cooking skills can provide an additional path to empowerment.

Having discussed many of the tools that assisted the women of this community in shifting from a state of powerless to one of empowerment, the focus of discussion turns
to leadership; the culmination of their shared experiences. While some of the women did not self-identify as leaders, all of the participants within this study clearly played various leadership roles, including within their families, networks of friends, and the local community.

**Leadership: Two Approaches**

Leadership was discussed in terms of perceptions and personal practice. Within this section, two approaches to leadership are presented: ethical leadership and unethical leadership. Research Questions 1 and 2 were addressed through understanding the concepts that emerged within these themes. In answer to Research Question 1, ethical leadership demonstrated the patterns of leadership that existed within the immediate community. Furthermore, the participants provided examples that demonstrated not only the ways in which they idealized this approach, but also their own practice of ethical leadership. Following this, Research Question 2 could be answered as their self-identified practice did not change from pre-migration to post-migration. However, key informants clearly believed unethical leadership was more prevalent, particularly within governmental structures, as a part of the pre-migration context of their home countries. Within the larger post-migration context of the United States, the women tended to perceive greater practice of and support for ethical leadership overall. Figure 4.10 (below) provides a visual representation of the two approaches of leadership.
Figure 4.10. Two approaches to leadership.

Unethical Leadership

While the member of this culture-sharing community tended to believe that ethical leadership was a more common practice within the United States compared to their home countries, this did not mean that unethical leadership could not or did not exist within their post-migration context. Corruption was among those most commonly cited, a notion that included, but was not limited to, bribery and embezzlement.

Corruption. During a focus group that helped to form many of the interview questions used within this study, Bushra discussed the pervasiveness of bribery throughout the pre-migration context of her home country:

In my country, it’s free to go to the hospital. But if you go and you’re having a baby, for instance, you have to pay the nurse a bribe, and you
have to pay this person and this person. And it’s supposed to be free, but it costs so much. And if you don’t pay, they will just leave you there bleeding. You will die. Sometimes they will hit you, they will pinch you, sometimes they will bite you, they call you bad names. It’s like, why did you put yourself in this situation? If you didn’t sleep with your husband, you wouldn’t be in this situation. It’s like, come on, what did I do wrong? That’s nature, that’s your husband.

Bushra demonstrated how bribing individuals was necessary to survive and expressed frustration with a system that seemed to punish people for doing nothing wrong; a system that allowed individuals to take advantage of those often in need. In the same way, Dahlia shared the commonality of embezzlement and bribery as a part of her perceptions of unethical leadership prior to migration:

The first thing that people are going to benefit from his new role [is] his family and his neighbors. Like immediate family, his home will change right away, right away because of embezzlement. He will change his home, nice cars. People, if they need to get anything done [illegally], they go to him and he will do it. And so, a lot of uh, money under the table. A lot of, what they call it, bribery. A lot. Too much bribery.

Both Dahlia and Bushra, as well as others, believed corruption flourished at all levels of society within their pre-migration contexts because the uppermost tiers of governmental leadership were also corrupt.

When I asked what would need to happen in order for the corruption of this system to be changed, many women suggested that such a task would be nearly
inconceivable. They explained how war and unstable governmental structures made changing corrupt behavior virtually impossible at an individual level because the
complete energy and focus of the government is on ensuring the entire country does not implode. The priority is clearly about maintaining power and some sense of stability, with the hope of preventing political uprisings. Short of completely removing all individuals within governmental leadership positions and starting anew, the women within this community did not see how change would ever come to be.

Additionally, the women from Iraq talked quite extensively about how they believed this was essentially what the United States government had intended to do (and believed they had accomplished) when they overthrew the government of Saddam Hussein during the Iraq War of 2003-2011 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). However, their individual perspectives were that, in reality, power was only given to other elite and corrupt individuals with the same agendas. Their view was that these superficial changes had resulted in the same, and even worse, problems than before. In this way, they felt that the attempts of the United States government in Iraq had essentially failed, only breaking down what little stability had existed within the country. I did not sense that they were angry with or ungrateful for the actions of the United States as a part of this discussion, but rather they were frustrated and felt that the problems within Iraq had been misunderstood and poorly addressed from the very beginning. To fully understand corruption, it is important to grasp the motivational influence of egotism, another aspect of unethical leadership.

**Egotism.** The women’s idea of egotism encompassed selfishness, arrogance, and even greed. Dahlia explained why she felt this quality was particularly detrimental when
leaders embodied such an attitude. She shared her perceptions of the Trump Administration as an example:

It’s bad, [President Trump is] just terrible. He needs to change. He needs to wake up. I think he is in his own world, not being efficient to anybody. That's why he fired so many people in Cabinet. So many people in his, in the White House and he just, anybody, I think, just say like…not agree with him on anything without, it's like, “What's this?” You know people have higher education, they get to be hired to be in those positions, and we need those people to run the country like before. We need their, we need their, their experience…. We need those people to help him run the country. He can't just run it by himself. We're not, we're not a gang here. We feel like he's a gang leader and he can [do] whatever he decide. We will have to obey and say yes. Otherwise (she makes a slitting motion across her throat with one finger and mimics a slashing sound), he’s going to kill you. It doesn't, it doesn't run this way. If we say we're going to be this still powerful and most powerful country in the world and we're, all these people look after us and look up to us. We’re not setting good example by his actions. I don't know. That's what I think.

Her words hinted at notions of dictatorship and fully embodied the concept of egotism, or an undue sense of self-importance. She further discussed the possibility of damage to the United States in terms of image, which reflects the importance of this concept as an aspect of cultural context (see p. 98). Her explanation suggests that image is important not only at an individual level, but also for the larger community and even
country. Beyond the damaging impacts of egotism on image, Deema shared how greed and an inflated sense of self were characteristics of unethical leaders:

They have, like they had so little, when they put in that position later on in the future, there will be greedy. They just think about themselves and think how do I take this and help [myself]? Because they're hungry inside. There will never be satisfied. If a person who grew up in a community, when people have not religious, shouting, abusing one another, he's going to do. So, it depends on that first seat, like that first home, when they grew up. And not just your home, your immediate home, [but] your community, your family, your relatives, the education, all of that play a big role into the person in the future. When they put in that position, it's going to show their background, it's going to show who they are really…

Deema further demonstrated how this type of leadership tends to become perpetuated within communities. When greed and abuse are all that one has ever witnessed among leaders, it is difficult to perceive the practice of one’s own leadership. Both of the examples provided by Dahlia and Deema spoke to the idea of hierarchy, which is the foundation of yet another concept that emerged as part of this discussion.

**Inaccessibility.** Many of the participants expressed how their experiences with leaders back home were such that the division of power made them fully inaccessible to the people of the country. Those with power viewed themselves as separate and not accountable to the rest of the population, which resulted in a division between those with power and those without it. Dahlia compared this with her experiences in the United States:
Here, when I see through my job, when I see my ex-directors, the governor I met, the mayors of [my town], the mayors like the previous mayors from [my town], how they're nice and they're honest. And to me, you know, I don't know about their, maybe people have different view, but for me, they’re honest, they’re down to earth. They talk to people. They’re not behind closed doors [where] nobody can get to them. They talk to you; they listen to you. They seem to care when you talk to them. Maybe they didn't do much, but at least they talk to you. At least you reach them. [Compared] to back home, when I hear about like sometimes even the governor or the mayor of our town, you can't get ahold of, you can’t even see, he has so many body guards and he has all these fancy cars, always lavish homes.

For Dahlia, her experiences with leaders in the United States were in complete contrast with leaders in her home country. While she felt that leaders within her pre-migration context were inaccessible, her experiences here allowed her to meet with local and state leaders to express her concerns. She felt that they listened to her and approachable; both are facets explored further within the discussion of ethical leadership later in this chapter. As with Dahlia, Lemma also elaborated on the idea of separation between leaders and the general population:

Some people, when they get empowered or they have power, money, whatever, sometime that really blinds them from seeing the people in front of them and they start to hurt the people. Sometime even knowing because they feel like… “I’m so powerful. Nobody can conquer me. I’m so
powerful. Nobody can do anything to me. I can do all these things and I can do that. And you know, nobody can stop me.” But sometimes some people, good people and they have power and they're down to earth still. They still care about the other people. So, it depends, you know? But if I see somebody who has power and I know that person doesn't care, I don't go talk to them. I don't go near them because I know they're not going to care. They're going to crush me without even knowing that I'm there…

Lemma shared how power blinded some people from caring for their followers, even to the extent of vanquishing them. Additionally, her example further demonstrated how the notion of egotism may fuel separation between leaders and their followers by creating a sense of invincibility or untouchability.

**Stealing.** Yet another aspect of unethical leadership was that of stealing. In a conversation about trust, Suha explained the notion of stealing and how it is not only limited to things of a tangible nature:

People can’t build trust, go to hell, okay? No, no, not just [stealing] money, [she pauses] the idea, the love, stealing love, stealing the idea from somebody. Steal his trust, steal his…advice, steal his confidence in himself. A lot of people, they do that. They make him feel bad. Feel really bad and want to kill yourself… Somebody else make you feel that way, this is stealing this from somebody. This not nice, it’s not good!

Suha’s perspective demonstrated how theft extends to one’s time, ideas, and even self-confidence. Her words indicated how this sort of behavior undermines others in
damaging ways. Sama further discussed how stealing may be manifested, particularly within governmental leadership, as she spoke of her experiences back home:

Because people, all they see now in the new government, [newly] elected government or the governments before that…those people who put in power, they just, they just soak, suck, suck, suck, suck. All the, all the whatever they can take. “I'm here only for a limited time, let me take whatever I can. Let me benefit myself and my family and my relatives and my tribe. Who cares about the others? Because I know I'm not going to be here forever. So, let me take, let me take like a sponge.”

Sama provided the visualization of soaking up resources like a sponge; taking whatever is available for oneself and not caring about his/her followers. Both Suha and Sama provided examples that showed how stealing is a characteristic of unethical leadership by causing direct harm to one’s followers. An additional characteristic within this theme was that of dishonesty.

**Dishonesty.** The concept of dishonesty encompassed lying, deception, and failure to keep promises or one’s word. Sama provided an example of President Trump who, from her perspective, had failed to keep his promises as a leader:

[President Trump] promised a lot of things he didn't deliver. He's against immigrants and refugees. He doesn't want to have people come here for safety, especially if they fleeing for their safety. It doesn't matter. [It doesn’t] bother him a bit…Now people like me who come here as visitors and they apply for refugee status like so they can stay here. Now, right
away they get an interview and kicked out. So that's what I think, and he doesn't stay true to his word. Like he [doesn’t] keep his promises.

Sama’s words revealed her belief that it is a leader’s responsibility to not only keep his/her own word, but also align with the values representative of that leadership position. In this case, she spoke to the significance of the United States as a place of safety for those who need protection. In Sama’s opinion, President Trump exhibits a bias against immigrants and refugees, and she perceived this as a lack of care and compassion for people in need, which clearly indicated distrust. Furthermore, her example showed how the perception of breaking promises, or dishonesty, was illustrative of unethical leadership. Dahlia shared a more personal story between herself and a former colleague whose dishonesty resulted in the demise of their friendship:

  Yeah, I used to have a coworker and I thought she was like a sister. We talked a lot about our secrets, about our lives and everything and I had no idea, Tiffani, that she was, she wanted my job, my title so bad. We both did the same thing. I just have the title, but it pays the same. Everything was same, she had a husband, I had a husband, I have kids, she has kids, she have a nice home and I have a nice home…. We both came from nothing and we built our life together. You know, with hard work. She has a husband is a million times sweeter than my husband. He was taking care of her like so well, super well you know and um, he pampered her like you would not believe, mine wasn't. But I didn't know that she's tried to dig this hole for me and bury me alive. Like you know, almost literally like make me fall in that hole, tried to get me fired so many times. I had no
idea it was her, tried to turn some of my clients against me. She would send people to [the Helping Hand Community Center] and tell them that I was racist, I didn't help that certain kinds of people because I didn't like, like Kurdish people, I didn’t like Yazidi or I didn’t like certain kind of people from certain provinces in Iraq. When I learned that it was her, I was like, “Her? Why?!”

Dahlia exposed how dishonesty is a behavior associated with unethical leadership. Her colleague’s actions were personally damaging for Dahlia and also undermined trust. The reflections provided by Sama and Dahlia highlighted the relationship between dishonesty and trust. Trust, and specifically the violation of trust, was central to many of the conversations about leadership that occurred within this community.

**Loss of trust.** The loss of trust was discussed at great length with many of the women. They tended to agree that trust was not only difficult to initially develop but often impossible to rebuild after it had been broken. Within the context of unethical leadership, loss of trust was of particular importance as a major consequence of the unethical leadership qualities outlined. That is to say that the attitudes and practices of corruption, egotism, inaccessibility, stealing, and dishonesty all contributed to a loss of trust.

The terms *power* and *trust* were frequently used interchangeably by the women within this community. It was as though trust and power were synonymous with one another in some ways. This relationship was important in understanding the overall significance of trust as a concept of leadership. Dahlia shared an example from her own
family in which her sister had attempted to turn their parents against Dahlia and her other siblings. Her example underlined the difficulty of rebuilding trust when it has been lost:

You can work hard, but it's like power, same thing. It's going to take a lot of hard work. You will have to show that you're truthful again, you’re honest. Some people might trust you. Others will, like my sister, my twin sister, when we were talking to my parents and we had a lot of family issues before. Until today, we can't trust her…because she abused us big time in front of my parents and she tried to get our parents to be against me and my two other sisters. So yes, we talk to her now, but you can’t trust her fully. Once we lost that, because she abused us big time.

Though this event had occurred several years prior to our interview, Dahlia described the difficulty of ever redeveloping trust with her sister as a result of this event. Similar to Dahlia’s account, Lemma explained the complexity of trust, or power, and the difficulty of attempting to rebuild trust when it has been lost:

If you gain power, it took you awhile to gain power and then you lost it because of you’re doing wrongdoing and then you want to regain it back. Maybe you'll regain it back just a little. Because people, once they, in our culture, once you lose faith in somebody, it's going to be very, very hard to gain that faith back in them. Maybe a small percent, maybe new people, maybe they might not know about you, about your history…But no one, not the other people, because once you lose [trust], it's going to be very difficult. You know, God forgive, but sometimes as human being, we don't forgive.
The accounts provided by Dahlia and Lemma worked to show how loss of trust, or power, is difficult to overcome. Moreover, the qualities of unethical leadership were discussed as methods that directly contribute to loss of trust. Alternatively, ethical leadership both embodied and was positively perceived as an idealized approach to leadership.

**Ethical Leadership**

The approach of ethical leadership was often described as the practices of a good leader; how a leader *should* lead. Additionally, it was clear through my observations while immersed within this community and through discussions with key informants that ethical leadership was both idealized and embodied within this culture-sharing community of MENA immigrant and refugee women. Several characteristics developed within this construct including: "fears God," respected, listening, "feelings for people," helping people, equality, keeping confidences, honesty, solving problems, empowering others, and development of trust. As with the discussion of unethical leadership, trust was related to all of the concepts that emerged as a part of ethical leadership. The behaviors of an ethical leader helped to develop and sustain trust with one’s followers. Paramount to the theme of ethical leadership was the notion of fearing God or being religious.

"Fears God." The importance of fearing God or having a strong religious practice was a common point of discussion and central to the practice of leadership. As Jana discussed the type of leader she believed was necessary to reform Iraq, she shared the characteristics of a good leader:

Is to have a very powerful person have power and who fears God…has to be religious and fear God. And he's not going to care about bribery. He's
not going to, no one can say, "Oh, okay here, this is under a table. Do this or this isn't, you know, let's sign this, let's do that. Let's do this contract…and this much will be a deposited in your bank account." No. That's what it needs, Iraq, that's what it needs. The right leader in the right place and he's going to, he's going to make sure that the law is followed to the bits, otherwise…

Based on Jana’s account, fearing God not only reflected observations of religious practice, but also noted the importance of following the law and not taking bribes. In another example, Lemma discussed the concept of fearing God, which she believed was key to other positive leadership qualities:

If you fear God and you’re religious and God would make everybody like you. God will, people will see that you fear God…because the way you talk to people, the way you communicate with people, the way you treat people, it shows if you fear in God or not. If you're just a person who doesn't care, who’s reckless, you know, it shows. And your action and it show, if you're religious, you’re kind, you're considerate. That all shows to people and people can see that very easily.

Lemma believed that fearing God was indicative of one’s entire leadership practice and would determine how people viewed that leader. This was not only an aspect discussed ideologically but was a trait I could clearly see was identified within each of the key informant’s individual practice of leadership. In a similar vein, being respected was an important facet of ethical leadership.
Respected. Having the respect of others was a concept that emerged within many conversations about leadership. It was not only important that a leader be respected within one’s community, but also that the leader acted in such a way to earn respect from others. On the comfortable couches of Bushra’s living room, we were surrounded by many sentimental treasures she had collected over time. Couch arm covers she had embroidered herself, vases of brightly colored flowers, framed photographs, and other ornamental decorations created the sense of coziness within her home. Her pride in her home was clear and helped to demonstrate the importance of being respected within one’s community through the practice of self-respect (e.g., care for one’s living space). As we sat together in this welcoming space, she shared her perspective of what it meant to be a good leader and the importance of earning respect as well as showing self-respect:

We grew up learning that if a person to be a good leader, especially if it becomes you borrow money or borrow something from somebody, you return it on time. You don’t just ignore and don’t pay it back or don’t return it back. That shows the good quality of a good person, that you know that you didn’t just like ignore that another person. You didn’t think, “Oh, it's not important if I'm going to give it back or not, I don’t care.” No. It shows like you stand up to your word. That’s why then people rely on you, respect you in the community. Come to you and make you bigger and bigger. And you, because of the respect, because you gave yourself respect, you, you stood up to your word. You didn't just like said something and then did the opposite.
For Bushra, the notion of keeping one’s word was intertwined with having respect. Suha further elaborated on the notion of respect as she reflected on what it meant to have power. She shared how she believed the most important thing in gaining respect from others was to first give respect to them, a clear demonstration of leadership:

Power [she pauses to think], you have to know how to respect people, so people respect you back, this is power….Yeah. Let them be seen the way you like them to behave with you, it’s power too. Not everybody knows about that, no, no. Power, how to show the people to respect you. This is the power. And to show the people how to behave with you, the way you like to behave…Like I respect you so you just, you gonna respect me back….If somebody respect you, don't do attack him. This not nice, they will attack you. When you attack somebody, you have to attack him back….If you respect somebody, he will respect you back…Yeah. So, you have a power to make the people have to respect you…Yeah. It's power. Yeah.

Bushra and Suha emphasized the value of respect as a facet of ethical leadership. Suha also eluded to the importance of reciprocity, noting the importance of the leader to first give respect in order to attain it. In addition to having respect, an important aspect of being a leader was having followers, or those who listen and obey.

Listening. All of the women asserted that followership was a necessary aspect of leadership. Without followers, who is the one leading? According to Lemma, the single most important action in developing followership was to treat individuals with equality by listening:
I feel like the way I can, I can live and make people believe in me, and they listened to me, if they all feel and believe I treat them equally, all of them. And I listened to them and I care about them and they would listen to me and then they will follow like whatever we're going to do together. But since I'm the leader, that's how they, that's how they going to follow. That's how I believe.

Lemma’s beliefs about how to treat followers paralleled Suha’s approach toward gaining respect. Both women underscored reciprocal behavior. That is to say, if one desired to have his/her followers listen, then one must listen to them first. Additionally, Lemma’s words clearly noted the importance of fairness and equity, concepts which will be further discussed within the section on equality later in this chapter. Dahlia elaborated on the importance of listening as an act of caring, regardless of one’s actual power:

[If] I have no power, that power is gone, I might think… “what's the point?” So maybe be a good person, they have a good voice in the community. I'm not that rich and I have maybe limited education, but people follow me. People listen to me because I cared about people. I listened to them. Sometimes people just need somebody to listen to them. They know maybe you can't change the world for them, you can't give them money, you can't change their life a lot, tremendously, but maybe you can change it a little bit at a time or give them hope to change it or show them ways to change it, you know, to improve their lives. And so that's…I think for sometime leaders, this is the smallest things they can do, but they don't choose to do that.
From Dahlia’s assessment, she believed leadership was not dependent on power, but rather on the individual actions of a leader. Moreover, she pointed out that one does not need to have many resources to help or show care for others, thus emphasizing the power of simply taking the time to listen to others. In like manner, the notion of “feelings for people” emerged as a significant concept within the theme of ethical leadership.

“Feelings for people.” Similar to the concept of listening, authentic care for and the act of caring became another prominent topic within the discussion of ethical leadership. This concept was captured by the common phrase “feelings for people,” which Sama described in the context of power:

You gain power by feeling. Feeling is the most important thing. When you feel, when you feel people, you feel the small, teeny, tiny person to the biggest person in the community. When people feel like you really feel them, and you have that knowledge that you really care about them. That's where you gain power… Like feeling…you let me know when you feel like you could be just a normal person, maybe a farmer or something or grower or something. But you have a good heart and you have feelings for people. You care about people. That's what feelings are.

Sama demonstrated how this concept is about both caring for people as well as relating to them. Bushra explained the importance of having leaders who genuinely care because the role of a leader, as she saw it, was to protect the best interest of his/her followers:

It's important to have somebody have power and be a good leader in the community. Yes. People, or the less knowledgeable people, are less
educated people. People don't take advantage of them, if it's a good leader in the community. He's going to pay attention to them and he's going to, or he or she going to take care of those people…. If there is no leader in the community, he was going to take care of those people, was going to pay attention to them, who's going to cater to them?...

Bushra’s example echoed the notion of collectivism, which was discussed early in this chapter as a part of the cultural context. She stressed the importance of protecting those who are disadvantaged. In the illustrations provided by Sama and Bushra, showing care for one’s followers was among the most important traits of ethical leaders as it exemplified the notion of “feelings for people.” In a similar vein, the idea of helping people also emerged as a vital component of ethical leadership.

**Helping people.** Like “feelings for people,” another major responsibility of leaders that emerged was the importance of helping people when they are in need. This often required personal sacrifice in some way, even if only by giving up one’s time. Prioritizing one’s followers by helping them could be viewed as an extension of caring or “feelings for people.” Suha provided an example of helping a friend in need with whom she had shared dinner only a short time before:

After two hours, he call me, he say, “Hajah (one who has completed the haj), I’m dying, I’m dying!” I said, “Okay, don’t go anywhere, I come!” It was 15 minutes from my house to his house. I go over there, he was, I don’t know what happened to him! So, I call the ambulance right away and the ambulance came, and I took, I go with him to the hospital, like half an hour, [to] the hospital. I sit with him, he have a kidney pain. I have
no idea. [They] give him a small injection like this [she makes a gesture to
her arm as if giving herself a shot and makes some moaning noises to
mimic his pain]. I sit with him until four o’clock in the morning.

Though certainly inconvenient and late at night, Suha rushed to her friend’s side
so that someone could be with him at the hospital. Suha waited at the hospital until her
friend’s brother could arrive to sit with him. Dahlia also discussed the importance of
helping people when they are in need, and of being available even when it is not
convenient. She provided her own experiences as an example:

…And I can’t say, “Oh no, Tiffani, I don't have time to talk to you. Or I
can't, because I have so much more--” No. I have to save some like
battery, some space, and save it for you! And save it for someone else and
try to expand my, like my life battery or the battery. And my battery go
from this small to who knows now how big it is, you know? But you have
to ‘cause I feel like I'm very fortunate that even people can trust me with
their things. It's a huge thing. It's a blessing from God that people can see
that, and they can trust you with their things. It doesn’t matter if it's big or
small. They might think it's huge thing and maybe it could be a small
thing. Maybe it's not even worth it, but to them.

Dahlia’s words reiterated the role of leadership as one of great responsibility.
Their accounts underscored the notion that when people follow you, when they trust you,
it is your job to be an ethical leader in these ways. Clearly, both Suha and Dahlia agreed;
helping people was important and often required personal sacrifice as a part of ethical
leadership.
**Equality.** An aspect of ethical leadership that emerged and, in many ways, overlapped with the ideas of “feelings for people” and helping people was the manifestation of equality. This involved not only seeing oneself as equal to others, but of also practicing equality through just and fair treatment of one’s followers. On an afternoon during Ramadan, Suha and I sat again on her back porch and talked. She was aware that I did not observe the holiday and prepared for me a plate of cut watermelon and grapes along with an apricot drink served in what she called a “fancy-shmancy” glass (an antique wine glass with intricate etchings). I preferred not to eat or drink in front of those who were fasting, but she insisted that I eat, to the point that she seemed a bit irritated with me during our interview until I finally ate some of the fruit. In the midst of my dilemma, she shared the importance of viewing oneself as equal to others, particularly for leaders who happen to be women:

> I am a leader. I will be the leader. I was a leader. Everywhere, all the way.
> Yeah, you know, it’s good, it’s good to be strong enough, nothing wrong with that. If you want to protect yourself, even from your husband, you have to show him first of all, you are a human being. You have a name, you have a family, you have a soul, you have a heart, you have blood!
> Don’t be afraid. The same way he got to this life [is] the same way you got to this life too. You are equal. Except, he is a man and I am a woman, but we are still equal, we came from one God. We came from Adam and Eve, there is no difference…. There’s not difference. You have the right to vote, he have the right to vote. You have the right to choose who you want to live with and he have the right. So, everything the same…
Suha’s account purported how equality required strength in viewing oneself as equal to other human beings. Her example seemed particularly focused on the importance of gender equality—equality between men and women as human beings. Similarly, Sama discussed the need for leadership within Iraq to observe and practice equality if there is any hope for restoration of society or peace:

…to have Iraq be good again so people can live there, poor and rich, young and old, people who's in need, people who's not in need, handicap or not, so anybody we will be equal and everybody will get the same benefits and be treated the same and treated humanely.

Sama discussed how equality not only required fair treatment by mandating that everyone has the same access to the same resources, but also that individuals be treated humanely. This idea alludes to human dignity. As in many of the discussions throughout the interview process, Suha and Sama highlighted the importance of human value; that every life is worthy and valuable. This was key to understanding the guiding principles of an ethical leader. A seemingly related practice identified as a part of ethical leadership was the importance of keeping confidences.

**Keeping confidences.** For many of the women, confidentiality was of great importance throughout our interviews. In some cases, they had past experiences in which their own trust had been violated. Understanding the cultural contextual concept of image was essential to this concept because the threat of having one’s confidence broken was almost always a direct threat to his/her reputation within the community. An important part of ethical leadership was learning to keep the confidences of others. Bushra
explained the significance of this within her own leadership experiences of giving advice to others:

Only the people will come to me for advice, they know me. They know I'm going to keep a secret, keep everything confidential, care about them, listen to them, and give them the good advice.

As with other practices of ethical leadership, this concept overlapped with the idea of caring for one’s followers. In her example, she used the phrase, “keep a secret,” which is really the most important aspect of keeping confidences and protecting the secrets of others. Dahlia also expressed the significance of keeping things confidential by emphasizing this practice for creating a sense of safety for followers:

Keeping things confidential, I think, ‘cause that's how people can kept coming for 19 years to me, they feel safe. Uh, I listen to people, I care. Um, sometimes people come, and they take advantage of me and they fake things and I still cry, and I believe them because I wasn't raised to believe otherwise. You know? You say, “Why would you do this and say this if, if it didn't happen?” …I like to help.

In Dahlia’s experiences, her own trust had been violated at times by people who took advantage of her caring spirit and willingness to help. Despite this, she continued to have faith in people and protected their confidentiality in order to build safety and trust. In this way, she clearly felt her role as a leader within her community was more important than the potential threat of having her own trust violated.

**Honesty.** As with keeping confidences, being honest was another important and valued practice of ethical leadership. Honesty was discussed in two ways: First, to be
honest with oneself and second, to be honest with one’s followers. Over steaming cups of tea, Lemma explained the importance of being honest with oneself during one of our final interviews together:

[A leader] has to be honest with himself before even being honest with people. And that's how he can develop that trust with people. So, if he's not honest with himself and he's not going to be happy, you know, you might fake it he's happy, but he's not going to be happy…. A lot of people, sometimes people like, yeah, they give advice to so much to people, but they don't follow it themselves. So, they're not honest with themselves.

From Lemma’s explanation, a major part of being honest is taking one’s own advice, essentially leading by example. Jana similarly discussed the importance of leaders to be honest with themselves first and reiterated the relationship between trust, honesty, and respect:

It's important for a person like to have the trust, to be honest and be honest with themselves first. And that's how they gain trust. So, trust is being honest with people…. When you're honest with people, when you respect people, be on time, when you promise something, you deliver.

Jana stressed the importance of leading by example and further expanded the notion of honesty as being punctual and following through on one’s promises. In this way, honesty was strongly related to trust (e.g., trusting that one with do as he/she promises to do). The importance of trust is discussed as a facet of ethical leadership later in this chapter. Yet another important quality, or skill, discussed within the context of ethical leadership was the ability to solve problems.
Solving problems. The aptitude of a leader to provide sound advice or to solve problems was of critical importance and mentioned many times within the conversation of leadership. Suha explained this concept during our final interview together:

…Don’t try to use this power, if something to be against you. [She pauses.] So, people gonna be stuck with you, listen to you, obey you, love you, take your opinion, take your advice! You always, if you have any problem, any problem, they come to you! And this is, make me feel, “Oh my God, I’m so good!” When you teach people how to become, to fix this problem. Next time don’t come back to me. You try to fix it by yourself. [If] you can’t, you can’t find anyone who can fix it by himself, then you come talk to me. [She pauses.] See how many different ways?

Suha’s perspective highlighted the importance of welcoming people’s problems and allowing them to feel that they can always seek help. Additionally, she noted the value of challenging or encouraging followers to solve their own problems. In this way, solving problems went beyond simply providing advice and expanded to the idea of empowering others. Bushra presented another aspect of solving problems, which was resolving conflict:

In my culture, where I come from for being a good leader? Like two people are arguing about something and they come to that leader. Sometimes people like when people start fighting in the community or are arguing the community, people don't always let it go to the government. You don't call the police; you don't make it to the police station. It's like in other neighborhoods, they can look at your neighborhoods as weak
because you always seek government help. You don't have a good leader in your community. How come that leader didn't catch it in time and tried to solve the problem before it gets to the government.

In addition to resolving conflicts, Bushra spoke to the importance of solving problems locally, diffusing them before they became bigger or required the involvement of outside authorities. I heard this idea reflected within many stories and conversations during my time spent within this community. A great deal of pride comes with being able to solve the problems of one’s own neighborhood or community. As a leader within this context, this approach is a part of his/her duty and responsibility to followers. When a conflict escalates to the point of calling the police or involving other outside forces, the situation becomes something to be embarrassed by, especially to a leader within that community. This reflects notions of image, or reputation, that emerged as a part of the cultural context theme (discussed at the beginning of this chapter) as such events were thought to tarnish the reputation of both the community and leaders within that community.

**Empowering others.** An important aspect of leadership was the empowerment of others through education. Whether supporting educational opportunities or teaching others, every instance of this that emerged in conversations was focused on the idea of empowering others. On a day I met with Dahlia, we opted to talk at the mall. Dahlia loved to watch and observe people, and she expressed her desire to get out of her house on this day, perhaps just for a change of scenery. Winter was just beginning, and the temperature was chilly. We met just as the mall opened in the late morning, so it was very quiet.
Aside from those who worked at the mall, few people were around. We found a comfy booth, which afforded us some privacy from any passersby, and both curled our feet beneath us as we settled in to talk. She opened her handbag and dumped a pile of wrapped chocolate truffles onto the table (she always seemed to have chocolates with her). I searched for something to drink and brought back two glasses of lemonade with fresh fruit from one of the vendors in the food court. Dahlia spoke clearly about the importance of supporting educational opportunities, and she even compared being uneducated to deafness or blindness:

And always value education, push for education in your community if you're a leader, because it does wonders for people. But if people [are] uneducated, they're like blind people. I'm sorry, like, like they don't know what's going on, like [being] deaf. They can't communicate with people. They don't know what the, how the world is running, how these small change sometimes, like education, it opens your mind to so much and you could communicate with other people. They can have you know, languages that open even more doors for you, you know. Then you know, you get to know like what other communities similar to [ours] they're doing this, or we can do that, you know?

Dahlia’s example demonstrated how she perceived education as a powerful tool, not only toward individual empowerment but to the empowerment of one’s entire community. This aspect again reflected the important cultural contextual value of collectivism. While not explicitly stated, the value for the greater good and doing what is
best for the majority of people were strong undercurrents throughout this entire study and should not be ignored.

Like Dahlia, Deema reiterated the importance of empowering others through education. She provided examples from her previous leadership experiences back home as a schoolteacher within a rural village. Though she was a home economics teacher, her subject area included a vast array of lessons:

[I teach] everything, sewing, so whatever fabrics that I have at home, I teach to have each one of them has a handkerchief with them so they can wipe their noses and stuff, take Vaseline and apply to their hands, cut their fingernails so they can stay clean from like no germs, cut their hair. So, when I go to school there, I just put my apron on like for cooking and that's what I do. So, a lot of the ladies, I taught them how to make all the different kinds of desserts, different dishes because I told them, when you grow up in the future, you're going to be a future mom. You're going to have a husband. He's going to ask you about different recipes, different dishes. Then you'll learn that. So that's what I did. Yeah.

Deema took pride in her ability to teach others both in her home country and after her migration to the United States. In one conversation, she shared how she was able to take her previous experiences as a teacher and apply them within her current context to provide both driving and Arabic language lessons. She spoke of her ability to meet people on their level of learning even though the content is different from the subjects she had once taught in her home country. This was clearly an example of transferrable skills from Deema’s past leadership experiences that demonstrated how her individualized
approach to leadership did not change from the pre-migration to the post-migration context. Beyond empowering others, the final facet of ethical leadership which emerged was that of developing trust.

**Development of trust.** The topic of trust repeated throughout this study. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, trust was frequently used interchangeably with power, which made these concepts virtually inseparable as a part of understanding leadership.

Over lunch one afternoon (even as a child screamed at a nearby table—this seemed to be a common occurrence for us), Suha discussed the significance of followers trusting a leader. She explained, in her view, how followers trust leaders to protect them and love them:

> Yes, okay, for the people is power, you have to be, to know how to behave with the people, to let them trust. You have to trust me. They can listen to me…. You have to trust her and listen to her and that way for advice. Anyway, if you believe in her, trust her, and you know that she is, she is the person who can protect you and love you, this is kind of trust.

Clearly, the role of leadership and of being trusted by followers was not to be taken lightly. As with the other constructs of ethical leadership, trust underscored leadership as a great responsibility. Lemma provided a more personal example of those who trust her and explained how being perceived as an outsider was sometimes advantageous in these cases:

Some people like, they trust me. They asked me like to go with them, some places they don't want others from their own country to know or from their own community, but they trust me because I'm an outsider. I
look like an outsider to them, even though I speak the same language and from the same religion, but because I'm [from a different country], not Iraqi for example...they trust me with these things and they said, “Well, we trust you, please, we know you don't talk. Could you please go with us to this place? I can't trust anyone else.”

Just as Suha had shared, Lemma’s words reiterated the responsibility, or perhaps even burden, of being trusted and viewed as a leader. As with many of the other examples provided as a part of this discussion, leadership meant protecting others, caring for them, and helping them whenever possible.

**Conclusion**

Through thematic analysis of the data, five major themes emerged: (1) cultural context, (2) powerlessness, (3) empowerment, (4) unethical leadership, and (5) ethical leadership. The first of these themes, cultural context, was found to be integrated throughout all of the other themes. Powerless, empowerment, and ethical leadership clearly worked to demonstrate the shared process of emergence to leadership within the post-migration context and directly answered Research Question 3 in this way. Additionally, the perceptions and practice of ethical leadership aligned to answer Research Question 1 by explaining how the participants understood and experienced leadership within the shared cultural community.

Finally, in answering Research Question 2, the individual practice of leadership did not appear to change from the pre-migration to the post-migration context. However, perceptions of leadership within the greater contextual environments, particularly among governmental leadership, did change significantly. While unethical leadership was
viewed as prevalent within the pre-migration contexts due to systemic corruption and instability, the post-migration context provided a more supportive structure for the practice of ethical leadership as defined within this chapter. Overall, the findings illuminated the shared experiences of key informants as a process of moving from powerlessness to empowerment and, finally, emerging to leadership roles in which they were able to help empower others.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary

The value of understanding leadership among diverse populations is critical as the workforce becomes increasingly globalized. There is a need to investigate how cultural factors shape both the practice and the philosophy of leadership (Chuang, 2013; House et al., 2004; Kabasakal et al., 2012). Furthermore, as the United States continues to face future labor shortages, there is importance for investigating populations who are a source of human capital and who can contribute to the rich diversity of the workforce (Cagle, 2019; Mutikani, 2018; Porter, 2019).

Middle Eastern and North African immigrant and refugee women tend to participate at a lower rate within the United States workforce in comparison to other immigrant groups (Bloch, 2007; Deacon & Sullivan, 2009). Additionally, they are frequently underemployed and work in positions for which they are overqualified and/or overeducated (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009). The present research may illuminate better practices for assisting this culture group’s transition into the workforce by understanding their specific needs, practices, and perceptions as they relate to their culture and their role as leaders.

The overarching purpose of this ethnographic research was to investigate the leadership patterns existing within a culture-sharing community of MENA refugee and immigrant women living in the Midwestern United States after resettlement. This study attempted to broaden existing literature about leadership through an in-depth exploration of women’s leadership within the post-migration subculture of MENA refugees and immigrants. Previous research has rarely investigated leadership within subcultures and is
further limited in its exploration of intersectionality (e.g., gender, religion) (Chin, 2013; Chin & Trimble, 2014; House et al., 2004). Even less is known about the migration experiences--particularly to a culture very different from one’s pre-migration context--or the outcomes of workforce transition in regard to leadership opportunities and success within those roles (Najjar, Luethke, & Tuliao, 2018).

For the purposes of this study, the research questions asked: (1) What are the leadership patterns perceived and practiced by MENA refugee and immigrant women living in the Midwestern United States after resettlement? (2) How are changes in the leadership experiences of MENA refugee and immigrant women described from the pre-migration context to post-migration context? and (3) What is the shared process of emergence to leadership within this community? These research questions helped to guide the content of interviews with the key informants.

Through an ethnographic approach, data collection involved immersive observational research over the course of three years. A significant amount of time was spent becoming familiar with the community and developing trust with participants at the initial research site, the Helping Hand Community Center. Over time, these observational experiences grew to include additional events beyond the research site, such as engagement parties, lunches, fundraising events, and much more. From these immersive experiences, observational fieldnotes were developed as well as reflective memos that contributed to the contextual richness of this study and assisted in further expansion of the themes that emerged.

During the time spent at the Helping Hand Community Center, there were three occasions that provided opportunities to lead group discussions, which became focus
groups for the purposes of this study. Based on the information received during these sessions, directed interview questions were developed for interviews with the key informants. The primary sources of data for this research included the fieldnotes from those initial focus groups as well as nearly 36 hours of transcripts from interviews with seven key informants. Topics of discussion during interviews focused on personal experiences related to and perceptions about leadership. Additional questions about power and powerlessness were developed based on these initial conversations about leadership. Probes elicited stories and examples to clarify meaning throughout the interviews.

Fieldnotes were analyzed through line-by-line coding of the occurrences to identify emerging themes and patterns. Additionally, more than 1,000 excerpts were analyzed from the interview transcripts through first and second cycle coding. An eclectic approach, which involved simultaneous coding, in vivo coding, and process coding, was used for the first cycle analysis and pattern coding was used for the second cycle analysis. In all, nearly 500 unique codes were revealed. Eighty-seven of these codes occurred within the data 10 or more times and were analyzed through pattern coding in the second cycle analysis, revealing five major themes, four subthemes, and 48 supporting concepts in total. These themes, subthemes, and supporting concepts are included in Table 5.1 (below).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Context</th>
<th>Powerlessness</th>
<th>Empowerment</th>
<th>Unethical Leadership</th>
<th>Ethical Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>&quot;You're weak&quot;</td>
<td>Having Faith</td>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>&quot;Fears God&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;You are naked&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;In sha' Allah&quot;</td>
<td>Egotism</td>
<td>Respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender norms</td>
<td>Losing assistance</td>
<td>God's justice</td>
<td>Inaccessibility</td>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriarchy</td>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>Internal Locus of Control</td>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>&quot;Feelings for people&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction limitations</td>
<td>Diminished health</td>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Dishonesty</td>
<td>Helping people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covering</td>
<td>Violation of trust</td>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>Loss of trust</td>
<td>Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distrust</td>
<td>Self-motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Keeping confidences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Living in fear</td>
<td>Voice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Cut off your wings&quot;</td>
<td>Avoiding trouble</td>
<td></td>
<td>Solving problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td></td>
<td>Empowering others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Real friends</td>
<td></td>
<td>Development of trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support network</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mental healthcare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Living in the U.S.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Money</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being heard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cooking Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The five major themes related to leadership included cultural context, powerlessness, empowerment, unethical leadership, and ethical leadership. Taken together, the themes of powerlessness, empowerment, and ethical leadership revealed the shared path, or process of emergence to leadership, which the women within this community experienced after migration to the United States. These themes answered the third research question by revealing the shared process of leader emergence within the immediate subculture. Additionally, cultural context was of particular importance because of its overarching influence within all of the other themes that emerged from the data. In answering the second research question, the two approaches to leadership worked to demonstrate how perceptions about leadership changed from a system favoring unethical leadership within the pre-migration context (e.g., instability, corruption) to a system that supported ethical leadership within the post-migration context (e.g., stability, equality). Moreover, the supporting concepts within the theme of ethical leadership clearly demonstrated the patterns of leadership that were both perceived and practiced by the MENA immigrant and refugee women within this community. Finally, the first research question was answered by understanding how, the approach of ethical leadership, with focus on building trust, was highly favored as a means of developing followership.

Having studied and been a part of this cultural community for nearly three years, I believe trust was not only a facet of leadership, but rather the development of trust was the culmination of ethical leadership practice. That is to say that each of the supporting concepts discussed within ethical leadership are connected to trust, and without trust, leadership does not exist. Just as unethical leadership worked to undermine the trust of
followers, so ethical leadership developed and sustained trust with one’s followers. Trust fosters an environment of safety and support, and this was the form of leadership practice I heard idealized. It was embodied through the practices of the women who were interviewed as a part of this study. To be viewed as trustworthy, then, wholly captured the notion of being an ethical leader.

**Comparison of Findings with Past Research**

In comparing the findings of the present study with past research involving MENA refugee and immigrant women, several concepts were found to be consistent with previous findings and are summarized below (see Table 5.2). Overall, several concepts from the present study were consistent with previous findings; they were related to all factors except for entrepreneurship (for examples, Connor, 2010; Foroutan, 2008; Fozdar & Hartley, 2013). Additionally, while entrepreneurship was not directly related to any of the concepts that emerged in this study, it was mentioned by two of the key informants during interviews. Suha told of how she had owned a business prior to migration, while Bushra described her attempt to start a food catering business after migration but had been unsuccessful in the endeavor.
Table 5.2

Comparison of findings from previous research involving MENA refugee and immigrant women with findings of present study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous Findings</th>
<th>Related Concepts</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language acquisition (Beiser &amp; Hou, 2001; Benseman, 2014; Deacon &amp; Sullivan, 2009)</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to healthcare (Beiser, 2005; Bhugra &amp; Becker, 2005; Carswell et al., 2011; Deacon &amp; Sullivan, 2009; Eisenbruch et al., 2004; Fazel et al., 2005; Fozdar &amp; Hartley, 2013)</td>
<td>&quot;You're weak&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Losing assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stress</td>
<td></td>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diminished health</td>
<td></td>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental healthcare</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Living in the U.S.</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and religion (Bouma &amp; Brace-Goven, 2000; Darvishpour, 2002; Moghadam, 2003; Moghaddam, 2004)</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patriarchy</td>
<td>Gender Norms</td>
<td>Cultural Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction limitations</td>
<td>Gender Norms</td>
<td>Cultural Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Covering</td>
<td>Gender Norms</td>
<td>Cultural Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;In sha' Allâh&quot;</td>
<td>Having faith</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God's justice</td>
<td>Having faith</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and family support (Carswell et al., 2011; Deacon &amp; Sullivan, 2009; Forrest &amp; Brown, 2014; Weine et al., 2011)</td>
<td>Real friends</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support network</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (Benseman, 2014; Chui, 2011; Fontes, 2014; Fozdar &amp; Hartley, 2013)</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning opportunities</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment and underemployment (Allen, 2009; Bloch, 2007; Chui, 2011; Clayton, 2005; Colic-Peisker &amp; Tilbury, 2006; Deacon &amp; Sullivan, 2009; Dumper, 2002; Foroutan, 2008; Ghorashi &amp; van Tilburg, 2006;</td>
<td>&quot;Cut off your wings&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooking skills</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace violence and discrimination (Colic-Peisker &amp; Tilbury, 2006; Collins, 2015; Cruz &amp; Klinger, 2011; Foroutan, 2008)</td>
<td>Covering</td>
<td>Gender Norms</td>
<td>Cultural Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social networks (Beaman, 2006; Calvó-Armengol &amp; Jackson, 2004; Colic-Peisker &amp; Tilbury, 2006; Foad, 2013; Schaefer, 2015)</td>
<td>Real friends</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support network</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurship (Connor, 2010; Foroutan, 2008; Fozdar &amp; Hartley, 2013)</td>
<td>Not observed</td>
<td>(discussed by two key informants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to entrepreneurship, facets of powerlessness such as coping with diminished health and stress related to well-documented past research about access to healthcare (for examples, see Beiser, 2005; Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Carswell et al., 2011; Deacon & Sullivan, 2009; Eisenbruch et al., 2004; Fazel et al., 2005; Fozdar & Hartley, 2013). Fear of discrimination or workplace violence (for examples, see Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Collins, 2015; Cruz & Klinger, 2011; Foroutan, 2008) were also echoed in examples such as the account given by Bushra in which she discussed her fear of wearing the hijab to work because it made her easily identifiable as a Muslim (see the discussion of covering within the theme of cultural context). Findings of previous work that highlighted unemployment and underemployment (for examples, see Allen, 2009; Bloch, 2007; Chui, 2011; Clayton, 2005; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Deacon & Sullivan, 2009; Dumper, 2002; Foroutan, 2008; Ghorashi & van Tilburg, 2006; Yakushko et al., 2008) also emerged within concepts such as “cut of your wings” (a supporting concept within the powerlessness theme).

Similarly, several supporting concepts of the empowerment theme overlapped with the findings of previous research. These included the importance of learning English or language acquisition (for examples, see Beiser & Hou, 2001; Benseman, 2014; Deacon & Sullivan, 2009) and education (for examples, see Benseman, 2014; Chui, 2011; Fontes, 2014; Fozdar & Hartley, 2013; Hannah, 2003) through knowledge attainment or opportunities to learn. Additionally, the value of having real friends and a support network also aligned with past findings which discussed social networks (for examples, see Beaman, 2006; Calvó-Armengol & Jackson, 2004; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Foad, 2013; Schaefer, 2019) as well as family and community support (for examples, see
Carswell et al., 2011; Deacon & Sullivan, 2009; Forrest & Brown, 2014; Weine et al., 2011). Similarly, cultural and religious practices which emerged within previous research (for example, see Bouma & Brace-Govan, 2000; Darvishpour, 2002; Moghadam, 2003; Moghadam, 2004) were exemplified through concepts such as having faith (a subtheme of empowerment).

The themes related to culture and religion were especially complex and, as the findings herein suggest, may have the potential to suppress (e.g., “cut off your wings”) or assist (e.g., having faith) the path to empowerment. A better understanding of these cultural and religious factors is needed for agencies who work with populations of MENA women as well as potential employers to consider strategic ways to support empowerment. For instance, providing provisions such as a space to pray and establishing dress codes that permit the wearing of the hijab may expand employment possibilities for Muslim women. In addition to opportunities for improvement of workforce transition through facets of empower, yet another important contribution of this work may be found in the emergence to leadership after experiencing life crisis (e.g., forced migration to a cultural context that is different from the cultural context of one’s home).

**Leader emergence as an adaptive response.** Through comparison to past research, it became clear that a major contribution of this study was the discovery of new concepts that have not been captured in previous work involving populations of MENA immigrant and refugee women. One example of this is the idea of leader emergence as an adaptive response to stress or trauma. Research by Taylor and colleagues (2000) suggested that an alternative response to stress among women (beyond that of fight-or-
flight) is to tend-and-befriend. Their work highlighted the ways that women cope through the practice of protective and nurturing behaviors as well as through the development of connections with others, particularly with other women (Taylor et al., 2000). Concepts which emerged from the data, such as the importance of real friends (from the empowerment theme) as well as “feelings for people,” helping people, and empowering others (from the theme of ethical leadership), closely align with the notions of tend-and-befriend. Further investigation of the concepts from this study, that relate to tend-and-befriend, are imperative as they may provide a path to empowerment and leader emergence as a means of coping and resiliency. Furthermore, research of leader emergence as an adaptive response to trauma could provide meaningful implications for populations beyond the immediate community (e.g., other populations who have experienced life crises).

In addition to the notion of tend-and-befriend, posttraumatic growth literature further supports the value of the findings that emerged within this study through understanding how traumatic experiences may result in positive change at the individual level. Findings from Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) explained how positive outcomes following highly challenging events of life crisis are manifested through meaningful relationships with others, a strengthened sense of self-confidence, and the development of a personal spiritual practice, among other possible outcomes. These concepts closely aligned with the findings of the empowerment theme that emerged from the data through supporting ideas such as real friends as well as the subthemes of having faith and internal locus of control. Furthermore, the themes of both empowerment, especially in reference to internal locus of control, and ethical leadership have not been closely explored within
populations of MENA immigrant and refugee women, which make their emergence here of particular importance and emphasize the need for further investigation.

**Ethical leadership and existing leadership theory.** The emergent theme of ethical leadership was paramount to the purpose of this study. Through perception and practice, ethical leadership articulated those leadership characteristics most valued by members of the shared cultural community of MENA refugee women within the present study. These characteristics included "Fears God," respected, listening, "feelings for people," helping people, equality, keeping confidences, honesty, solving problems, empowering others, and the development of trust. Brief descriptions for each characteristic may be found in Table 5.3 (below).
Table 5.3

*Ethical Leadership Theme Characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Framework &amp; Characteristics</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Fears God&quot;</td>
<td>Has a strong religious practice and lives a lifestyle consistent with that practice; having integrity and being moral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respected</td>
<td>Being a respected figure within one's community through upstanding behavior; followers listen and obey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Authentically listens to and regards followers with equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Feeling people&quot;</td>
<td>Understanding the needs of all followers, being relatable and accessible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping people</td>
<td>Helping those in need often at the cost of personal sacrifice; actually showing up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>Involves recognizing that all humans are equal including oneself; promotes equal accessibility to resources for all people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping confidence</td>
<td>Develops trust by protecting the information and secrets of one's followers without judgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Consistency in one's words and actions; leading by example; keeping one's word and not breaking promises; involves being honest with oneself and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving problems</td>
<td>Requires ability to provide sound advice and resolve conflict to solve problems; involves empowering others to solve their own problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering others</td>
<td>Works to empower one's followers by promotion of educational opportunities as well as teaching and sharing skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of trust</td>
<td>Is trustworthy and has integrity; fosters an environment built on trust which fosters safety and support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In an effort to investigate the ways in which the findings of this research may overlap with previous work, the characteristics identified within the theme of ethical leadership were compared to those of two existing theoretical models: Transformational Leadership and Servant Leadership. Tables 5.4 and 5.5 (below) demonstrate this comparison and the areas of overlap between these theories and the present findings. The last column, labeled “application,” includes the characteristics of ethical leadership that were similar to the characteristic of each established model, respectively.

Table 5.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformational Leadership (Avolio, 2011)</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idealized Influence</td>
<td>Develops respect, trust, and admiration of followers who emulate leader as a result</td>
<td>Respected, Development of trust, Keeping confidences, Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational Motivation</td>
<td>Provides meaning and challenge for work of followers; shows enthusiasm and optimism</td>
<td>Solving problems, Empowering others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Encourages creativity; ability to reframe problems</td>
<td>Solving problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized Consideration</td>
<td>Gives attention to each follower’s needs through roles as coach, mentor, teacher, facilitator, confidant, and counselor</td>
<td>Equality, &quot;Feelings for people,&quot; Helping people, Empowering others, Listening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When comparing the characteristics of ethical leadership to Transformational Leadership, it appeared that all supporting concepts of ethical leadership fit within the nomological network of the four I’s (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration), with the exception of “fears.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Framework &amp; Characteristics</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Servant Leadership (Spears, 2010)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Listens intently to identify the will of followers and help clarify that will. Also involves listening to inner voice</td>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Ability to understand, empathize, and accept others as people</td>
<td>Equality &quot;Feelings for people&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing</td>
<td>Recognizing opportunities to help others find healing and become whole through relationship</td>
<td>Helping people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Self-awareness as well as understanding issues involving ethics, power, and values</td>
<td>&quot;Fearing God&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>Ability to build consensus within groups through persuasion rather than coercion</td>
<td>Respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualization</td>
<td>Embraces broad conceptual thinking; ability to dream great dreams</td>
<td>Not observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foresight</td>
<td>Ability to foresee potential consequences and understand lessons of the past as well as realities of the present</td>
<td>Solving problems Empowering others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewardship</td>
<td>Commitment to serving the needs of others. Requires trust and emphasizes openness and persuasion, rather than control</td>
<td>Honesty Development of trust Keeping confidences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to Growth of People</td>
<td>Involves deep commitment to and investment in the growth of others</td>
<td>Empowering others Helping people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building community</td>
<td>Seeks to identify means for building true community</td>
<td>Development of trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moreover, it appeared from this comparison that all of the characteristics of ethical leadership also fit within the construct of Servant Leadership. However, conceptualization (from Servant Leadership), which involves broad conceptual thinking, did not appear to emerge as an idea within the present study. In order to validate the congruency of ethical leadership with the models of Servant Leadership and Transformational Leadership, future investigation could include more targeted questions to align with these leadership theories. Researchers could closely examine the practice of conceptualization from Servant Leadership to identify if this characteristic is a component of practice, or if it was simply not captured as a part of the immediate study. Additionally, some attention should be given to the characterization of “fears God,” which did not appear to fit into the existing framework of Transformational Leadership, to understand how this aspect may be important in gaining a deeper understanding of leadership in other cultures.

Importance of this Research

While the number of displaced individuals worldwide continues to grow at an exponential rate, there exists a dearth of leadership research which has deeply investigated subcultural groups of immigrants and refugees. Scarcer still is research which has accounted for intersectionality (e.g., gender, religion, culture, race, etc.) within such populations. This research is particularly valuable to leadership scholars as insights about the process of leadership emergence has potential to contribute to the economic growth and improvement of immigrants and refugees after resettlement. To date, MENA immigrant women tend to participate in the workforce at a lower rate than other immigrant populations in the United States. Yet, the findings of this study suggest the
possibility of applicable workplace leadership skills, which should be investigated in future research.

An additional contribution of this research is its exploration of leadership through a methodological approach that worked to capture the complex interacting factors of leadership. Complexity Leadership Theory is a perspective which suggests that leadership cannot be understood by looking only at individual leader behavior, but rather that leadership is the result of many intermingling dynamics which occur as a result of diverse contexts (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). The work of Uhl-Bien and her colleagues (2007) suggested that the framework of Complexity Leadership Theory mandates the need for leadership research which accounts for such dynamics. Through the present ethnographic research, the study of leadership was advance by looking at intersectionality (e.g., religion, race, culture) within a community of MENA immigrant and refugee women by demonstrating how contextual factors may influence the conceptualization of leadership.

Finally, a valuable contribution of this work is its discussion of leader emergence as an adaptive response to trauma, such as the experience of forced migration. Having already discussed the growing number of forcibly displaced individuals worldwide, it is clear that such populations could benefit from knowledge that has the potential to improve coping and resiliency strategies. Beyond refugee populations, there are endless numbers of individuals who have experiences of highly challenging life crises including first responders, veterans, and victims of assault, among many others. The findings of this research may be of significance by providing a starting point for the development of
strategies based on leader emergence (e.g., the development of leadership skills) that could provide positive outcomes for such populations.

**Implications**

This study clearly revealed a comprehensive leadership practice articulated by the key informants. It further demonstrated the emergence of leadership skills and leadership experiences, that are highly valuable human capital resources. Given the current labor shortage issues facing the United States labor market, these skills have the potential to be applied in impactful and meaningful ways. While additional research is undoubtedly needed, this study makes an important contribution to the growing body of literature toward conceptualizing ways to better assist workforce transition for MENA women.

Several tools were identified that assisted with the empowerment of the key informants and others who were a part of this study. Understanding these resources may allow both governmental and non-governmental agencies to better focus their efforts in providing assistance to meet the needs of MENA immigrant and refugee women. The concepts that were a part of internal locus of control may be of particular interest as they have not been well-addressed within previous research with similar populations.

Furthermore, leader emergence as an adaptive response may be generalizable to populations beyond the immediate subculture. Emergence of leadership was instrumental to the MENA women’s overall outlook on life and success in regaining a sense of purpose within their own community. Populations who share the experience of powerless as a result of trauma, or life crisis, may include military personnel who have experienced trauma, individuals who have been through life-altering accidents, or even those who have been incarcerated for extended periods. Of course, additional research is needed to
understand the applicability and usefulness of leader emergence as an adaptive response, but it has the potential to provide valuable insight nonetheless.

**Limitations**

While qualitative research by its very nature is not widely generalizable, this is not a typical goal of qualitative approaches such as ethnographic research. As outlined in Chapter 3, the purpose of ethnography is to learn about a culture-sharing group and the patterns that exist within that specific group through immersive research experiences (e.g., observations and interviews) (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Having understood the purpose of ethnographic research, there are some limitations of this study which should be addressed as they contribute to its limited generalizability.

Though the immersive nature of ethnographic research allowed for great depth and understanding within this subculture, it limited the population of this study. Specifically, the small number of participants and limited inclusivity of members (i.e., MENA refugee and immigrant women) who were a part of the immediate culture-sharing group restricted the population. Additionally, in keeping with ethnographic practice, the number of key informants was limited to seven women, thus limiting the number of participants.

A further limitation to this research was the diversity of MENA women within this small population. While this enriched the overall findings within the unique culture-sharing group, it is possible that the findings may have included additional concepts within the theme of cultural context if all participants had originally been from a single region within the Middle East or North Africa due to greater homogeneity. Moreover, all of the key informants were over the age of 30 and all had children. This is another aspect
of the study that may have contributed to different results had younger women and/or those without children been included in this study. Self-selection of the participants, particularly of the key informants, was yet another limitation because it only allowed for the inclusion women who were willing to be interviewed.

Finally, though I contend that a high level of trust was a necessary precursor to beginning interviews with key informants, ideally this process would have started earlier. Perhaps the addition of small group interviews--such as those with Deema, Sama, and Jana--would have provided a good option to help the women become more acquainted with me. While the three-year investment was essential for development of the trusting relationships that led to authentic insights and deep disclosures, lengthening the interview period would have also provided an option for analyzing possible changes in responses over time (e.g., as the researcher became a more trusted individual within the community). The quality and richness of this study would have been impossible to develop without the established trust of this community’s members as authentic insights and opportunities for immersive experiences beyond the Helping Hand Community Center would likely not have occurred.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research involving MENA refugee and immigrant women should consider the integration of existing leadership models for comparison, especially Transformational Leadership and Servant Leadership, through quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approaches. A further qualitative study could expand the immediate findings by involving case study research in order to compare leadership practices within similar communities
of MENA refugee and immigrant women. As there is still limited research involving MENA populations, a qualitative or mixed-methods approach would be most ideal. Inclusion of the Servant Leadership survey, for instance, may provide a means for integration of mixed methods.

The concepts discussed as a part of the empowerment theme should be investigated to further understand how they may be used by governmental and non-governmental agencies who work with MENA refugee and immigrant women. Doing so has the potential to support the empowerment of MENA women as well as earlier development of leadership skills. Additionally, further exploration of the concepts related to internal locus of control are important in understanding the process of empowerment as these concepts have not appeared as major findings within previous research.

While this study is a starting point for examining the perceptions and practices of leadership within a subculture of MENA refugee and immigrant women, a next step to this process could involve investigation of ways to transfer these leadership skills to the workforce, particularly within leadership positions. It is of particular importance to be mindful of the cultural contextual factors that emerged when thinking about workforce transition. A culturally sensitive approach to conceptualizing better workforce transition for MENA refugee and immigrant women is needed because it has the potential to improve economic outcomes such as increased workforce participation.

Finally, further research should consider the process of leader emergence found within this study, particularly as an adaptive strategy for coping with the stress of life crises. Importantly, researchers should investigate both similar populations of MENA refugee and immigrants, as well as other cultural groups. As briefly discussed within this
study’s significance, there is the potential for the applicability of this model among other populations who have experienced loss and subsequent powerlessness as a result of trauma. With these populations in mind, further research would certainly be a worthwhile endeavor.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study greatly expanded the knowledge base related to leadership. Ethnographic research over three years included immersive observations, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with key informants, all of which allowed for a rich collection of data. Analysis involving an eclectic approach for the first cycle coding and pattern coding within the second cycle review provided five emergent themes: cultural context, powerlessness, empowerment, unethical leadership, and ethical leadership. Study of this culture-sharing group of MENA refugee and immigrant women revealed a clear process of leader emergence after resettlement. This process of emergence to leadership appeared to be an adaptive response to the traumas, or life crises, that members of this community had experienced. This study further revealed findings that were both consistent with previous research, as well as some new findings, such as leader emergence as an adaptive response. The overall findings of this research provided useful insights for improving workforce transition for similar populations, in addition to the development of approaches which could assist with coping and resiliency following traumatic experiences.

**Researcher’s Reflection**

As I reflect on the past five years of my doctoral program, I find that it has been characterized by moments of feeling invincible, as though I were able to move
mountains. In the same breath, I faced moments of feeling overwhelmed by self-doubt, sometimes resulting in complete paralysis or inaction. I have experienced both triumphs and setbacks, all of which I now see as a valuable part of my journey in this life. When I started this research, I never imagined it would involve three years of data collection, but I cannot imagine the outcome would be as meaningful or complete without this significant time investment. I could not have comprehended the deep connection I would feel to this community even now as my research draws to a close.

The women who were a part of this study left a lasting impact on me. Their stories inspired me to pursue my best self and to view the world with greater optimism. With a focus on leadership, I did not anticipate the deeply emotional journey involved in recounting their experiences of powerlessness and empowerment. Their stories left me questioning whether I was capable of telling their experiences, to accurately portray them as individuals and to represent their voices as their own. I have worked to do this to the best of my ability in collecting, analyzing, and writing the results of this study. I am forever grateful and indebted to this community. They opened their homes to me and showed me hospitality in ways I could not comprehend prior to this research. The hours which my key informants and interpreter committed to the interviews within this study were significant, and I am thankful for their contributions. Just as many of them have come to call me their sister, daughter, and friend, so are they my sisters, mothers, and lifelong friends.
References


https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014


Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, 8 USC § 1101 (1980).


Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Participant Informed Consent Form

Title: Investigating the Experiences of Political Refugees at a Community Center

Purpose:
This research project will aim to better understand the lived experiences of displaced women in the United States. You are invited to participate in this study because of your involvement as [redacted]. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate in this study.

Procedures:
You will be interviewed about your experiences at [redacted] as well as the experiences about your relocation process and what led you to the center. The total time commitment for this study will not exceed a maximum of one hour and thirty minutes (1 hour for initial interview and 30 minutes for follow-up interview if needed).

Benefits:
There are no direct benefits for your participation in this study, but I will share my findings with you.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the investigator’s office and will only be seen by the investigator during the study. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported using a pseudonym so that your identity will be kept confidential.

Compensation:
There is no compensation for your participation in this project.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact the investigator(s) at the phone numbers below. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or the [redacted] or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

I grant permission to be audio taped during the interview(s).
I do NOT grant permission to be audio taped.

I grant permission to be photographed and I am aware that these photographs may be used in publications and/or presentations.
I do NOT grant permission to be photographed.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Research Participant

Name and Phone Number of Investigator(s):
Tiffani Luethke, Graduate Student, Principal Investigator
Gina Marcin, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator/Student Advisor
Office: (308) 393-7988
Office: (402) 472-4454

300 Agricultural Hall / P.O. Box 830709 / Lincoln, NE 68583-0709 / (402) 472-2807 / FAX (402) 472-5863
Appendix B
IRB Change Request Approval April 20, 2018

April 20, 2018 - official approval letter Tiffani Luethtke Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication Gina Matkin Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication FYH 143, UNL, 685830947 IRB Number: 20160515954 EX Project ID: 15954 Project Title: Investigating the Experiences of Political Refugees at a Community Center Dear Tiffani: The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects has completed its review of the Request for Change in Protocol submitted to the IRB. The change request form has been approved to: 1. The study will include observations of multiple meetings occurring at this site, totally in approximately 150 separate observations. 2. Interviews with participants will include 6-7, 1-hour meetings with each person. To date, only one participant has been interviewed (on 2 separate occasions) and she will be asked for additional interviews if she chooses continue participation. 3. It was previously indicated that interviews would be conducted at the investigator's private office, or at the research site, or at the researcher's home. Based on the preliminary research, it became clear that some participants would prefer to be interviewed at their own homes because it provided them the most comfort and convenience. We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event: * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures; * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur; * Any protocol violation or protocol deviation * An incarceration of a research participant in a protocol that was not approved to include prisoners * Any knowledge of adverse audits or enforcement actions required by Sponsors * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research; * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff. This letter constitutes official notification of the approval of the protocol change. You are therefore authorized to implement this change accordingly. If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 402-472-6965. Sincerely, Becky R. Freeman, CIP for the IRB
Appendix C
Example Interview Questions for Key Informants

1. Recently in class, we discussed qualities of a leader. What are some qualities that you believe are important for leaders to possess?

2. What do good leaders do?

3. Are there differences between the qualities of leaders here in the United States versus leaders in your home country? If so, how are they different?

4. What is power or how do you define it?

5. What are some of the ways that people attain power?

6. How important is power and why?

7. What are some reasons that you would go to others to ask for help or advice?

8. Can you tell me about a time when someone came to you for advice or help?

9. What are some reasons that people may ask for your help?

10. Can you think of a time when you have shown leadership?

11. Do you think of yourself as a leader? Why or why not?

12. Do you think others see you as a leader? Why or why not?

13. Can you name five (or more) things that you are really good at?

14. What are some of your qualities that you think would make you a good leader?
## Table of Five Qualitative Research Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Narrative Research</th>
<th>Phenomenology</th>
<th>Grounded Theory</th>
<th>Ethnography</th>
<th>Case Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>Exploring the life of an individual</td>
<td>Understanding the essence of the experience</td>
<td>Developing a theory grounded in data from the field</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting a culture-sharing group</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Types of Problem Best Suited for Design</strong></td>
<td>Needing to tell stories of individual experiences</td>
<td>Needing to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon</td>
<td>Grounding a theory in the views of participants</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting the shared patterns of culture of a group</td>
<td>Drawing from psychology, law, political science, and medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit of Analysis</strong></td>
<td>Studying one or more individuals</td>
<td>Studying several individuals who have shared the experience</td>
<td>Studying a process, an action, or an interaction involving many individuals</td>
<td>Studying a group that shares the same culture</td>
<td>Studying an event, a program an activity, or more than one individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Collection</strong></td>
<td>Using primarily interview and documents</td>
<td>Using primarily interview with individuals, although documents, observations, and art may also be considered</td>
<td>Using primarily interviews with 20-60 individuals</td>
<td>Using primarily observations and interviews, but perhaps collecting other sources during extended time in field</td>
<td>Using multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from Creswell, 2013
Appendix E
Commonly Used Arabic Words and Phrases

Al-ḥamdu lil-lāh: Thank God or praise be to God

Hajah: A women who has completed the Haj (the pilgrimage to Mecca)

Hijab: A head covering worn in public by some Muslim women

ʾIn shāʾ Allāh: God willing or if God wills it

Qurʾan: Sometimes also referred to as the Holy Book, it is the religious text of Islam

Ramadan: An important Muslim holiday during which strict fasting is observed from sunrise to sunset for one month