This qualitative study explored the experiences of Muslim women from the Arab world who came to live and study in the U.S. This study gave voice to their daily lived experiences of transitioning to and adjusting to life and study in the American world. Nine bilingual women provided in-depth responses to interviews and follow up phone calls. Women were raised in predominantly Muslim countries and attended institutions of higher education for the first time in the U.S. as international or domestic students, including refugees. Interviews were in English. Any spontaneous Arabic that was used by participants was immediately translated by the bilingual researcher and verified for accuracy with the participant. The constructivist and critical ideologist paradigms shaped this phenomenological research. Low inference descriptors and direct quotes were primarily used to tell their
stories. Their stories began from the point in time before they left their home country to the present time when they were interviewed.

Seven themes emerged from the stories of the women in this study. Themes were grouped into three processes of transitioning, adjusting, and succeeding. In the transitioning process, women paint a picture of what life was like for them back home and when they first made the move to the U.S. This process included the themes titled: (1) It's hard to say goodbye, which was about complicated goodbyes, and (2) Just like in the movies?, which was about the differences between expectations and reality they experienced. In the adjusting process, women describe how they adjusted over time and experienced many challenges including discrimination. This process included the themes titled: (3) I miss this, which was about the life they missed from back home, and (4) Life in America is hard work, which was about hard work and effort they were making in their life here. In the succeeding process, women shared the final part of their stories on what aided or eased their adjustment and led to success. This process included the themes titled: (5) Home away from home, which was about how they successfully coped with the loss of family and friends by developing their social support network here, (6) Inner strength and independence, which was about how they developed through faith, advocacy, and skills, and (7) Respect and understanding, which was about how changes occurred over time in their views on discrimination, America and Americans, people back home, and their own selves.

A recipe for success emerged from the stories of these women, as well as requests from them for others to accept and accommodate them. Connections to the literature on discrimination and the media, acculturation, ethnic identity, and religious identity are made in the discussion, as well as recommendations for higher education, psychology, counseling, and future research. A strong recommendation for individuals working with this population was given to become familiar with the requests women in this study made for acceptance and for accommodations.