AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PERCEPTIONS HELD BY K12 MUSLIM FEMALE ISLAMIC SCHOOL TEACHERS IN THE UNITED STATES OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND THEIR EFFECTS ON SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SCHOOL EFFICACY: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

In this dynamic era of change the educational landscape in North America offers parents a plethora of choices when it comes to educating their children. Muslim American parents are no exception to this phenomenon, specifically after the world was shaken on September 11th, 2001. Muslim professionals saw an opening in the market, and so Islamic schools proliferated through the country. A priori studies on Islamic schools have focused on the perceptions held by school leaders of the effects of their leadership style on school climate; the gap in literature has provided the impetus for this research. As such, this qualitative, Interpretative Phenomenological study uses servant leadership theory, school climate theory, and aligns these with Islamic leadership theory to create a lens, to describe the understandings and perceptions held by Islamic school teachers of their experiences with school leadership, and its perceived effects on school climate.

The results from this study indicate a few salient and noteworthy points; first, the culture of nepotism in Islamic schools indicates that employees may not always be treated equally; next, teachers confirmed that their state of mind is what led to the positive climate that they experienced. Moreover, they reported a lack of transparency between leaders and stakeholders. A lack of cultural competency as well as a deficiency in academic proficiency regarding policy and curriculum meant that leaders were ill prepared to deal with common issues. Participants also reported the common use of religious guilt and most prominently, the implementation of a dictatorship under the guise of the Islamic shura Ideology, which promotes mutual consultation and honors the voice of subordinates.

The findings of this study will provide Islamic school organizations with a foundation for assessing the role of principal leadership, specifically with regards to its effect on school climate.
Furthermore, this research will enable schools to modify credentialing and continued professional development requirements for their principals, as well supporting ongoing research regarding leadership in Islamic schools. Cultural constraints make it challenging for many ethnic minority individuals (particularly women) to speak openly about disparities that they deal with on a daily basis; to some this is considered a form of disloyalty or treachery, to which end, this research will provide the stimulus for dialogue amongst Islamic school boards and teachers.
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All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, and to our Master Muhammad (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon Him) may Allah raise his rank.

My American Dream has been very challenging; I arrived a few weeks after the heinous attacks of 9/11, and as a Muslim female I was faced with what seemed like unsurpassable challenges. My life, at times, seemed like a complete whirlwind of nothingness, but as I was continuously reassured “this too shall pass,” it indeed did; I sit here today completely aghast.

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Muhammad Khalil Khalid and Najma Nisa, who, having immigrated to the United Kingdom in the 1960s, were fiercely aware of the injustices, discrimination, and obstacles that stood in the way of ethnic minorities. They instilled within “all five of us” the inherent passion for education; the only way they saw that we could attempt to level the playing field. The wisdom in their words rang true as I found myself only able to survive as a single parent because of my education.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

As a scientist, I am best able to understand processes when they have a logical sequence; for every reaction to take place a catalyst is required. The purpose of a catalyst is to speed the reaction up such that equilibrium is met in the optimal time and surrounding environment. As such, there exists in the western region of the United States of America (from southern Oregon to Baja, California) the knobcone pine tree (*Pinus attenuate*) that requires searing heat (usually in the form of a bush fire) to allow for its cones to burst open and release its seeds that grow in the optimally conditioned ashy soil (Keyworth, 2002). This analogy can be related to the growth of Islamic schools in America; born out of the devastation and destruction of that unassuming Tuesday morning in September 2001, the Muslim community witnessed itself being held accountable for the terrorist attacks, and something needed to be done to change this. It was this unequivocally tumultuous event that provided the catalyst for the proliferation of religious institutes; Muslims battled to overcome prejudice by Islamizing Muslim children without de-Americanizing them.

The growth of Islamic schools throughout the United States has not come without its struggles; the heftiness of the moral responsibility that it carries within the bricks and mortar is unequivocal. An Islamic school is more than just a building; accordingly, Qadri and Qadri (2002) assert it is the blueprint of the future generation and society. Shaheed (1990) purports, these buildings play a key role in establishing Islamic communities, “whose manners, ideas and concepts, rules and regulations, values and criteria are all derived from the Islamic source,” (p. 4). The ultimate goal of Islamic schools should be to produce graduates who are not only rich in knowledge, but who are noble in character and who can promote righteousness in society.
Islamic schools have a hefty goal to meet; my personal experience in three such institutes has left me baffled. Leadership, comprised largely of immigrant professionals who are not primarily educators (Aabed, 2006) seems ill-equipped to deal with demands that 9/11 has left in its wake. Literature indicates that there is a strong relationship between leadership and school climate, and more significantly between servant leadership, as exhibited by Prophet Muhammad (Beekun & Badawi, 1999) and the organizational climate of a school (Black, 2010).

My journey as a science teacher in America began just two months after the devastating terrorist attacks of 9/11--attacks that would shake this country to its very core as a sense of fear and grief emanated from Americans of all races and creeds. The instantaneous effects of the attacks were clear: carnage, death, destruction, prejudice and feeling of deep-seated uncertainty. I was no ordinary chemistry teacher; I was a Muslim woman who adorned the banner of Islam—the hijab. My covering was not only a testimony of my faith, but a promise to my students and society at large that the vicious acts of very few could not, and would not, dictate my actions. I stood firm on that first November day at the front of the bleak classroom filled with innocent and almost fearful eyes. These girls were my students and I was determined to empower them; I would be a light bearer…and, that’s where this fairy tale comes to a bitter end.

As I learned in my almost 12 year experience working in some of Northern Virginia’s most established Islamic schools, the top heavy hierarchy led to the creation of a less than optimal environment in which students and teachers alike were unable to thrive. Indicators of poor school climate such as lack of student achievement (measured by the IOWA or Stanford test batteries), low rate of student retention (measured by the number of reenrolling students), high absenteeism, high teacher turnover rate, lack of communication and an unwillingness to allow the stakeholders a voice, were all prominent features. My experiences as an educator gave
me firsthand insight into the effects of leadership practices in Islamic schools and their insular attitudes that hampered the progress of the institute on the whole.

Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to determine how K12 Islamic school educators experience leadership in their schools and how they make sense of how leadership style impacts school climate, thereby providing Islamic school organizations a foundation for assessing the role of principal leadership, specifically with regards to its effect on school climate. Furthermore, this research will enable schools to modify credentialing and continued professional development requirements for their principals, as well supporting ongoing research regarding leadership in Islamic schools. Cultural constraints make it challenging for many ethnic minority individuals (particularly women) to speak openly about disparities that they deal with on a daily basis; to some this is considered a form of disloyalty or treachery. This research will provide the stimulus for dialogue amongst Islamic school boards and teachers

The topic. Islam is one of the world’s fastest growing religions – according to population projections by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, the world’s Muslim population is expected to increase by about 35% in the next 20 years, rising from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.2 billion by 2030, (Pew Research Center, 2011). This trend is also reflected in the growing number of independent Islamic day schools in the United States. In an MSNBC report Kari Huss (2011) estimates that there are 250 K-12 schools currently operating that are based in Islamic teachings. The formation of the Council of Islamic Schools in North America (CISNA) in 1991 marked the dawn of a new age in organized Islamic schools (Merry & Driessen, 2005). After the horrific events of 9/11, Merry (2005) reports the primary motivation for many Muslim parents, to place their children in independent Islamic schools, was to protect them from the secular influences and prejudices in the public school system and society, and therefore to
cultivate a strong religious identity. Additionally, the Islamic School League of America (ISLA), a nonprofit that connects Muslim educators and institutions, estimates that 40,000 students are enrolled in these schools, a dramatic increase of 25% in the last five years (Huus, 2011), and those numbers are expected to keep growing.

Despite their rapid dissemination throughout the country, Islamic independent schools face many challenges. A majority of them are not overseen directly by the government, so there is no regulatory body that oversees practices or evaluates school wide efficacy based on a set of mandated standards, and thus Islamic schools receive no state funding (Merry & Driessen, 2009). Moreover, the absence of an external control mechanism is a factor that leads to the empowerment of administrators giving them the autonomy to make decisions regarding curriculum. Therefore, these schools present inconsistent academic results despite their efforts to provide a rigorous curriculum; most of these institutes are in their infancy, and thus their achievement data does not match the optimistic school aims (Merry & Driessen, 2009). Merry et al. (2009) assert, “In North America, many [Islamic] school teachers and administrators have no formal training in education, and a severe shortage of qualified teachers persists” (p.111).

Furthermore, whilst most principals possess managerial experience, they are devoid of leadership experience and training within the realms of a school setting (Merry & Driessen, 2009). Thus, school governance can be difficult; Islamic school administrators are notoriously overworked and underpaid. The average length of employment for an Islamic school administrator is three years, roughly half of the public school average (Saleh, 2000). Reports of inadequate administrative support, low pay, staff burnout, and school board ineffectiveness are common (Merry & Driessen, 2005). Furthermore, teacher retention remains an ongoing challenge to Islamic schools, as evidence indicates there is a discouraging level of teacher efficacy within
these institutes (Ezzidine & Moes, 2004). Combined, all of these factors lead to a poor school climate in which principals are unable to espouse and encourage forward thinking, a sense of purpose, and a collective vision (Dinham, Cairney, Craigie, & Wilson, 1995). Though this universal acceptance of this view appears trite, its importance is undiminished. Sapphire and King (1985) note, it is school leadership, and particularly the principal, that “gives shape and direction to the school’s culture… [Through] a vision that embodies core values and purposes” (p. 67).

Overall, the symbiotic nature of relationship between the leadership style employed at a school, and the perceptions held by teachers of the schools climate, cannot be underestimated.

Research problem. The purpose of this study was to hear the voices of K12 Islamic School educators in order to understand their experiences with leadership in their schools; and moreover, how they are able to make sense of the impact of leadership style on school climate. Since research has only examined the way in which Islamic School leaders make sense of this relationship (Aabed, 2006; Elsegeini, 2005) this study addresses the insights of key stakeholders at the grassroots of the educational arena. Furthermore, research indicates that leadership style is known to have an effect on school climate (Black, 2010). As the number of Islamic schools has grown in the USA, research has failed to examine the way in which teachers perceive leadership style to impact school climate; evidently, data has been collected defining only how leaders perceive this to be. Therefore, there is a clear gap in literature addressing this issue, a gap that I aimed to fill.

Justification for the research problem. Islamic organizations in Western countries face many challenges that resonate from their internal structure (Faris & Parry, 2011) and schools are no exception to this phenomenon (Al-Lawati & Hunsaker, 2007; Beekun & Badawi,
A myriad of factors, including social, cultural, and political challenges contribute to the instability of the school climate within Islamic schools (Aabed, 2006; Elsegeini, 2005; Ezzidine & Moes, 2004; Fattah, 2009; Merry & Driessen, 2005).

The importance of building healthy school climates that support learning is a topic that has been investigated for over a century (Drago-Severson, 2012; Gunbayi, 2007). However, it is essential to examine how Islamic school principals shape school climates, given the rapid dissemination of Islamic schools throughout the United States (Huus, 2011) coupled with challenging educational demands, educators face in contemporary society (Drago-Severson, 2012; Ezzidine & Moes, 2004).

Studies on school climate have shown a direct, positive correlational, relationship between servant leadership style and schools that create a positive learning environment, (Adeogun & Olisaemeka, 2011; Black, 2010; Bulach, Malone, & Castleman, 1995; Greenleaf, 1998) and greater teacher retention and satisfaction (de Barona & Barona, 2006). According to Greenleaf (1977, p. 6)

The servant-leader is servant first… It begins with the natural feeling that one not only wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first; perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions…The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.

**Deficiencies in the evidence.** While current research addresses the perceptions held by Islamic school leaders, of the impact of their leadership style on school climate (Aabed, 2006; Elsegeini, 2005), and while a plethora of research exists that demonstrates the perceptions of
teachers in mainstream public schools of the effects of leaderships on organizational climate (Awan & Mahmood, 2010; Black, 2010; Dinham, Cairney, Craigie, & Wilson, 1995; Gunbayi, 2007; Hall & George, 1999), there is a gap in literature which exists addressing the perceptions of held by Islamic school teachers of the effects of leadership style on school climate.

**Relating the discussion to audiences.** The overarching purpose of this research is to provide a basis for dialogue and change within Islamic schools. It has the potential of providing the impetus for implementation of a training program for leaders before entering the role of school principal. Furthermore, it will provide teachers in Islamic school with the voice that is currently lacking; the voice that is muffled under the guise of subservience to God, but in reality due to a fear of undermining the authority, is hushed. Additionally, this research will fill a gap in literature wherein the perceptions of teachers in Islamic schools, which are seldom taken into consideration, will be addressed. This research also aims to bolster the current theoretical underpinnings providing Islamic school leaders a method by which they can address servant leadership, and its relationship with school climate through an Islamic lens; to this effect, the theoretical framework guiding the research uses as servant leadership theory and school climate theory as its structural scaffolding, and applies Islamic leadership theory to provide context, allowing its specific application to the Islamic schools context.

**Significance of Research Problem**

The best leadership practices can promote exemplary standards of excellence, both in the academic achievement of students and the professional growth of staff members. In pursuit of these goals, many leadership theories, models, and styles have been subjected to extensive quantitative and qualitative analyses. Researchers recognized the need for servant leadership to be exposed to considerable critical analysis, in order to provide sufficient empirical data to
translate the theory into an acceptable level of academic credibility (Anderson K. P., 2005).

The empirical data collected from the research study has the potential to contribute to the practical application of a theoretical dialogue regarding servant leadership and its effects on school climate. For example, analysis from the current study could provide insight into practical implications for principals, and how implementing such practices could enhance school climate (Black, 2010). Second, the study has the potential to provide insight into areas of emphasis for individuals responsible for developing effective leadership programs, using servant leadership principles as a foundation. For example, as a result of this study, school administrators may consider it plausible to provide professional development and training to principals before they begin their duties (Black, 2010; Laub, 1999). Third, the current research may contribute to the construction of the concept of applying servant leadership practices within Islamic schools (Black, 2010; Chowdhury, 2001; Greenleaf, 1998;). Fourth, this research could provide the impetus for a correlational analysis using statistically based instruments augmenting the confidence and validity of this research, by either strengthening or refuting claims made by the participants regarding their perceptions of how leadership practices effect climate in Islamic schools (Anderson, 2005; Laub, 1998; Miears, 2004; Thompson, 2002).

Research Question

How do the experiences of female Muslim K12 Islamic school educators shape their perceptions of the impact of school leadership on school climate?

Theoretical Framework

A theory, according to Ritchey (2008) is, “a set of interrelated, logically organized statements that explain a phenomenon of special interest and that have been corroborated through observation and analysis” (p. 8).
Since Islamic schools are in their infancy and have been reported to provide an education that leaves many feeling disheartened (Merry & Driessen, 2009), the theoretical frameworks chosen to inform this research deal specifically with how teachers perceive school leadership, and school climate. George and Bishop (1971) assert climate is a necessary link between the organizational structure of the school, the leadership style of the principal, and the attitude and behavior of teachers. Clearly, posit Sergiovanni and Starrat (1988), climate is the manifestation of the intertwining of the organizations structure, the leader’s character, and the teachers’ performance, and satisfaction.

In light of this, the following section shall address the frameworks that will enable the researcher to understand the perceptions of Islamic school leadership practices and school climate, held by full-time teachers of Islamic K12 schools in America.

**Islamic leadership theory.** Any analysis of an Islamic group should take into consideration the social, cultural, religious, and political elements that the group’s leadership uses to establish its authority (Bar, 2012). Based on the example of Prophet Mohammed and his Companions, who became the first four successors, or caliphs, spirituality is an integral component of leadership in Islam. In Islam the role, and attendant responsibility, of leadership is not to be chased after as an ambition (Kriger & Seng, 2005); the process involves the ability to improve the status quo to the benefit of all members of the organization (Beekun & Badawi, 1999). Islamic school leaders must therefore, empower others, project a clear image of the organization’s mission and vision, model the way for stakeholders, whilst concurrently supporting, motivating, and encouraging followers (Elsegeini, 2005).

Effective leadership is sparse within Western Muslim organizations (Sahadat, 1997). In fact, Aabed (2006) asserts the most pressing problem for Islamic schools is that they lack
competent leadership demonstrated by the fact that school boards do not have the leadership training to run a school; in essence he purports, most Islamic school administrators seldom hold a graduate degree in the field of educational leadership, or school administration. Furthermore, this manifests itself in the lack of adequate resources, high teacher turnover, and student attrition, as well as the hiring of under or ill-qualified educators (Aabed, 2006). While the studies demonstrating the tenets of effective leadership in Islamic schools are limited, Yukl (1998) asserts leadership efficacy can be measured by the leader’s contribution to the quality of group processes, and the extent to which the organization performs its tasks, and goals, successfully. Fattah (2009) further argues that traditionally Arab or South Asian perceptions, held by Muslims in North America regarding leadership, are what hamper the success of Islamic organizations. Leaders are unable to transfer the tenets of Islam in a Western setting, and though they may conduct training camps and activities in North America, the area of human development and leadership has been neglected (Altalib, 2001). Siddiqui (2002) bolsters this argument through her observation that the top-down leadership approach imported from the Islamic world has clashed with a more team-oriented, and horizontal approach, that is prevalent amongst many of the teachers who have been raised and educated in North America.

**Servant leadership.** Robert Greenleaf (1977) was the first to coin the phrase “servant leadership,” which he defined as the “servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1998, p. 43).

Black (2010) asserts servant leaders are not servants through doing things for others, but more so in the sense that they are leaders who focus on making their subordinates more competent in being able to meet their own needs, so that they are “better equipped to serve the
Robert Greenleaf (1998) identified ten characteristics of the servant-leader such as listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, and commitment to the growth of people, building community, and stewardship.

Mention of servant leadership is made throughout the Qur’an and Sunnah (traditions) of Prophet Muhammad (Abed, 2006). One of the main principles, to which Muslims are taught to adhere, is the principle of leadership through service. The following hadith (authentically narrated saying of Prophet Muhammad) demonstrates this: “A ruler who has been entrusted with the affairs of the Muslims, but makes no endeavor for their material and moral upliftment, and is not sincerely concerned for their welfare will not enter Paradise along with them” (Al-Bukhari, 1997, p.166).

Islamic leadership is both guardianship and service oriented (Abed, 2006). The servant-leader approach has been part of Islam since its beginning, more than 1400 years ago (Chowdhury, 2001). Siddiqui (2002) posits the concept of servant-leader originated from the Islamic system, which promoted leaders as servants of their followers. Prophet Mohammad said, “The leader of the nation is their servant” (Daylami, 1997). The underlying theme of servant leadership is closely reflected in the teachings of the religion, and based on the sayings and traditions of Prophet Muhammad, “this form of leadership embodies the characteristics one would expect [Islamic] school principals to follow” (Black, 2010, p. 443).

**School climate theories and models.** Black (2010) postulates school leaders who invest their time, energy, and effort in “assessing and improving their school climate can increase their school’s overall efficacy,” (p. 443). Furthermore, the principal, as the torchbearer of the school, is responsible for creating a “positive organizational climate through effective leadership at the
school level,” (Black, 2010, p. 443).

Halpin and Croft are pioneers in the study of school climate (Hoy & Tartar, 1992). Specifically, they studied the influence of the leader’s behavior on organizational climates; their focus was elementary schools, wherein they concluded that each school has a different personality or feel (Halpin, 1966). Halpin and Croft (1963) identified eight dimensions of climate, which defined six climate types arranged on a continuum from open to closed: open, autonomous, controlled, familiar, paternal, and closed. This framework was built around examining critical teacher-to-teacher, and teacher-to-principal interactions and relationships, and resulted in the development of the Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire (OCDQ) (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991; Gonder & Hymes, 1994).

The eight dimensions of climate comprising Halpin and Croft’s (1963) framework were divided into two groups (Black, 2010) – four refer to characteristics of the faculty namely, disengagement – where teachers are not committed to the task at hand; hindrance – where teachers feel unnecessarily burdened by their principals to complete extra duties and work; esprit – wherein morale within the teachers develops from a sense that their social needs are being met, and that they have a high level of task accomplishment; and intimacy – wherein the teachers perceive intra-school relationships to be warm and friendly. Four dimensions refer to the behavior and characteristics of the leader namely, aloofness – wherein the principal displays a nonchalant and disinterested attitude towards subordinate staff members; production emphasis – whereby the principal supervises very closely, ensures the delivery of directions, and refrains from receiving faculty feedback; thrust – where the principal adopts a dynamic persona, and encourages the movement of the organization towards improvement; and consideration – wherein the principal is warm, friendly and helpful to faculty (Black, 2010; Hoy et al. 1991).
Gonder and Hymes (1994) provide a set of guidelines that yield either a positive or negative school climate. They posit that, a lack of leadership, vision, a mission or goals; the absence of a clear purpose; unfair enforcement of rules; autocratic administration; stagnation; top-down management; the abundance of unreasonable rules; and the loss of social and emotional togetherness are all indicative of a poor school climate. On the other hand, Gonder and Hymes (1994) highlight that, a good sense of direction; consistent credibility; the positive exchange of views and ideas; a leadership team that empowers their subordinates; a knowledgeable communicative leader; the encouragement of inter-teacher negotiation; and sense of cooperation are but a few of the factors that ensure and restore school climate.

Based on the model of Parry and Procter-Thomas (2003), the following diagram is the theoretical framework that guided analysis of data in the current study. It demonstrates the relationship between school climate and its reciprocal effects on principal leadership style in the context of Islamic schools, where servant leadership has specific characteristics that relate directly to the sacred Islamic texts and the example of Prophet Muhammad.
Figure 1a – Graphical representation of theoretical framework

The theoretical proposition that school leadership and school climate have a reciprocal effect upon one another, and that together they influence school effectiveness, is demonstrated in the diagram above. In accordance to the theoretical underpinnings discussed herein, school climate as described by Halpin and Croft (1963) is defined as either “open” or “closed.” Hoy and Miskel (2013) assert an open school climate is demonstrated through the professional,
collegial, and friendly teacher relations in which there is a clear commitment to the education of students. Additionally, the principal is supportive and professional, and refrains from micromanaging. On the other hand, teacher relations that are disengaged, distant, suspicious, and not professional, characterize a closed school climate. In this scenario the principal is directive, restrictive, and not supportive. With that being said, the above-depicted theoretical framework illustrates the direct relationship between school climate and school leadership; specifically servant leadership which is characterized through five traits, namely service before self, listening as a means of affirmation, creating trust, focus placed on what is feasible to accomplish, and commitment to the growth of people. While this model serves as a framework for all schools, in the context of Islamic institutions the integration of the moral characteristics of Prophet Muhammad (as presented in the Qur’an and Sunnah) is of paramount importance, since this provides Muslims with the basic code of conduct for life; these character traits consist of taqwa, humility, civil duty, self-development, and mutual consultation. The culminating and overarching tenet of this model is school efficacy; a priori theory postulates that while both servant leadership and school climate have an effect on school efficacy (as demonstrated by low student attrition, low teacher turnover, high achievement and high morale) the former is of greater influence.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction: Islam - A Complete Code for Life

In a post 9/11 world, the mere mention of the words Muslim or Islam elicit a variety of emotional responses, this has led to an unprecedented interest in the monotheistic faith by scholars and citizens alike (Campbell, 2008). This literature review aims to examine less of the contemporary issues dealing with Islam, but will rather focus on contemporary leadership issues that exist within Islamic schools.

The word Islam is derived from Arabic noun Aslama, meaning to accept, surrender, and submit. More specifically, it refers to the action of submitting to the will of Almighty Allah. Islamic teachings permeate all facets of human existence, ranging from family relations, social etiquette, morals and values, economics, jurisprudence, diplomacy, and governance (Mir, 2010).

Despite the cultural diversity of the Muslim Ummah, sacred religious texts, namely the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah, form the basis for acceptance of norms and values, thereby creating a similarity in philosophy across geopolitical boundaries (Shah, 2006). Islamic leadership does not rely, for its legitimacy, upon traditional authority, but rather on rational-legal systems based on unity of purpose, acknowledgement of one God, and the foundational example of Prophet Muhammad, whose referent and charismatic authority lives on through the Sunnah (Almoharby & Neal, 2013). It is thus vital to utilize, as a frame of reference, the Qur’an and Sunnah, both of which postulate the characteristics of Islamic leadership by setting forth the example of leadership prototypes through the example of Prophet Muhammad and his companions (Shah, 2006).
Educational Leadership: An Islamic Perspective

With an overwhelming focus on ethnocentric practices in education, which are predominantly embedded with Western philosophy and values, the rapid growth in the multicultural nature of educational institutions tends to be ignored (Dimmock, 2000; Shah, 2006).

With some six million adherents in the United States, Islam is said to be the nation's fastest-growing religion, fueled by immigration, high birth rates, and widespread conversion (Merry, 2005). The fluid nature of societal structure within the United States has led to the establishment of some 250 to 300 Islamic schools (Al-Lawati & Hunsaker, 2007), and in this post-9/11 era, the education of Muslim students is receiving much attention in comparative research, media, and the education policy arena in the West, as the religion of Islam undergoes resurgence in popular culture, and in the public sphere (Niyozov & Pluim, 2009). Moreover, the religious training of Muslim leaders is becoming highly politicized, and is a vigorous area of debate in the political arena (Gilliat-Ray, 2010). It would seem fair, therefore, to examine the Islamic perspective on educational leadership.

Leadership in Islam

Islamic leadership does not rely for its legitimacy upon traditional authority; its basis is composed of the unity of three key factors: the concept of purpose of existence, monotheistic belief, and the example of Prophet Muhammad, whose referent authority is kept alive through the discussions of the Sunnah. The definitions of leadership are numerous. On gathering those that are amongst the most predominantly used, a common theme emerges. The concept of leadership has been cogently presented by Mintzberg (2004, p.143). He asserts,
Leadership is not about making clever decisions and doing bigger deals, least of all for personal gain. It is about energizing other people to make good decisions and do other things. In other words, it’s about helping to release the positive energy that exists naturally within people. Effective leadership inspires more than empowers; it connects more than controls; it demonstrates more than it decides. It does all of this by engaging itself above all and consequently others.

In a similar light, Prophet Muhammad postulated that the leader of the Ummah is its servant; thus a leader should direct their subordinates towards achieving their goals through motivation and personal example (Altalib, 2001). For Muslims, the single most undisputed example of leadership, that is worthy of emulation, is Prophet Muhammad who stands as Qudwah Hasanah; Allah clearly states in Surah al-Ahzab, verse 21 of the Qur’an: “There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the last day and (who) remembers Allah often.”

In the Islamic leadership model, leaders pursue a vision of creating a society that is just, welfare orientated, egalitarian, and free from discrimination, exploitation, and oppression (Mir, 2010). In essence, Prophet Muhammad was a character-centric leader in using practical wisdom to make decisions (Beekun, 2012). A most apt definition of practical wisdom, as it relates to Prophet Muhammad, was offered by Nonaka and Takeuchi (2005), “tacit knowledge acquired from experience that enables people to make prudent judgments and take actions based on the actual situation guided by values and morals.” Beekun (2012) asserts practical wisdom emphasizes the importance of flexible and contingent decision making, while seeking advice from members of the community with a high moral standing, who possess the competencies pertinent to dissecting and working through the issue at hand. Melé (2011) augments our
understanding of this concept positing, practical wisdom involves having a sincere attitude towards doing what is right as well applying ethical principles. Since Aristotle suggests that the latter is a function of a leader’s character, “the person of good character perceives a situation rightly – that is, take proper account of the salient feature,” (Hartman, 2006, p. 74), it is of no surprise that there is a strong relationship between leadership efficacy and character (Mintzberg, 2004).

**The character-centric leader.** In order to identify Prophet Muhammad’s style of leadership it is important to turn to the Qur’an (68:4) wherein Allah states, “And you (Muhammad) stand as an exalted standard of khuluq,” Abu Layla (1990) describes the trait as character, natural disposition, or innate temper. He augments his definition by explaining that while the nature of a person is one that s/he is born with; khuluq is an acquired state through education and socialization. In essence, it is a learned custom or habit and overtime; it may even become second nature. Abu Layla (1990) suggests that education and socialization processes need to immerse individuals in emulating the behavioral pattern of Prophet Muhammad.

The leadership of Prophet Muhammad can also be framed within the model of charismatic authority presented by Max Weber (1862-1920), in which he postulates that authority is based on personal charisma (Takim, 2006). Takim (2006) asserts charismatic leaders create social revolutions as they challenge traditional and rational norms, disturbing and even overturning the status quo. This was exemplified when Prophet Muhammad replaced tribal affiliation with allegiance to the Ummah, in Medina; his argument was grounded in submission to Allah and the acceptance of his prophethood (Takim, 2006). The Prophet’s charismatic appeal, together with his competency as a spiritual, political, and military leader enabled him to gain the unequivocal trust and allegiance of the people of Medina (Takim, 2006). To that effect,
charismatic leaders possess the ability to influence major modifications in the behaviors, routines, and thinking patterns of organizational members, thus building commitment throughout the group towards the achievement of attaining goals and fulfilling objectives (Awan & Mahmood, 2010).

Prophet Muhammad modeled the key moral virtues pertinent to his role by practicing them tangibly; the Sunnah stands as a reliable source of information documenting this. According to Awan and Mahmood (2010), Prophet Muhammad’s character-centric style of leadership can best be described in light of two theories: transformational leadership (Bass, 1988) and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). Whereas transformational leaders motivate in a direct fashion, by challenging constituents to get involved and to come onboard, servant leaders rely more on an indirect approach with a central focus on the power of leading by example (Echols, 2009). Parrott (2000) posits that while transformational leaders hold the power of example in great regard, they do extend this by arguing that at appropriate times, transformational leaders must have the moral courage to confront opposing personalities and thereby hold followers accountable.

**Transformational vs. Servant leadership.** According to Choudhary, Akhtar and Zaheer (2012) transformational leadership is an ethical leadership style involves a leader’s capability to promote intellectual stimulation through inspiration. Yukl (1998) adds, transformational leadership is the “process of building commitment to the organization’s objectives, and empowering followers to accomplish these objectives” (p. 324). In this instance, the need for empowerment by one of the group’s members would be balanced by the consideration for the well-being of the entire populace; to this effect, such leaders are focused on the greater good of
the organization, and will rarely detour from its objectives for the sake of individual pampering (Echols, 2009).

The idea of “the leader as a servant,” first coined by Robert Greenleaf in the 1970s, has been a defining characteristic of Islamic philosophy for almost 1500 years (Alsarhi, Salleh, ZA, & AA, 2014; Chowdhury, 2002). At its core, servant leadership is a long-term, transformational approach to life and work; it is a method of leadership that sets the foundational opportunity for creating a positive change throughout society (Spears & Lawrence, 2001) by leading by example, and by placing utmost importance and priority on the needs of the members of a group.

A stark difference becomes apparent at this point. However, according to Echols (2009) the former theory does not contradict the latter, it extends the theory to the next step; in that transformational leaders possess the understanding that, at times it takes more than just a good example to motivate and empower constituents, since motivating them also entails them be held accountable for their actions, an action which would compromise the very essence of servant leadership. With that being said, since servant leadership is viewed as this antithesis of marginalization, it enables maximum empowerment of constituents; whereby the contributions of each individual are unequivocally valued (Echols, 2009). In a similar light, servant leadership can serve as a check against the temptation provided by transformational leadership to become authoritarian and manipulative since its aim is for the members of a group to fulfill the goals set out in the leader’s vision. On the other hand, servant leaders do not necessarily aspire to be leaders but are drafted or chosen, as Prophet Muhammad was, to serve their people and moreover to seek shura with others in the event that there was no divine revelation to address a specific issue (Beekun, 2012). Moreover, Beekun (2012) reports, “there was never an occasion
when he [Prophet Muhammad] sought shura that he did not follow the shura decision when he may have personally disagreed with it” (p. 1010).

Despite its ability in advancing organizational learning, (Senge, 1990) and an increase in job performance (Bono & Judge, 2003) by providing the opportunity to augment understanding of the organization’s goals through experimentation, dialogue, and communication (McGill & Slocum, 1993) transformational leadership can be considered moral or immoral depending on the core values of the leaders, many of whom have been also been viewed as tyrannical (Bass, 1985). For instance, transformational leaders may enhance and highlight the positives of their character, while down playing their weaknesses; furthermore, they may adopt the values which they believe are in alignment with theories of leadership of their followers (Beekun, 2012). In contrast, Prophet Muhammad was forthright about his values and never compromised them. Had his moral standing have been skewed, Prophet Muhammad would have undoubtedly adopted the corrupt values (in return for their offers of wealth and power) of the elite tribes of Makkah (Beekun, 2012).

A central tenet of Islamic leadership, and decision-making, is the absence of coercion or imposition in all matters, even matters of belief (Almoharby & Neal, 2013). A theme, which recurs in the Qur’an, is that of free interpretation, thus reinforcing the aforementioned (Almoharby & Neal, 2013). In Surah Al-Nour, verse 54, Allah commands:

Obey Allah and obey the Messenger [Prophet Muhammad], but if you turn away, he [Prophet Muhammad] is only responsible for the duty placed on him to convey Allah’s message, and you for that placed on you. If you obey him, you shall be on the right guidance.
Similarly, it is reported in the Qur’an (2:256) Prophet Muhammad never compelled anyone to embrace Islam against his/her will; he refrained from over indulgence and lived humbly in basic accommodation; perhaps most importantly, Prophet Muhammad did not appoint any of his family as his heir apparent.

Prophet Muhammad’s order to call the Makkans to Islam was confirmed in the revelation from Archangel Gabriel, wherein Allah states, “Proclaim what you have been ordered and turn away from the idol-worshippers,” (Qur’an, 15:94). In response, it is reported that the Prophet arranged for a large gathering wherein he invited his distant relatives who had not yet accepted Islam; he was not received well, except for the approval of his cousin (by way of his father) Ali Ibn Abi Talib (Emerick, 2005). Prophet Muhammad’s second attempt to assemble with the people of Makkah (namely the Tribe of Quraish) resulted in him standing atop Mount Safa and declaring the oneness of Allah; his uncle (Ali’s father) became red with anger and admonished him calling out, “May you perish!” Prophet Muhammad’s response was to peacefully and patiently continue spreading the message of Islam, neither coercing nor placing citizens under duress to accept the message that he had been given (Emerick, 2005).

In order to overcome the ethical concerns of the transformational leadership, specifically overriding the values and interests of individual members, Stephens, D’Intino and Victor (1995) suggest that two servant leader traits, namely leader consciousness and service orientation towards followers, need to be implemented in addition to the preexisting model. In sum, Bass (2000) asserts, servant leadership “goes beyond transformational leadership in selecting the needs of others as its highest priority;” whereas, “transformational leaders strive to align their own and other’s interests with the good of the group, organization or society,” (p. 30). Despite meeting numerous parameters set out in transformational leadership, Prophet Muhammad’s
character-centeredness was based on morals and values that extend beyond this perspective and moreover rise above its potential deficiencies (Beekun, 2012).

A theory that helps to augment understanding of Prophet Muhammad’s leadership model is Greenleaf’s (1977) servant leadership model (Almoharby & Neal, 2013; Altalib, 2001; Beekun, 2012; Beekun & Badawi, 1999; Mir, 2010). Greenleaf (1977) asserts servant leadership is enough to permeate influence among a group that produces healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous leaders, who enable followers to grow as persons. Greenleaf’s conception of leadership rested partly on the fact that leading with the purpose of selflessly serving was contagious (Echols, 2009).

**Prophet Muhammad and His Successors**

Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, “On a journey, the leader of a people is their servant” (Adair, 2011, p. 35). This statement is evidenced in the Sunnah, a source that is used by Muslims to emulate the exemplary life of Prophet Muhammad (Almoharby & Neal, 2013). In this statement, Prophet Muhammad asserts the purpose of a leader as one who serves those that s/he leads; both those in a group (ensuring that they remain cohesive and attentive to their goal), as well as addressing the needs of the individuals that make up the group (since each person was identified as having needs on a smaller, but no less significant, level) so that they were able to achieve the successful completion of their journey (Adair, 2011). The key attributes of a servant leader manifest themselves in the care they take to ensure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. Hence, subsequently, a servant leader will empower and inspire others to lead. Prophet Muhammad exemplifies these traits in the following hadith reported by the pious companion of the Prophet, Ibn ‘Umar: "All of you are shepherds and each of you is responsible
for his flock. A woman is the shepherd of the house of her husband and she is responsible, as is the servant in regard to his master's property" (Bukhari, 2012, p. 44).

Furthermore, one of the greatest leadership attributes brought to the world by the Prophet of Islam was the message of optimism for a brighter future (Mir, 2010). Muslims in all spheres of life derive spiritual guidance from the Quran, and the example that has been laid out by Prophet Muhammad; this is an example that gives them the practical demonstration of the values that all Muslims must emulate (Mir, 2010). In following his tradition, early Muslims (specifically his four successors, aptly given the title “Khalifah Rashidun” or “Rightly Guided Caliphs,” all of whom were leaders of significance in their own right) used his life and conduct to be the benchmark for spiritual, civic, and military leadership (Campbell, 2008; Krigera & Seng, 2005).

Islam, with its claims to universality and comprehensibility, seeks to encompass every aspect of human endeavor, in keeping with this, an in-depth review of literature indicates five overarching attributes that form the prerequisites for those demonstrating effective leadership in an Islamic context, namely taqwa, humility, civic duty, self-development, and mutual consultation. Each of these will be discussed, wherein evidence will be provided from the life of the Prophet and his successors.

Taqwa. Despite the core tenet of equality among all of humanity in Islam, one attribute that distinguishes individuals from another, and thereby provides a case for a system of hierarchy, is the degree of piety and taqwa that one possesses (Beekun & Badawi, 1999; Mir, 2010). Those that are imbued with taqwa, referred to here as the muttaqin, are referred to in the following verse of the Qur’an (49:13), “Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is [he who is] the most righteous of you.” A leader’s fear and constant remembrance of God, as
well as knowledge of their level of accountability to their creator, provides the impetus for carrying out the functions of their job with unwavering sincerity, and thus safeguards against transcending the boundaries prescribed by Allah in the Qur’an (Beekun, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of an effective Muslim leader is to look out for the welfare of his followers and guide them towards a state of God-consciousness and taqwa. Moreover, as the guardian leader, he promotes justice, and protects his community against tyranny and oppression (Ahmad, 2009). Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) purport, character-centered individuals are spiritually alert; they possess the awareness that while a person may be able to thwart the rights of a man, the ability to dodge God will be crippled. Hence, pseudo-servant leaders behave in an unethical manner because they hold the perception that they are beyond checks and balances laid out by Allah in the Quran, and will face little or no ramification for their injustices (Beekun & Badawi, 1999).

**Humility.** In accordance to the traditions of the Prophet, a leader amongst the Muslim must possess and exhibit genuine humility and should avoid aspiring to achieve a role of authority; the servant leader is led into this position by society on the basis of expertise in the specific field and piety (Mir, 2010). In essence, therefore, the leader does not seek out the followers, rather they seek him out.

Humility derives from the Latin word *humus* or earth; *homo* and *hominus* from which is derived the word human also stems from the same root. In alignment with this, Adair (2011, p. 85) asserts, “We are made of earth, it is said, and to the earth we shall return. To assume a role other than that does not humbly acknowledge the subservience to the creator, as his creation is short of foolishness.” This is exemplified when ‘Ali (the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, and the fourth Caliph) wrote in his letter to Malik al Ashtar al Nakha’i urging him to remain humble in his new position as governor of Egypt,
Never say to yourself, “I am their Lord, their ruler… and I must be obeyed submissively and humbly.” Such a thought will unbalance your mind, will make you vain and arrogant, will weaken your faith in religion and will make you seek the support of any power other than Allah’s (perhaps that of your party or your government). If your rule makes you feel pride or vanity over your subjects, then think of your Lord’s creations, the supremacy of His might and glory, His power to do things that you cannot even dream of doing, and His control over you which is more dominating than you can ever achieve yourself over anything around you. (Ibn Abi Talib, n.d., p. 8)

Humility is further exhibited by Abu Bakr Siddiq, the first of the pious companions of the Prophet to assume the role of Caliph after his death. He is reported to have said, “I have never sought this position; nor has there ever been a desire in my heart to have this in preference to anyone else… If I do right, you must help me and obey me; if I go astray, set me right.” (Mir, 2010). Another of the companions of the Prophet, Anas, reported that the Prophet’s indescribable humility was once again demonstrated through his acceptance of an invitation with the knowledge that he would be presented “with barley bread and soup whose taste had changed [due to spoiling],” (Beekun, 2012, p. 1011). Furthermore, Anas reported the Prophet as saying, “I am God’s servant, I eat like a servant, and sit like a servant,” (Beekun, 2012, p. 1011).

Civic Duty. Mir (2010) posits a Muslim leader will not hesitate to put all at stake for the collective good of the citizenry whose cause and welfare take precedence over the leader’s needs. If meeting the needs of the populace entailed the Prophet treading outside of his comfort zone, he would do so, without question. The Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad demonstrates how he would advise his followers, “None of you [truly] believes, until he wishes for his brother what
he wishes for himself.” (An-Nawawi, n.d.). According to Islamic morals the leader is responsible for securing the legitimate rights of his community (Beekun & Badawi, 1999).

On examining the seerah it becomes apparent that Prophet Muhammad was benevolent to the core; status was not a priority, neither a single example nor instance, or action has been documented indicating his desire for personal monetary benefit (Mir, 2010). Rather, he consistently sought the welfare of his companions and labored to guide them towards what was good (Beekun, 2012). Further examples of the Prophet’s selflessness have been documented in relation to his exemplar service to the community and his followers. In the month of Dhul-Qa’dah (the 11th month in the Islamic calendar) of the 6th year after the initial retreat from Makkah to Medina, the Prophet left Madinah to return to his birth place to perform the rights of the pilgrimage to the sacred Ka’bah, with some 1500 Muslims (Association of Islamic Charitable Projects, 2003). The disbelievers refused to allow them to enter, and in keeping with his character, and placing utmost priority on the safety of his followers, the Prophet decided on peace and ordered his men to change their route to avoid a clash with the Makkans (Al-Karmi, 1964). The Prophet led his men to Al-Hudaybiyya where they were ordered to stop and camp. On hearing of this, the Makkans sent an envoy by the name of Suhayil to talk to him; he discourteously conveyed the message that the Muslims would, under no circumstances, be permitted to enter Makkah, albeit to circumambulate the Ka’bah (Al-Karmi, 1964). After lengthy negotiations, the Prophet agreed that for the safety of his followers he would compromise; the Treaty of Hudaybiyya was born out of this event (Association of Islamic Charitable Projects, 2003).

Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the fourth Caliph, cousin, and son-in-law of the Prophet, was present when the treaty was established; he relates, Prophet Muhammad dictated these words, “This is
what Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah ratifies.” The envoy from the Quraish interjected, “do not write the Messenger of Allah; if we had thought this to be case we would not have fought you.” The Prophet agreed, for the sake of his followers, and in the spirit of compromise conceded; the phrase was replaced with “This is what Muhammad, the son of Abdullah ratifies.” (Al-Karmi, 1964; Association of Islamic Charitable Projects, 2003).

**Self-development.** Self-development in Islam can be most closely related to the acquisition of knowledge. From its inception, learning in Islam is a religious obligation, incumbent upon every Muslim regardless of gender (Shah, 2006) and furthermore, spanning the entirety of their life (Ashraf, 1995) contributing to the individual’s holistic development. As such, Bedouin chiefs, from the time of the Prophet and beyond, were required to possess practical wisdom enabling them to propel themselves forward as skilled negotiators, demonstrating the ability to resolve quarrels between their followers, as well as dealing with members of varying tribes (Adair, 2011). Shah (2006) asserts, according to Islamic teachings, righteousness can only be attained through the acquisition, and furthermore, application of knowledge to every aspect of life, thereby underpinning the argument of the purpose of education in Islam as a requirement for self-development. Furthermore, in alignment with Islamic ethos, Bernard (2007, p. 34) asserts a “servant led organization provides an environment where people can grow closer to their full potential as human beings.”

This leads to the concept of *jihad* which in this context, gains paramount importance. Contrary to the negatively propagated perception of jihad through the media, its literal meaning is to develop the whole-being through the acquisition of knowledge so that s/he acts with righteousness for the sake of God (Mir, 2010; Shah, 2006). Through spiritual and intellectual enlightenment, which leads to self-realization and thereby self-transformation, and the ability
and willingness to embrace change (Mir, 2010), jihad enables Muslims to combat carnal and unworthy desires such as greed, lust, and evil inclinations. Furthermore, and more specifically related to leadership, it empowers believers to encourage others to achieve the same objective, and serves as the backdrop for leaders to serve humanity (Gulen, 1998).

In sum, Marbun (2013) posits, in accordance to the divine teachings of the Holy Qur’an, a competent leader is one who is able to unite divine awareness with a rational awareness of their surroundings. In essence, they are amongst those who possess the capability to read, understand and make sense and proper use of the realities of life with the intention that they augment their sense of taqwa. In essence, Nurrudin (2011) purports effective Islamic leaders possess the ability to integrate their worldly knowledge with an understanding of their profession, with the conscious awareness that their ultimate goal (and therefore that of their followers) is to seek the pleasure of Allah.

Mutual consultation. While a Muslim leader does make independent decisions, such a step is only taken after consulting with, and taking into consideration, the advice and views of constituents (Mir, 2010). Unlike the elitist (majority/minority) approaches to decision making, the concept of shura stresses consensus building (Beekun, 2012) and fosters the spirit of collectivism (Mir, 2010).

The practice of shura was established at the time of the Prophet; the heads of lineages made decisions of importance by reaching a consensus in a time-honored manner, during the majlis. The practice of consultation was first set out in the following verse of the Qur’an “And those who answer the call of their Lord and establish prayer, and who conduct their affairs through consultation,” (42:38), and was practiced by the Prophet whose nature it was to seek and accept advice (Beekun & Badawi, 1999; Beekun, 2012; Mir, 2010). The Prophet himself was
directed through Qur’anic revelation (3:159) to consult his companions, “…Ask for [Allah’s] forgiveness for them [the followers]; and consult them in affairs [of moment]; then, when you have taken a decision out your trust in Allah.” The practice of shura has a tri-fold purpose; it not only enables members of the Islamic organization to participate in the decision-making process, it also provides a restraint on administrative power and authority (Al-Buraey, 1985; Beekun, 2012;), and concurrently serves as a check to ensure the integrity of the leader’s conduct in the event that s/he deviates from the collective goals of the group (Altalib, 2001).

Beekun and Badawi (1999) posit the process of mutual consultation should not be limited to the elite or special interest groups; instead all members of the group who may be potentially affected by the decision or change should be involved especially when they possess the technical skills, or knowledge pertinent to the decision.

The following guidelines have been established to help define the scope of shura (Altalib, 2001):

1. Administrative and executive affairs should be left to the leader.
2. Affairs requiring prompts, urgent decisions should be handled by the leader and presented to the group for review at the next meeting (either in-person or remotely held).
3. Group members or their representatives should be able to verify and question the leader’s conduct freely and without fear of retaliation or embarrassment.
4. In accordance with the dialogue, policies should be established and adopted, and accordingly long-term objectives should be set so that progress can be measured.

School Climate

A school’s climate is its atmosphere for learning. It includes the feelings people have about the school and whether it is a place where learning can occur. A positive climate
makes a school a place where both staff and students want to spend a substantial portion of their time; it is a good place to be (Howard, Howell, & Brainard, 1987, p. 5).

Haynes, Emmons, Ben-Avie (1997) report school climate refers to the quality and consistency of interpersonal interactions between the institutes’ key stakeholders and community which are believed to significantly influence a child’s development on cognitive, social, and psychological levels. So, while poor school adjustment and school failure (and thereby an unhealthy school climate) are often misinterpreted as a manifestation of: cognitive ineptitude, a student’s value systems that deviates from accepted norms, high levels of poverty, high minority-low SES settings, and an inadequate development; studies have indicated a strong relationship between school climate and student achievement (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1977; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Cook, Murphy, & Hunt, 2000; Creemers & Reezigt, 1999) mitigating these factors and ruling them out as determinants for predisposition of failure (Astor, Guerra, & Van Acker, 2009; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013;).

School climate is a complex construct that has been recognized as an important component of effective schools (Lehr & Christenson, 2002). An extensive review of literature conducted by the staff at the Yale Child Study Center (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997) yielded 15 of the most common components that characterize positive school climate:

- **Achievement motivation**: defines the belief that students possess of wanting to, and being able to, learn.

- **Collaborative decision-making** refers to the fact that key stakeholders (that is parents, students, and staff) are actively involved in decision making that affects the school.
• Equity and fairness wherein students are treated equally regardless of their ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status (SES) and disabilities.

• General school climate describes the overall feeling of positivity during interactions within the school community yielding sentiments of trust and respect.

• Order and discipline wherein students display appropriate behavior in the school setting.

• Parental involvement indicating that parents are frequently involved in school activities.

• School community relations defining the support and involvement of community and businesses in the life of the school.

• Dedication to student learning – teachers noticeably and actively motivate students to learn.

• Staff expectations dictate that students will succeed in school and in life afterwards.

• School leadership wherein the principal effectively guides the direction of the school by laying the foundation for a positive climate through example setting.

• School building – though seemingly superficial, the school’s physical appearance reflects the school and the surrounding community.

• Sharing of resources refers to the equal distribution and access to resources, materials, activities, and equipment within the school by all students.

• Caring and sensitivity displayed by the principal demonstrating consideration for key stakeholders.

• Student interpersonal relations defining the high level of caring, respect, and trust among students in the school.

• Student-teacher relations are healthy demonstrated through a high level of caring, respect, and trust among students and teachers in the school.
In sum, while there remains a considerable overlap in components contributing to a healthy school climate, an effective school has been described as one possessing the following traits: a sense of order and discipline, parental involvement, staff dedication to student learning, high expectations for academic performance and behavior, caring relationships, and respectful interactions between students, staff, parents, and community members (Black, 2010).

Additionally, school climate is associated with a variety of student outcomes including achievement, absenteeism, self-control and behavior, and educators, specifically school leaders can play a critical role in promoting a positive school climate (Lehr & Christenson, 2002).

**The Relationship between Leadership and School Climate**

Hall and George (1999) report just as the teacher establishes the climate for the classroom; the school principal plays a significant role in establishing and maintaining a positive climate within the school. In essence, how teachers perceive and interpret the actions of the principal leads to the construction of school culture, which undoubtedly governs (if only in part) the culture in each classroom. In their study, Hall and George (1999) examined the effect of leadership style on school climate by studying the success of implementation of the same innovations within nine schools in the same school district, all of which comprised students from similar SES backgrounds. Findings from the study yielded that there was a stark disparity in the success of implementation of the innovation in the schools despite the fact that all teachers had attended the same in-service training workshops, had access to the same materials, were given access to the same level of district office support, and were provided with the same time to implement the practices associated with the innovation. The overarching difference was reflected in the following statement given by a group of practitioners, to whom the Hall and George (1999,
p. 172) posed the following question, “Why were the teachers in different schools so different in their degrees of implementation success?”

It’s the principals. In Group 1 schools principals provide a great deal of leadership. In Group 2 schools the principals talk a good game but don’t do a lot. In Group 3 schools the principals are really well organized, but they do not push beyond the minimum (Hall & George, 1999, p. 172)

In essence, this discussion implied the existence of a direct link between what the principal did and the extent of teacher success in implementing educational innovations thus indicating the impact that leaders have on, teacher and student success and therefore, school climate.

In a study conducted by Dinham, Cairney, Craigie, and Wilson (1995) in the New South Wales province of Australia the role of the principal was examined in regards to the health of school climate in three schools. Data was collected from schools that represented the SES and cultural diversity of the region; additionally they were chosen because they were considered by stakeholders “to display evidence of effective communication,” (p. 37) a key indicator in determining the health of school climate (Howard, Howell, & Brainard, 1987). The study was conducted in two parts, the first comprised surveys and questionnaires, and the second comprised and in-depth study over the period of three months in which interviews and observations were conducted.

Results collated from school 1 indicated the staff as having a strong sense of collegiality and cohesion; senior staff in the school had a “strong and close working relationship with the principal,” (Dinham, Cairney, Craigie, & Wilson, 1995, p. 51). The principal was noted as having a pivotal influence in setting the positive tone for the school, ensuring that there was close contact between senior staff including head teachers and deputy heads. Staff asserted this
principal had an ethos grounded in open communication with a preference to get things out in the open. Healthy school climate was also attributed to the staff being given autonomy in their classrooms, and the reiteration of positive reinforcement and recognition on a continuous basis.

School 2 was noted as having lower school morale resulting from a lack of communication projecting a negative image of the school to students and the community. Overall, the level of collaborative decision-making was sparse; this was specifically noted between head teachers and the senior executive. At the grassroots level, most teaching personnel felt that the level of consultation regarding school wide decisions was inadequate. Misunderstandings arose out of the fact that teachers were not given mailboxes in the main office in which communication could be exchanged. Furthermore teachers, students and staff expressed how inaccessible the principal of the school was.

Additionally, the administrative wing of this school appeared to be the least vital and active of the three institutions; “It was drab and dated with trophies and prizes dating mainly from the 1970s and seemed separated from the rest of the school both physically and administratively” (Dinham, Cairney, Craigie, & Wilson, 1995, p. 42). In light of this, Hill and Johnson (2005) report an annual expenditure of approximately $37 billion on PK12 school renovation and construction, and a further $48 billion on facility maintenance and operations in the US. The importance of a school’s physical environment with regards to school climate and stakeholder perception cannot be underestimated (Dinham, Cairney, Craigie, & Wilson, 1995).

Communication used an indicator of school climate at school 3, detracted from the otherwise good reputation of the school. The disparity that existed between the principal and the deputy head were a cause for concern; whereas the latter was seen to execute business in an old style approach the former, in contrast, was known for encouraging and implementing innovative
schemes such as an open-door policy. A hampered school climate resulted from the lack of consistency at this school; the blurriness that existed between the lines of decisiveness (exhibited by the deputy head) or collaboration (expressed by the principal) caused the principal at school 3 to experience some frustration in being unable to see his vision of a positive school culture being attained.

In sum, the aforementioned demonstrates the ambiguity that exists in the relationship between leading a school effectively, and its effects on yielding a healthy school climate. It is impossible to separate the principal from the organizational climate of the school; the principal both influences and is influenced by the school’s community to make decisions. Additionally, at all three schools it was apparent that students, in particular, were highly sensitive to the nature of their school’s environment and took personal affront when it failed to meet their expectation, or when others criticized it in the community; the responsibility for which lay in the hands of the school executives.

**Findings of Current School Climate Studies**

Getzels and Guba (1970) defined schools as “social institutions.” Over three decades later, Gunbayi (2007) agrees with this, in positing that a school is an organization in which several key personnel interact. This point is given great depth, through the explanation that each school has a climate that makes it unique (Gunbayi, 2007). The climate of a school is affected by the style of its managers, the cultural norms, and values upon which the school has been founded; and among a plethora of other factors, the policies, expectations, and standard operating procedures that form the pillars upon which the structural foundation is built (Merry & Driessen, 2005; Gunbayi, 2007). Climate is the necessary link, Gunbayi (2007) argues, between organizational structure and teacher attitude and behavior. Therefore, the way in which teachers
perceive school health and climate can be integral in determining how effective the organization is at fulfilling its mission.

**Teachers’ efficacy and school climate.** Wayne K. Hoy and Anita Woolfolk Hoy are key figures in the discussion on school climate (Shaughnessy & Wells, 2009). Hoy and Woolfolk-Hoy introduce their idea of an “instructional leader,” as part of their framework, who, they claim empowers teachers to lead, learn from their mistakes, and improve instruction (Shaughnessy & Wells, 2009). It is the principal, they argue, that should model such behaviors that highlight a focus on academics, high expectations for students, intellectual curiosity, continuous improvement, persistence, and resilience (Shaughnessy & Wells, 2009).

Shaughnessy and Wells (2009) posit that in the absence of such actively displayed traits, the following will likely result: a dysfunctional organization in which the school climate can degenerate resulting in a “every [teacher] for himself” mentality, where teachers are “closed, non-cooperative, fearful of making mistakes, untrusting, skeptical, and [even] cynical” (Shaughnessy & Wells, 2009, p. 3). Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) examined the interactions between two carefully specified dimensions, namely, teacher efficacy and the aspects of a healthy school climate as defined by staff perceptions towards leadership style (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). In their quantitative analysis, Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) administered questionnaires to teachers in 37 New Jersey public schools. The teachers were asked pertaining to their perceptions of school climate from two vantage points, specifically, their personal and professional experiences. Teachers were asked to respond to questions using a six-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, focusing on areas such as “I usually look forward to each working day at this school,” (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993, p. 370) and “you can count on most staff members to help out anywhere, anytime—even though it may not be part of their
official assignment (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993, p. 370). The dimensions of efficacy were assessed using a short form of the scale consisting of five personal and five general teaching efficacy items from the Woolfolk and Hoy version of the Teacher Efficacy Scale (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). The dimensions of school health were assessed using a version of the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) for elementary schools, a 39-item instrument that measures the six elements of school health. A series of statistical analyses yielded results that indicated a clear correlation at the elementary school level, in that the relationship between efficacy and organization is reciprocal, that climate affects a sense of efficacy, and that efficacy affects perceptions of climate (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). Furthermore, schools promoted personal teaching efficacy when teachers perceived that their colleagues: “Set high but achievable goals,” “create an orderly and serious environment,” and “respect academic excellence.” Moreover, the “teachers’ sense of efficacy had a positive correlation to their administrators' responsiveness” (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993, pp. 365-369).

**School climate: Teachers’ perception studies.** The relationship between teacher efficacy and the organizational health of schools is also noted in the qualitative studies conducted by Lazaridou and Iordanides (2011) and Jones (2002). The former describes a situation in which the principals’ role in achieving school effectiveness was measured. One hundred and nine teachers in a northern Greece prefecture were voluntarily selected to respond to a 22-question instrument that required objective Likert-style responses, that were based on a five-point scale “ranging from not at all important, to very important” (Lazaridou & Iordanides, 2011, p. 8). Results from this study indicated that, in schools where school climate was said to be positive, teachers reported that they felt heard by the principal, such that they developed positive interpersonal relations (Lazaridou & Iordanides, 2011). In addition, teachers were encouraged to
take risks, seek professional development opportunities, and embrace the opportunity to foster leadership duties (Lazaridou & Iordanides, 2011).

The latter investigation comprises a case study spanning four months during the 2000/01 academic year. Data collection methods for this study included the use of questionnaires, personal interviews, observations, reflective journals, and written artifacts (Jones, 2002). Findings, in response to the research question (interpreted here as being) *what are the perceptions held by diverse followers of African American principals in urban schools?* indicated that the ethnically diverse followers (namely the teacher-subjects of the study) perceived the leadership style of African American principals’ in urban schools differently, in situations where the European American teachers felt as though their work was not validated, the African American teachers sensed a great deal of support and acknowledgement for tasks completed beyond the call of duty (Jones, 2002). Jones (2002) posits “Researchers have discovered that organizations must recruit and retain ethnically diverse leaders as a way to bring collaboration among the various ethnic groups,” (p. 32). Cornell Jones (2002) has introduced another variable into the school climate and leadership dynamic, and since census statistics indicate the rapid growth of minorities in the country, it is futile to believe that these groups will not assume leadership roles. Furthermore, leaders in Islamic schools are by and large, members of minority groups, and Jones (2002) indicates the possible reasons why so many perceive them to be ineffectual.

Over a decade after Hoy and Woolfolk’s study was published, Johnson and Stevens (2006) also examined school climate through a quantitative analysis. Here, they studied 59 schools in an American southwestern school district. Like Hoy and Woolfolk (1993), their findings indicated a positive and statistically significant relationship between teachers’
perceptions of school climate and student achievement. In schools where teachers perceived a positive school climate, a high degree of affiliation among teachers, an atmosphere of innovation and high involvement of teachers in the decision making process, cooperative, friendly students, and adequate resources and facilities, were also noted. Collectively these schools reported enhanced student achievement (Johnson & Stevens, 2006). Data in this study was gathered through the completion of a pre-existing school climate instrument, namely, the School-Level Environment Questionnaire (SLEQ) (Johnson & Stevens, 2006). Wherein the teachers were asked the questions in the Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) study and were therefore expected to respond spontaneously, Johnson and Stevens (2006) distributed the questionnaires, and these were completed independently. Thus, it would appear that the timeline adherence in responding to the survey offered greatly flexibility in the Johnson and Stevens (2006) study. This raises the question of internal validity – could it have been possible that teachers would interact with one another whilst completing the battery? Would then, their responses be less spontaneous? According the middle-eastern culture specific study conducted by Gunbayi (2007), teachers were less likely to give honest responses if perceived as controversial; thus, giving teachers the chance to collaborate as to their responses would, according to Fraenkle et al. (2012), hamper the internal validity of the study.

Unlike Hoy et al. (1993) and Johnson et al. (2006), Mattar (2011) used the cross-sectional design, a method that involves “taking different samples at one or more points in time, enabling a comparison of groups,” (p. 254). Thus, to establish a relationship between teachers’ perceptions of school performance and the factors affecting it, samples were selected from 10 Lebanese public schools, of which five were wealthy and high-achieving schools, and five were poorer low-achieving schools (Mattar, 2012). Mattar’s (2012) method of data collection varied
significantly to those mentioned a priori in this synthesis. Rather than employing questionnaires that collected data based on a satisfaction Likert-scale, she implemented the use of semi-structured surveys, conducted in a face-to-face format, that embraced the opportunity for open-ended dialogue, with the added chance for “informal chats” (Mattar, 2012, p. 254) with the principals of the schools. In addition, Mattar (2012) aimed to bolster her mixed-method study with the implementation of replication, such that the schools in the study were selected on the premise that each would either predict the similar results, or produce contrasting results for very clear and predictable reasons. In addition, Mattar (2012) employed pattern matching aimed at securing the internal validity of the study, such that when data is gathered from a similar setting, the chances of their correlation with the original study increase when pattern matching is employed.

Another feature that separates this study from the former two is the fact that Mattar (2012) utilized less rigorous statistical analyses to verify the findings of the study. Explanation of the results was seemingly descriptive most of the time and was, in limited circumstances, based on the correlation coefficient values of the raw data. For example, it was found that principals at the high–achieving schools were more likely to display features of instructional leadership as compared to their lower-achieving school counterparts (Mattar, 2012). Additionally, there was only a very delicate mention of the congruence between certain variables. In general, Mattar’s (2012) study yielded findings that were in agreement with the other studies examined thus far, in that school climate was, by and large, determined by the leadership philosophy and practices of the respective principals. Teachers in the study alluded to the fact that principals demonstrated positive school climate when they encouraged and motivated their teachers (Mattar, 2012).
In their quantitative study of multiple American middle schools, Hough and Schmitt (2011) also posit that, wherein teachers are afforded the opportunity to receive developmental design (DD) training by their leaders, there is a positive correlation with both student achievement and thus school climate.

**Conclusion**

The concepts of leadership and organizational climate are intertwined (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989), “school leaders are demarked as the most critical component of an effective learning environment” (Black, 2010, p. 446). This linkage is evident in educational research where organizational climate has been related to principal effectiveness (Anderson, 1982), trust of the faculty in the principal, and trust among teachers (Hoy & Tartar, 1992). According to Adeogun et al. (2011) leaders have an integral role in influencing school climate; it is their task to build bridges and develop relationships between groups of stakeholders such as the teachers and the parents.

In Islam, followers have a religious obligation to obey their leaders, providing there is no disobedience of God and Prophet Muhammad (Faris & Parry, 2011). Aabed (2006) posits, there are significant struggles that Muslim school leaders face within a Western context – they find difficulty in maintaining equilibrium between their faith and the way they lead. Furthermore, teachers grapple with the notions of ethics and trustworthiness, whilst concurrently dealing with a leadership style that deters from openness amongst staff, and one that hampers a positive school climate (Elsegeini, 2005). This literature review has aimed to develop an understanding of the relationship between school leadership in Islamic schools and school climate.

Literature indicates that the most pressing issue for Islamic schools in the United States is that they lack competent leadership (Aabed, 2006; Fattah; 1999; Khalil 2002). Fatteh (1999)
further attributes the poor leadership trait to the perceptions that Muslims hold of leadership, and moreover the fact that Muslims are not aware of the criteria for effective leadership, and become confused in transferring Islamic principles within a Western organizational dynamic (Faris & Parry, 2011). If these matters go unaddressed, students in Islamic schools will continue to suffer at the hands of inadequate leaders (Fattah, 2009); that is to say, the type of leaders who find difficulty in assimilating within mainstream western culture, and who are unable to transfer the tenets of their religion outside of their countries of origin into establishments that are grounded in democratic ideology (Faris & Parry, 2011).
Chapter Three: Research Design

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to hear the voices of K12 Islamic school female educators in order to understand their experiences with leadership in their schools and moreover, how they are able to make sense of the impact of leadership style on school climate. Since research has only examined the way in which Islamic school leaders make sense of this relationship (Aabed, 2006; Elsegeini, 2005) this study will address the insights of key stakeholders at the grassroots of the educational arena. Furthermore, research indicates that leadership style is known to have an effect on school climate (Black, 2010). As the number of Islamic schools has grown in the USA, research has failed to examine the way in which teachers perceive leadership style to impact school climate. Evidently, data has been collected defining only how leaders perceive this to be. Therefore, there is a clear gap in literature addressing this issue, a gap that I would aim to fill.

In order to fulfill the objectives of this study, the following research question was addressed: How do the experiences of female K12 Islamic school educators shape their perceptions of the impact of school leadership on school climate?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine how K12 female Muslim Islamic school educators experience leadership in their schools, and how they make sense of the way in which leadership impacts school climate. At this stage in the research, school climate will be generally defined as the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students’, parents’, and school personnel’s experience of school life, and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.
A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing, and satisfying life in a democratic society.

**Positionality Statement**

Having worked in Islamic schools, in varying capacities, over a duration exceeding a decade, I have witnessed a myriad of problems, from high teacher turnover to poor execution of the curriculum and appalling student retention rates. The cause of these issues become blurred and masked because, by their very nature, these schools are highly bureaucratic, and thus seeking and implementing solutions becomes near impossible. Dissecting the structure of the school and understanding that Arab culture has a significant role to play in Islamic institutes, has afforded me the ability to understand that many of the shortcomings and failings of these schools stem from poor leadership. Having attended Islamic studies classes, and through my own quest to gain deeper knowledge of Islam, I have been baffled by the way in which Muslim leaders lead; selflessness is replaced with selfishness; the voices of followers are muffled by the beating of the iron fist; and the ability to progress professionally is hampered for fear that independence may pave a way out of subservience. To that effect, I have chosen to examine a specific form of leadership that plays out in Islamic texts, namely servant leadership. Through interviewing a selection of K12 Islamic school teachers, I aim to determine the perceptions that they hold regarding the effects of leadership style on school climate.

**Research Design**

The following section provides a rationale for the choice of methodology and method adopted for this research project.
For decades, experimental psychology relied solely on quantitative methods of research involving the development of a hypothesis, which could be tested in practice through experimentation and observation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). In essence, the aim of the research was to refute or substantiate a preexisting theory by eliminating claims to move the researcher closer to what he, or she, believed to be the truth. Wherein quantitative studies are seen to focus on quantifying occurrences and determining the size and validity of associations between variables and entities, more recently there has been a growing trend in the implementation of qualitative research methodologies. Qualitative researchers have a growing interest in understanding and exploring how individuals make sense of the world, how they experience events, and what meaning they attribute to phenomenon (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

The intent of this study was to understand the experiences of K12 Islamic school teachers and how they speak to the perceptions that they hold of leadership practices, and how these leadership practices affect school climate. Previous works examining the effects of leadership on school climate have largely been of a quantitative nature, postulating there to be a correlational relationship between the two variables, (Black, 2010; Contartesi, 2010; Curry, 2009; Watts, 2009). To this effect, a qualitative study was chosen as the overarching research design.

Crotty (1998) asserts although there are a wealth of methodologies available to the social researcher, the importance of building a solid theoretical base from which to conduct a doctoral study should not be played down. The next logical step in designing a qualitative study was to identify the paradigm or worldview that will inform and shape the practice of research.

Guba (1990) posits a paradigm is “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (p. 17). Creswell (2007) further asserts, paradigms used by qualitative researchers vary with the set of
beliefs that they bring to the research, and are based largely on their past research experiences. In light of the current research interest, the social constructivism paradigm is adopted wherein “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work,” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). Here, qualitative researchers are inescapably subjective, and research findings are co-created between the researcher and the respondents, since the researcher recognizes the impact on the research of their own background and experiences, as such “they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences,” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). The latter point is of great relevance in this study since my own experiences working in Islamic schools helped to shape the meanings attained from the participants’ experiences.

Creswell (2007) emphasizes social constructivists do not generally begin with a theory; rather, they generate a pattern of meanings as the research evolves. The work of these inquirers is based on the following three assumptions identified by Crotty (1998):

- Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that the participants can construct meaning from their situation.

- Qualitative researchers seek to understand the context and setting of the participant(s) through visiting this context and gathering information; furthermore they interpret findings based on their own experiences and background.

- The basic generation of meaning in qualitative research is social, arising from the interaction with a human community.
Research Tradition

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. They [the researchers] turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations… Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to…interpret phenomenon in terms of the meanings that people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3)

Based upon several factors, for example the researcher’s advocacy inclination; the extent to which the personal and political considerations of the researcher will be included; as well as an assessment of the arguments that the researcher wishes to address, Creswell (2007) posits qualitative research can take several different forms including narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnography and case studies. Each type of research constitutes a comprehensive framework, which includes theoretical underpinnings behind it as well as guidelines for research design (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Whereas narrative studies report the life experiences of a single subject, and an ethnography focuses on the shared process, activities actions and interactions of an entire cultural group, a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007), and thus would be the most fitting for this research.

Furthermore, phenomenologists employ a strategy of inquiry in which they identify the essence of human experiences centered on a focal point, better known as the phenomenon, as described by their participants. For example, in this research study, I aimed to examine the way in which teachers in K12 Islamic schools in the USA perceive leadership style, and its cumulative effect on school climate, wherein the impact of leadership style would be the phenomenon
(Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, Moustakas (1994) asserts understanding the lived experiences of participants in a study implies that a phenomenology is a philosophy as well as a method; the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagements, allowing for patterns to emerge from findings regarding the meanings that participants attach to specific ideas. Validity in data collection and analysis is demonstrated in this process when the researcher brackets his or her own life experiences, repertoires of knowledge, beliefs, values, and experiences in order to accurately understand and describe how participants in the study talk about objects and events (Ahern, 1999; Niewswiadomy, 1993).

Bracketing serves as an inherent issue when carrying out a research study in which the researcher wishes to take on an active role in the process of attempting to get close to the participant’s world to gain an insider’s perspective, but is unable to do this directly or completely (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Inevitably therefore, phenomenology has a broad spectrum of beliefs and approaches while sharing a common interest in understanding the human experience in a specific setting (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). Simply put, the spectrum spans two approaches, namely that which place emphasis upon hermeneutic (interpretation) and idiographic (study of the individual) understanding (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013), and those stemming from a traditional Husserlian approach, which typically focuses upon descriptive accounts of experience. To this end, there has been significant growth in phenomenological research in the past few decades with the dawn of many different approaches including Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This study adopts the IPA as its methodological approach because it attempts to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003); furthermore, as Smith (2008) asserts, the interpretation process of IPA is a two-stage
procedure wherein, “the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (p. 53). In other words, “IPA researchers try to understand what an experience (object or event) is like from the participant’s perspective” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 362). The phenomenon to be understood in this study was the effects of leadership style on school climate in Islamic schools.

The rationale for selecting an IPA, therefore, was to comprehend how K12 female educators experience the world (specifically their interactions with leadership, and their perceptions of how school climate was impacted by leadership) from their perspective.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis – Theoretical Foundations

An IPA is an inductive approach to research, which is strongly influenced by the hermeneutic version of phenomenology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013) and was specifically developed by Jonathan A. Smith to allow for the rigorous exploration of idiographic subjective experiences, as well as social cognitions (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Smith et al. (2013) assert, “Without the phenomenology, there would be nothing to interpret; without the hermeneutics, the phenomenon would not be seen,” (p. 37)

Phenomenology. Smith et al. (2013) provide a comprehensive overview of the philosophical underpinnings of IPA, which stem from the 20th century works of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre. According to classical Husserlian phenomenology, experience should be examined in the way that it occurs; it should be looked at in its own terms, thereby identifying the essential components of the experience making it unique and distinguishable from all others (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Husserl attempted to establish the issue that was at the core of the subjective experience, and did so through a process of eidetic reduction involving specific techniques such as ‘free imaginative variation.’ In this process, an
individual considers different possibilities that could arise out of a situation and draws on the individual’s past experience, but of equal importance is the individual’s ability to be able to imagine new examples (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013).

As a student of Husserl, Heidegger believed that people exist in a world of objects, and sense of the world is made through interactions from the perspective of the individual. Furthermore, he argued that a person existed within a context, and because their existence is in relation to others, it is always considered temporal and situated (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). Freeman (2008) further elaborates; in an IPA a researcher needs to comprehend the mindset of a person and the language, which mediates one’s experiences of the world in order to translate his or her message. In essence, therefore, posit Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012), IPA researchers attempt to understand what it is like to stand in the shoes of the subject, and while understanding that this is not completely possible, they make meaning of the subject’s world through a process of interpretative translation.

Merleau-Ponty further developed the ideas of phenomenology postulating, an individual exists within the world as an observer forming perceptions rather than being incorporated within it (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). Merleau-Ponty presents the body as the hub of meaning-making, explaining how physical touches represent the crossing over between subjectivity and objectivity, and how the body is not conceived as an object in the world, but as our means of communication with our surroundings (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Sartre stressed the importance of the human being engaged in the act of ‘becoming;’ indicating that “we are always becoming ourselves, and that the self is not a pre-existing unity to be discovered, but rather an ongoing project to be unfurled (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013, p. 19). Additionally, Sartre introduced the significance of ‘nothingness;’ the absence of a specific
object from a setting where it is expected adds specific meaning to that setting. Furthermore, Sartre iterates the importance of our perceptions of the world being shaped by the presence of others who are concurrently pursuing their own projects (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013).

**Hermeneutics.** “A second major theoretical underpinning of IPA comes from hermeneutics, [which in turn] comes from the theory of interpretation” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013, p. 21). While trying to get close to the participant’s personal world, IPA considers that one cannot do this directly or completely. Access is dependent upon the researcher’s own conceptions which are required to make sense of the subject’s personal world through a process of interpretative activity – this is where the theory of hermeneutics comes in (Smith, 2008). According to Smith et al. (2013), the three most prominent scholars of hermeneutics are: Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer.

The theologian Schleiermacher, primarily concerned with the interpretation of historical texts such as the Bible, proposed a thorough interpretation method of a text including linguistic analysis, that is searching through years of incremental accretion to reveal the original meaning of the script, as well as a psychological analysis, that is the examination and interpretation of what was said, and how it was said (Cassidy, Reynolds, Naylor, & DeSouza, 2011). Schleiermacher asserted, this would reveal the meaning of the text whilst at the same time revealing something of the (un)intentional motivations of the original author (Moran, 2000; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013).

Schleiermacher’s position, in terms of merging the context of what was documented whilst understanding the motives of the author, has a contemporary resonance for IPA researchers when analyzing the texts of research participants (Smith, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). They accept that experiences are unique for each individual; however, they are lived within a shared
context. Schleiermacher’s theories form a significant touchstone for IPA; the linguistic and psychological interpretations enable a researcher to extract meaning beyond the explicit claims of the participant. In essence, this process does afford researchers a license to claim their analyses as more accurate than the accounts of the participants, but it may reveal more about a person than that person is aware of themselves (Cassidy, Reynolds, Naylor, & DeSouza, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013).

Heidegger built upon the work of Schleiermacher by fusing together his understanding of phenomenology with the theories of hermeneutics. Heidegger asserted a subject’s engagement with the world (the people, objects, languages, cultures, and relationships that comprise it) is categorically indissoluble. To this effect, it is impossible for anyone involved in a study, whether researcher or participant, to disconnect from these facets in order to reveal some of the fundamental truths about lived experiences (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Critically important to this study in particular, Cassidy et al. (2011) assert that all “inquiry starts from the inquirer’s perspective, from the basis of their experience” (p. 265) Thus, setting aside their preconceptions and assumptions (in other words bracketing) in advance of the inquiry is not ruled out for the IPA researcher. To this effect, inquirers are encouraged to work from a Heideggerian perspective to identify their basic understandings of a phenomenon keeping in mind that their “fore-conceptions” may not come to light until work has started in the interview, and the phenomenon has started to emerge (Cassidy, Reynolds, Naylor, & DeSouza, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013).

According to Larkin et al. (2006), an IPA researcher is encouraged to adopt a “sensitive and responsive” (p. 108) approach to data collection and analysis in which the preconceived notions of the inquirer can be adjusted as data is collected. It is important to note that no matter how much a researcher attempts to distance him or herself from the phenomenon, they will never
be able to completely escape the contextual basis of their own experience (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). According to Heidegger, therefore, phenomenology involves hermeneutics, aiming for a rich and nuanced understanding of a phenomenon through the acquisition of “hard won insights” (Moran, 2000, p. 10) but where a perfect understanding of the subject’s experience will always remain hidden (Cassidy, Reynolds, Naylor, & DeSouza, 2011).

Like theorists before him, Gadamer’s initial work was concerned with the analysis of historical texts (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). Much in alignment with the work of Heidegger, Gadamer believed that an inquirer’s preconceptions emerged through the interpretative process. He highlighted, not only did the lived experiences of the inquirer provide a gateway into the text, but they also served as a hindrance towards a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, which could at times be clouded by one’s own preconceived notions regarding the situation. Gadamer stressed the importance of adjusting preconceptions through the course of the interpretative process, in a way that they could be used to promote new questions to be asked, and therefore new meanings to be made (Cassidy, Reynolds, Naylor, & DeSouza, 2011; Moran, 2000; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013).

To highlight the relationship of the theoretical underpinnings in IPA, the Hermeneutic Circle (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013) describes the iterative nature of IPA (questioning, uncovering meaning, and further questioning) – a process that is grounded in researcher’s fluid engagement with data. As such, interviewers use questioning techniques that are semi structured and exploratory at the start of a dynamic process. As an understanding of the phenomenon develops through participant responses, the researcher is able to seek further elaboration, to make meaning of the phenomenon, through asking supplementary questions (Cassidy, Reynolds,
Idiography. Idiography, a study that concerns itself with the “particular,” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013, p. 29) provides the third major influence on IPA. This concern operates on two levels. Primarily, the ‘particular’ refers to the commitment to the systematic and thorough depth of analysis of a specific case. Secondly, there is a commitment towards understanding how specific individuals (for example K12 female teachers), in a specific context (for example, in American Islamic schools), have experienced and attach meaning to specific phenomenon (for example the effect of leadership style on school climate). In this way, IPA utilizes purposefully selected small groups, which moves the researcher from the examination of a particular individual in a particular context to being able to notice claims about the wider population through the subsequent analysis of further cases (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Therefore, individual participants and their experiences are linked to others, creating a general picture of the population (Eatough & Smith, 2008), while not undermining their unique perspectives of the phenomenon (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Summary. Consequently, IPA draws from the spectrum of phenomenological traditions, combining aspects of hermeneutics with the tenets of empirical phenomenology, as well as idiography. This provides researchers with an in-depth view into the lived experiences (within a context) of their participants, regarding each one as an individual or particular, but concurrently allowing knowledge of the phenomenon to be built up through further questioning, thereby developing research data that is applicable in real world settings (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013).
Participants

Smith and Osborne (2008) posit,

IPA researchers usually try to find a fairly homogenous sample. The basic logic is that if one is interviewing, for example, six participants, it is not very helpful to think in terms of random or representative sampling. IPA therefore goes in the opposite direction and, through purposive sampling, finds a more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant (p. 56).

As such, the participants of this study all worked as full time teachers at the same few Islamic schools in the Washington, DC metropolitan area at some point during their career for a period of no less than two school years. Participants were classified as Muslim females that were either indigenous or immigrants to the United States. The two-year experience time frame provided the teachers with an ample period to familiarize themselves with the ethos and goals of Washington DC’s Islamic schools, as well as the schools’ communities, and cultures. Female teachers were selected for two reasons. First, my personal insight and experience working in Islamic schools has indicated that for every male teacher there are at least ten females. Additionally, leadership in such schools is generally male dominated and consists of an immigrant population of either Arabs or South-East Asians, and thus I determined it would be interesting to learn how women, who are expected to be docile, submissive, and subservient in nature (Archer, 2011) respond to, and perceive, the leadership style of their male counterparts. Since the participants do not teach at the same schools, resistance from school leaders will not be experienced and is not expected to hamper data collection.

The sampling strategy employed was purposive; as such the teachers that were invited to enjoin in the research met the aforementioned criteria (a female educator with at least two years
of experience teaching in Washington DC’s Islamic schools) for whom the research question will be significant (Chapman & Smith, 2002). With regards to sample size, Osborne and Smith (2008) assert, three is an ample sample size, allowing the researcher to have sufficient in-depth engagement with each individual case, whilst providing the opportunity for detailed examination of the similarities and differences in the accounts of each participant without becoming overwhelmed. Furthermore, snowball sampling could have been included which, according to Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 28), “identifies cases of interest from people who know what cases are information rich,” thus inviting participants for whom the research question will be meaningful (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). To that end, and in alignment with the IPA parameters, the sample consisted of four participants.

**Recruitment and Access**

Recruitment of research participants occurred through approaching the individuals personally. Additional participants were located through contact information that the researcher was already privy to, given the closeness in proximity to which she worked with the participants. Teachers, who were also former associates with whom the researcher maintained a collegial relationship, were invited to take part in the research through email letter (Appendix B) and/or social media sites such as Facebook depending on the availability of contact information. Where Facebook was utilized a private group was established to which prospective participants were invited.

Incentives, to promote participation in the research, were meaningful and useful in order to be effective. Monetary and other tangible gifts were obvious motivators, but in some cases may have been considered as a form of coercion. It was therefore important to review what was considered culturally acceptable (Aitken, Gallagher, & Madronio, 2003). Many Muslim
community members consider monetary rewards given to teachers to be a form of bribery (Iqbal & Lewis, 2002), thus a Starbucks gift card for the amount of $15 was considered more appropriate.

**Ethical Considerations**

**IRB approval.** In order to obtain IRB approval, the researcher successfully completed all of the required steps as outlined by Northeastern University. Additionally, the researcher completed the NIH’s online training course, “Protecting Human Research Participants.” Furthermore, the researcher made no contact with the participants until IRB approval had been obtained in written form, after the submission of a proposed outline of the study.

**Protection of human subjects.** Though this study does not involve the participation of adolescents, in alignment with the guidelines established by the National Institute of Health (Protecting Human Research Participants, 2011) entitled, “Protecting Human Research Participants,” it reflects the necessary ethical considerations. As such, participants would be guaranteed utmost anonymity since their responses may, in certain circumstances, cause them to jeopardize their position at work. Moreover, respect for persons, beneficence, and justice are all essential for the research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). Similar research conducted by Mattar (2012) on the factors affecting the performance of students in ten Lebanese public schools indicated that despite the promise of anonymity by the research team, there was reluctance on the part of the Lebanese teachers to participate in the research. Their wariness arose from fear of job loss, and the tarnishing of reputation, if they were to divulge specific information pertaining to their school.

According to Merry and Driessen (2009), a religious school is a symbol of the
submission to God, thus teachers may feel that they are being immoral if they disclose honest information about their leader(s) and their perception of school climate. Because some of the teachers in this study would be actively employed at an Islamic school, responses to “sensitive” questions may have been skewed. Though anonymity (through the use of pseudonyms) was guaranteed, confidentiality would not be; Smith et al. (2013, p. 53) describe, “To say that no one else will see it [the research] is not the case.” Hence, while teachers may not have felt comfortable divulging their most honest perceptions about their leaders or school climate, according to Smith et al., 2013, many participants demonstrated their desire to have their experiences represented in an academic forum whence anonymity was guaranteed. In consideration of the aforementioned, teachers were assured that results would be shared with Islamic school advocacy groups on an aggregate level, and that findings may lead to changes in policy and practice.

**Informed consent.** Smith et al. (2013) assert the necessity for informed consent in an IPA study is two-fold. Firstly, regarding data collection, it is imperative for a researcher to explain to the participants the expectations of the interview. Secondly, the researcher must clearly articulate the possible use of verbatim extracts as well as the likely outcomes of data analysis. Additionally, it was essential to emphasize that participation in the study was completely voluntary. Appendix C details the parameters of the study in the form of a “Participant Informed Consent Form,” in which participants were given the opportunity to remove themselves from the study without repercussion.

To prevent the inaccurate representation or misunderstanding of questions or responses, as indicated in Appendix C, participants were given the opportunity to ask clarifying questions. Furthermore, all communication was written in a clear and coherent manner taking into account
the limitations of English language ability of participants.

**Data Collection**

*Semi-structured interviews.* Smith et al. (2013, p. 56) stress, “In terms of devising a data collection method, IPA is best suited to one which will invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences.” Accordingly, the present study aimed to use “a conversation with purpose” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013, p. 57) technique, in the form of in-depth individual semi-structured interviews which adds a degree of structure to an interview in which pre-identified issues can be explored and elaborated upon (Denscombe, 1998). Rubin and Rubin (2012) emphasize the value of responsive interviewing, a technique that is based on the conversational partnership formed between the researcher and participant. Hunter Revell (2013) asserts, “This method allows the researcher to understand experiences through the participant’s words and stories and create meaning” (p. E54). In contrast to surveys and questionnaires however, Robson (2002) maintains, these interviews provide the researcher with flexibility, wherein the interview can evolve in interesting and previously unconsidered ways, as such, the participants are encouraged to elaborate upon their answers (Coolican, 2004).

The interview process in the current study consisted of three meetings. The first entailed collecting informed consent and building rapport, additionally it allowed for the collection of demographic particulars, and afforded the participant the opportunity to ask and answer any preliminary questions, or have their concerns addressed in an unobstructed manner. This portion of the interview consisted of four background questions. The next meeting consisted of asking eight questions that were aimed at triggering a thought process in which the participants’ understandings and perceptions relating to the research question were verbalized. The opportunity to have a third meeting, which consisted of a follow-up session, where responses
were reviewed through a process known as member checking, gave the participant a chance to augment their responses. Additionally, any concerns were addressed; for example, during this portion of the interviewing process, the researcher was afforded the opportunity to ask clarifying questions that emerged during the analysis of data.

**Proposed location of interviews.** The participant interviews were conducted in a mutually convenient location, at a time that suited both the researcher and participant. While every effort was made to meet the participants in person, when this was not possible, a telephone conversation was utilized, based on the participants’ comfort level with technology and their personal preferences. Irrespective, the participants were guaranteed privacy to enable them to comfortably share their experiences without reluctance.

**Interview protocol.** It was estimated that the interviewing process should last between 60 and 80 minutes. Appendix D outlines the data collection protocol detailing the proposed interview protocol. As such, the interviewer began the process by establishing rapport with the participant; Smith et al. (2013) assert, if the participant is not comfortable with the interviewer then trust will likely not develop and thus questionable data may be attained. According to Smith and Osborne (2008), it is important to highlight that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions being asked, and the role of the interviewer is that of an active co-participant who is an active listener (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013).

**The Interview Process**

As detailed in the interview protocol (Appendix D) the interview process consisted of two main parts, the purpose of the first was to build rapport, answer questions, collect demographic information, and address any concerns. Participants were reminded of their rights through the process, and they could request to omit themselves from the study at any time. The
second part consisted of asking a variety of background questions pertaining to their work in Islamic schools. These questions were followed by open-ended questions that aimed to elicit detailed accounts of experiences and events that illustrated authentic stories. Since this research only comprised one research question, all questions presented in the interview directly pertained to gaining a greater understanding of the phenomenon of the relationship between school leadership practices and school climate. At times it became necessary to ask probing questions (not listed in the interview protocol) specifically when a clear picture of experiences was not created, or when the participant spoke assuming that, as the researcher, I would be aware of the specific context; at this time a “conscious effort was made to expose the obvious” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013, p. 69). As such, Smith et al. (2013, p. 68) suggest,

As the interview progresses [it]…should…shift from talking about things at the generic to the specific level… there should be a [shift] from discussing topics at a summary level to specific accounts of particular experiences and the associated thoughts and feelings.

This process required that the interviewer remain attentive and focused through the course of the interview, and could spontaneously ask, “How did that make you feel?” or “Can you tell me more about that?” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). As Smith et al. (2013) note, the semi-structured interview used in an IPA study does not have to follow a set sequence, nor does every question have to be asked of every participant. Furthermore, the manner in which the question is asked can be altered for each participant. In essence, the participant in a semi-structured interview should be allowed to take control wherein they are able to confidently share their stories.

The ideal backdrop for comfortable interviews had already been established since there was a significant level of familiarity between myself, as the researcher, and the participants.
Having worked with them at some point in the past 13 years, there was a level of unequivocal trust and understanding that this study aimed to provide the impetus for change in Islamic schools and that their voices would contribute in part to starting a dialogue focusing on an improved future for Islamic schools. Consequently, on several occasions participants took ownership of the interview and spoke confidently about their experiences without being probed.

Interviews began promptly at the chosen locations; the ambience was calm and the participants displayed a willingness to share their experiences even when unprovoked. Aside from the interview conducted at Starbucks (this was the choice of the participant) the locations were private and responses required little clarification. When recounting specific situations, on a few occasions, participants stumbled as they mentioned the names of key personnel and asked for identities to be masked from the final analysis. Participants were reassured that they would have the opportunity to member-check the transcripts before coding, and would then have access to the analysis. None of the participants chose to review the transcripts or asked that anything be omitted.

All data that was collected through the duration of the interviews was done so in the form of notes and audio recordings (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). Data was recorded using the Voice Notes app on the iPhone and then was transcribed in a verbatim manner.

**The reflexive journal.** As part of the interviewing process, and then later throughout the coding process, the reflexive journal was used to note thoughts, observations, tone, and impressions gathered while listening to the stories and experiences of the participant. While the layout of the reflexive journal was fairly casual, it followed the format illustrated in Table 3a. To ensure that I bracketed my own feelings and perceptions regarding issues raised during the
interview, as the researcher, I remained cognizant; these thoughts were listed in the last column of the journal using red ink.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Meaningful / Noteworthy Occurrence in Interview</th>
<th>Researcher thoughts, questions, comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Umm Hassan</td>
<td>2a. Describe the feelings of teachers in your school when they interact with leaders</td>
<td>(LC) “They were scared…but that soon turned into pure indifference; they knew no one gave a hoot!”</td>
<td>This comment sent me back several years; standing outside the Principal’s door quivering at the thought of having my idea blown off. Spirit crushing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umm Omar</td>
<td>5a. Tell me a story when the actions of your leaders led to an overall shift in the atmosphere of the school.</td>
<td>(DC) “You know the one who confused us all was our leader…he was encouraging us to have our own union”</td>
<td>Ah-ha! Brave move by a leader in an Islamic school; why is having a united voice bad? No representation = no rights 😞</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>1b. How did you feel about the outcome of your interaction (with your leader)?</td>
<td>(DC/LC) “Eventually, I felt like I was burning out and not being very productive because in my mind if anything went wrong, I could not count on the leadership of that school, because the leadership was not professional enough”</td>
<td>The impetus for my study!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3a – Layout and Excerpts from Reflexive Journal

Data Storage

According to Lin (2009, p. 135), “enormous amounts of data may accumulate during the course of a qualitative study.” Put simply, a rigorous procedure was implemented to ensure the protection of any personal information that was used for research purposes. Data was protected through storage on a password-protected computer. To ensure the anonymity of participants,
pseudonyms were used at all times. Identifying demographic information was also guarded. In the event that data was printed these documents were locked in the researcher’s secure home office and after their use, the hard copy data was destroyed through shredding and the digital data was encrypted and destroyed.

In order to expedite the transcription of interview data, the web based service rev.com was used. This is a secure site where maximum precautions are taken to ensure the safety and security of all documents. To this effect, neither client information nor documentation was shared. Transcriptionists at rev.com are held to strict nondisclosure agreements ensuring the integrity of the data (Rev, n.d.).

**Five Steps of Data Analysis in IPA**

IPA provides “a systematic and practical approach to analyzing phenomenological data,” (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliott, 2002, p. 81). It aims to search for, and extract, distinct voices emphasizing both the convergence and divergence of themes (Smith et al., 2013). Smith et al. (2013) assert there is no prescribed manner in which to analyze data gathered in an IPA; however, they have established a seven step set of guidelines for novice researchers that was adopted in the data analysis of this study.

Step one of the analysis consisted of reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. In essence, the researcher should immerse and actively engage themselves in the data. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2013) suggest that the researcher listen to the recording of the interview while reading through the transcript. This will enable the participant’s voice to resonate every subsequent time the transcript is read. During this stage, as the researcher, I searched for contradictions, paradoxes, and shifts from generic to specific accounts. For example, a teacher may have begun by talking chronologically about their time as a female
teacher in an Islamic school; however, they may have then subtly shifted to talking about specific events, thoughts, and feelings pertaining to a more recent occurrence in their life.

Step two or Initial Noting (Smith et al., 2013), is also described by Moustakas (1994) as horizontalization. It is a detailed and time consuming pursuit in which the researcher’s role is to examine semantic content and language while noting anything of stark interest and identifying the specific ways in which a participant talks about an issue in order to identify conceptual thinking. In the present study comments were categorized in the following way: descriptive – consisting of what the participant has said; linguistic – consisting of the specific language used by the participant; and conceptual comments – ascertained on an interrogative and interpretative level.

In step three, emergent themes were developed. Saldaña (2013) describes this process as cycle coding, consisting of two parts. In the first cycle coding system, known also as in vivo coding the researcher captures the essence of a whole statement in several key words; this involves “splitting,” and it provides the researcher with a more nuanced analysis from the start (Saldaña, 2013). Additionally, in vivo coding demonstrates value and respect for the participant’s perspective and understanding, by using verbatim quotes. According to Smith et al. (2013) this step also involves reducing the volume of the data, while capturing its complexity through mapping interrelationships, connections, and patterns. This is accomplished through fragmenting the transcript into chunk themes; consideration to the conceptual thinking of the participant is highly encouraged here.

Step four of the data analysis process involved searching for connections across emergent themes (Smith et al., 2013). Whereas Saldaña (2013) refers to this as second cycle coding (or axial coding), Moustakas (1994) refers to this process as developing clusters of meaning. In
essence, this step involves the researcher creating an intricate tapestry, demonstrating the way in which the themes appear to fit together, and moreover how they are related to the research question.

Statements, feelings, and thoughts are removed from the chronological order that they appear in the transcripts, and are grouped together according to their themes. This process involves several mini-steps, described by Smith et al. (2013): abstraction – where superordinate themes are developed; subsumption – where emergent themes become the superordinate theme; polarization – a process which involves the identification of oppositional themes; contextualization – where themes are related to life events; numeration – identifying how often a theme is discussed; and function - demonstrating the importance and relevance of the themes for an individual. In essence, Saldaña (2013, p.207) asserts, “the primary goal during second cycle coding is to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization,” from the first cycle codes. Through the use of axial coding, I was afforded the opportunity to “strategically reassemble the data that were ‘split’ or ‘fractured’ during the initial coding process” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 159), in order to determine overarching themes.

Step five of the coding and analysis process, entailed “moving to the next case” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013, p. 100). It was essential here that as the researcher, I not only bracketed myself from the research based on my experiences, but also set aside assumptions based upon the emergent themes acquired from the analysis of the previous case(s). As such, the perspective of each participant was treated individually.

Step six, the final step in the analysis protocol, involves the researcher “looking for patterns across cases” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 101). This is where the researcher brings together themes ascertained throughout the interviews; as the researcher, I chose to develop graphic
representations of the most potent themes that demonstrated consistency; whereby the individual and shared meanings were identified, thus ensuring the analysis maintained a strong interpretative focus.

Coding, organization, and analysis were completed by digitally using MAXQDA designed for computer assisted qualitative data analysis.

**Data Analysis and Coding**

According to Braun and Clarke (2013), coding in IPA “doesn’t aim to produce succinct codes – a code is more like a brief commentary on the data” (p. 214). As demonstrated in the reflexive journal excerpt above, comments can be classified on several levels; in effect, a participant’s lived experiences and world meaning are categorized as *descriptive*; their use of specific language to communicate these experiences are termed *linguistic*; a comment that describes the participant’s experience, but that has been interpreted from the researcher’s vantage point, is considered *conceptual* - for this reason these comments were placed in the final column (Braun & Clarke, 2013). According to Smith et al. (2013), the IPA researcher works to make sense of how the participant conceives and makes sense of what they are experiencing. Thus, the researcher is conducting a double hermeneutic analysis, thereby indicating the need for the conceptual comments, and hence the third column in the reflexive journal.

Brocki and Wearden (2006) assert, by its very nature, an IPA acknowledges that research is a dynamic process, and therefore, the researcher is concerned with individual subjective accounts rather than formulating a generalized objective account. Additionally, while the researcher attempts to access the participants’ world in an un-prohibited manner, one cannot overlook the fact that “access [to the participants’ experiences] depends on and is complicated by the researcher’s own conceptions” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). Accordingly, the researcher
must employ bracketing during the process of data analysis. Moreover, Smith et al. (2013) remark, in keeping with the idiographic nature of IPA “bracketing the ideas emerging from the individual analysis of the first case while working on the second,” (p. 100) is essential in order to highlight the individuality of each case within its own right.

**Data analysis put into practice.** When conducting data analysis in this study, therefore, each of the interviews was read and reread, and analyzed on its own merit. This ensured that the unique nuances delivered by each participant were captured adequately. During each interview the reflexive journal was used as a tool to note specific language, tone, and conceptual comments, and these were taken into consideration when reading the transcripts. Smith et al. (2013) note such comments have the ability of capturing the assumptions and emotional experiences of each participant.

Each of the interviews was coded and analyzed using the sequence of steps detailed above. Data was transcribed using the secure online service provided by Rev.com, and was then transferred to MAXQDA where it was broken down, and organized into themes as they emerged. This step, referred to as in vivo coding by Saldaña (2013), involved the capturing of a whole statement giving credence to the experiences that the participants described. Themes were then established, and from these, sub-themes were developed. Finally, the search for meaning across cases was conducted, in accordance to Smith et al. (2013); this was accomplished through asking the following questions, “What connections are there across cases? How does a theme in one case help illuminate a different case? Which themes are the most potent?” (p. 101).

**Member checking**

“Member checking is the gold standard” (Sandelowski, 2008, p. 502) in quality control processes that are employed in qualitative research. Specifically, when the researcher seeks “to
improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of what has been recorded during a research interview” (Harper & Cole, 2012, p. 510) member checking is crucial. With regards to this study, this process was used to optimize the validity of the research findings. It served as a transaction between the researcher and the participant to ensure that there were no misconceptions, and that what the researcher understood corresponded to the source of the data. By actively involving the participant, the researchers’ analytical and interpretative findings were scrutinized and judged (Sandelowski, 2008).

Amongst its various benefits, member checking affords the researcher the opportunity to embed quality control into the primary data collection process. For instance, participants were asked to elaborate on, or clarify responses. Additionally, the researcher was given the opportunity to sum up, restate, or summarize what had been said in the interview, which provided the participant the chance to verify or clarify statements for accuracy and completeness, thereby rendering the data authentic (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sandelowski, 2008). As well as occurring in the primary stages of the research, simultaneously with data collection, Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert how member checking may also take place towards the end of the project when analyzed data is reviewed for authenticity.

Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is critical in establishing the worth of a study; in other words, trustworthiness is the process by which a researcher “persuades his or her audiences that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of” (p. 290). As such, they suggest the criteria involved in determining and evaluating the trustworthiness of a study. Of relevance to this study is credibility, which refers to the confidence that one has in the ‘truth’ of the findings. The techniques for establishing credibility
are several; for instance, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checking. The techniques employed in this study will be discussed in further detail below.

**Prolonged engagement.** As its name suggests, prolonged engagement ensures that the researcher spends sufficient time in the field to learn and understand the culture, social setting, or phenomenon of relevance. As the positionality statement suggests, as the researcher, I spent 12 years working in Islamic schools, and therefore have spent adequate time observing various aspects of the setting including, but not limited to, speaking with personnel on all hierarchical levels, as well as developing a rapport and trust with members of the school community.

Through this process, I was able to detect distortions that may have been apparent in the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.304) assert, “If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth.” Therefore, its goal is to identify characteristics, traits, and attributes most relevant to the phenomenon, and to extensively focus on them providing depth to the study.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation is the process that involves corroborating data in multiple sources to ensure a rich, robust, comprehensive and well developed account (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, according to Patton (2001), triangulation allows for the elucidation of complementary aspects of the same phenomenon in different settings and at different points in time. This can be achieved by examining the findings of similar studies available in literature.

**Peer debriefing.** To ensure that, as the researcher, my preconceptions of the phenomenon and setting did not bias the analysis of the findings from the data, the process of peer debriefing was employed. Through this process Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert, the researcher can become aware of his/her posture toward data, and analysis, which may have
otherwise been taken for granted. Furthermore, according to Thễ Nguyễn (2008), peer debriefing involves the researcher calling upon a disinterested peer who is in no way involved in the project. This candidate can aid in the process of meaningfully interrogating the research, both substantively and methodologically, specifically because of the importance of negotiating political and ethical concerns that may arise, as the data is being collected. In this research project, female Islamic school teachers expressed their feelings and shared their experiences of working in Islamic schools under Muslim leadership, this was a sensitive situation with which they may not have felt comfortable sharing. As a result, a peer debriefer aided the analysis in considering and weighing alternative techniques in eliciting key information. As such, Spall (1998) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit, peer debriefing, used in conjunction with other techniques (such as member checking) bolster the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research by implementing the use of external peers.

**Negative case analysis.** Negative case analysis involves the researcher searching for and discussing elements of the data that do not support the emergent patterns or themes. This process allowed for the opportunity to refine the analysis until it could explain data yielded in the majority of cases (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2001).

**External Validity.** External validity is the degree to which research findings can be generalized or transferred to other contexts, settings, and individuals. According to Trochim and Donnelly (2007) qualitative researcher can enhance transferability by carefully and thoroughly documenting the research context and the assumptions that are central to the research.

**Internal Validity.** Member checking, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility in a qualitative study and continues to be an important control process during the course of data collection (Harper & Cole, 2012). As such,
participants received the opportunity to review their statements for accuracy; in turn the researcher was given the opportunity to understand and assess what the participant intended to do and say by giving them the opportunity to correct errors, or challenge inaccurate interpretations. Additionally, the participants had the chance to augment their position by volunteering information that was simulated as a result of the playback process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Limitations**

While transferability is an integral tenet of external validity, because this study pertains specifically to Islamic schools, I realized that the findings of this study may not be transferable to other religious or non-denominational schools and that this study may only be relevant to other teachers working in Islamic schools.

Since Islamic schools are in their relative infancy, and are run and operated largely by first generation immigrants to the USA, it has been taken into consideration that this study relates to the young history of these organizations that can, and most likely will, evolve overtime. In the future, critics of the study may argue that the findings were due to the uniqueness of the participants, site or the specific time (for example, the post-9/11 era) in which the research was conducted.

**Confidentiality**

Since all of the study participants were partaking in an opportunity that would rarely be presented to them, in that they would be speaking openly about issues that relate to disturbing the status quo (which is a cultural taboo in many Muslim communities) they displayed varying levels of concern regarding their anonymity. Their concerns ranged from being totally indifferent, wherein they exhibited little to no desire to use a pseudonym; to the fear of facing potential
ostracism from local Muslims. Regardless of their inclination, each participant was guaranteed anonymity, and each was involved in selecting her pseudonym for herself.

All data collected through the duration of the study (in the form of digital recordings, the researcher reflexive journal and interview transcriptions) was kept in a secure location to which only the researcher was privy. Following the completion of the data analysis, all data was destroyed and digital recordings were encrypted.
Chapter Four: Summary of Research Findings

Introduction

Findings from the Pew Report (2007) describes the United States as one of the most religiously and ethnically diverse countries in the world. This overarching pluralistic philosophy, adopted by Americans, has allowed for communities rich in diverse cultures and religions to flourish. This has set the backdrop for coexistence, and thus the establishment and proliferation of schools and community centers by Jews, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims. The lattermost group serves as manifestation of this philosophy (Senzai, 2009) specifically after 9/11 when Islamic schools sprung up sporadically in the US, wherein it was estimated in 2011 that 250 K-12 faith-based Islamic schools were in existence (Huus, 2011).

Research on independent, religious schools indicates that leadership style is known to have an effect on school climate (Black, 2010); additionally a plethora of research exists that illustrates the perceptions of teachers in mainstream public schools regarding the effects of leaderships on organizational climate (Awan & Mahmood, 2010; Black, 2010; Dinham, Cairney, Craigie, & Wilson, 1995; Gunbayi, 2007; Hall & George, 1999). While multiple a priori studies have been conducted addressing the way in which Islamic school leaders make sense of the relationship between school leadership practices and school climate (Aabed, 2006; Elsegeini, 2005) little is known about the experiences of classroom teachers. Therefore, this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) aimed to understand the lived experiences of classroom teachers, and how they make sense of the relationship between school leadership practices and school climate.

My significant experience working in Islamic schools in the Washington DC metropolitan area has provided me the opportunity to work alongside some of the most
competent, female, Muslim educators whom I ultimately approached to participate in this study. While it was hoped that a general picture regarding the relationship between Islamic school leaders and climate would be painted, IPA also ensures that no one story clouds the experiences of another participant’s. To this effect, Smith et al. (2013) posit that IPA studies generally consist of a small, homogenous group of participants for a few reasons. To begin, the specific experiences of a case can be realized, and the convergence and divergence of these experiences can be mapped against other participants. Additionally, “it is possible to move onto more general claims…after the potential of [each] case has been realized” (p. 3) when the researcher is “able to assess the evidence in relation to their existing professional and experiential knowledge” (p. 4). So, while each participant brought to this research their unique experiences, there is potential to build a generalized argument, which would ultimately, help to benefit other Islamic schools.

**Research Question**

The research question that guided this process aimed to explore the experiences of female, K12 Islamic school educators and how they perceived the relationship between leadership and climate to play out in their respective school buildings. Specifically the research question was: *How do the experiences of female K12 Islamic school educators shape their perceptions of the impact of school leadership on school climate?* The collective accounts were used to gain further insights into the interconnectedness of the threads found in literature, as well as the theoretical frameworks employed. This ultimately created a tapestry specific to this group of educators, against their collective backdrop.
Participants

The trend of Islamic school proliferation throughout the US has been shadowed in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. The Islamic Schools League of America (2014) note, that in this area alone, 13 full day Independent Islamic schools operate, employing on average fifty teachers per school of which 90% are females. Purposeful sampling was used in this study to select teachers of varying backgrounds whose service years in Islamic schools ranged from 2 to 14 years, and who had a variety of experiences in terms of their level of Islamic affiliation and nationality/origin.

Since female teachers make up the vast population of educators in Islamic schools, and since they are directly affected by leadership practices, they were chosen to share their experiences.

The study was introduced to the participants through one-to-one conversation, and then formally through the letter outlined in Appendix B. This gave potential participants the opportunity to ask any questions they had pertaining to the study. Most prevalent among the questions raised was the concern that they expressed to remain anonymous. Once this was addressed, all potential participants that had been approached agreed to share their experiences. Times and places to conduct the interviews were confirmed, and of the four participants, two discussed their experiences via phone conversation; one preferred to meet publically at Starbucks; and because of her demanding work schedule and family commitment, one participant chose to participate at a location that was close to her children’s school.

This study involved the active participation of four female Muslim teachers, each of whom was assigned a culturally specific pseudonym of their choice. The interviewing process employed, was uniform and began with an overview of the study in which the teachers had the
opportunity to ask questions and gain clarity on issues pertaining to the study and the ramifications of participating. Participants were then invited to read, understand, and sign the Participant Informed Consent form (outlined in Appendix C). This was followed by the informal, semi-structured interview that lasted between 60 and 80 minutes. With the permission and consent of the participant, this was digitally recorded using the Voice Notes app available on the iPhone.

The participants of the study were invited to share information about their background, the factors and experiences that shaped them as educators, and address the key motivators in them choosing Islamic over public schools as a place to share their expertise, and impart their knowledge and wisdom.

**Umm Hassan.** Umm Hassan is of Eritrean decent was born to parents who traveled to the United States in June 1974, on student visas to pursue their undergraduate studies at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). Like many immigrants at that time, she explained how they came in search of opportunities. Umm Hassan was raised in Nevada, and until the age of five, when she entered kindergarten, she spoke Tigrinya almost exclusively. After this, she recalls English became commonplace at her home, and she was acculturated into the American way of life – this is particularly important as her responses to the interview questions can be framed as an African American woman, rather than the daughter immigrant parents.

Umm Hassan traveled to California to undertake her undergraduate studies. Through her interaction with other second generation Muslims (of immigrant families) Umm Hassan, gravitated towards the study of Islam and found her calling, when she graduated from college. While she achieved her initial teaching credentials in California, while working in an inner city school, Umm Hassan chose to share and impart her knowledge and expertise in an Islamic school
shortly after 9/11 which became the impetus for a five year stint in these institutes. Umm Hassan explains,

I started working as a long-term sub in an Islamic school that was really starting up in Las Vegas. I had a couple of reasons. One, was that there were some Islamic schools that were really emerging, that were getting established, and I wanted to be a part of helping them get established. Um, you know just in whatever capacity I could, and that capacity was as a teacher. Secondly, and I think the problem was significantly…was immediately after 9/11 you know September 11, 2001 and you know the events associated with that I think there was a lot of issues with you know, Muslims being discriminated against, a lot of issues with harassment. I went through some harassment in my local community and so I think part of it, too was like wanting to be… in a… a… what I perceived as a safe space. Um, and you know wanting to be in an Islamic school and helping to maybe avoid some of the discrimination that was really, really prevalent at that time.

In 2007, Umm Hassan moved to the Washington DC Metro Area where she taught in the area’s two largest Islamic schools. However, this was after teaching for a year in a relatively newly established school, just kilometers away. When asked about her motivations for choosing to teach in an Islamic school, Umm Hassan asserted,

It was I mean honestly, the same things that I find rewarding in teaching in public school or non-Islamic schools, and that's really just interacting with students, being able to translate a set of curriculum, into a whole year of learning. You know, seeing their development over a year, and getting to know them; and really just knowing that we're
making an impact on their life. And so that’s something that, that I think it's just universal to teaching.

**Umm Fatima.** Umm Fatima describes herself as a Muslim Irish American, and she accepted Islam before marrying her Palestinian husband. Briefly, when her children were young she lived in the Palestinian territory of Israel. When she returned she began teaching in an Islamic school; that was over thirty years ago, and at the time, she recalls her main motivations for choosing to continue her teaching career in a religious school as being two fold, she explained,

Well, at the beginning I was there to be with my children who were in school at that time and I wanted to be close to them, but then, it was very comfortable, to be around other Muslims and to be a part of their community.

When asked what factors motivated her to work at an Islamic school, Umm Fatima stated, “Well, I think it’s the companionship of other teachers. That’s one of the really good benefits, and having my own children also feel a part of the community, was one of the greatest benefits I think we had.” It is important to note that Umm Fatima embraced Islam almost 40 years ago and thus feeling like part of a community enabled her to feel a sense of belonging and gave her a stronger sense of her identity as a Muslim.

As an ESL teacher, and a huge proponent of the Montessori methodology, Umm Fatima said her approach was very progressive. She would have her students engaged in stations, and things would appear somewhat chaotic to onlookers, she explained, but students were thriving and parents were appreciative of the steady and consistent progress that their children were making. This pedagogical approach was not commonplace in Islamic schools when she started
teaching, Umm Fatima explained, and after facing much resistance she decided to establish her own Islamic, Montessori School in the fall of 2011 where she currently teaches.

**Umm Omar.** Umm Omar immigrated to the United States in 1997 when she married her husband. She was born to Palestinian parents, in Amman, Jordan where she lived until she was in fifth grade, when her family again moved to the United Arab Emirates. Umm Omar explains how her father was an active duty military officer, and so her perceptions of work ethic and effective leadership were largely shaped through his influence and his actions. She described, “My dad was in the military; that influenced me…being very punctual and, you know, doing the job to the best I can. Uh, also, I had a very good father. He was a very good leader.”

Umm Omar went onto explain how she was one of four sisters and how her father would value the opinion of his daughters, epitomizing a democratic family structure, and creating the foundation for the standard that she would use to measure leadership efficacy against later on in her life, and during her career. Among the examples she gave of her father, this was one of the most profound,

Uh, even if he wanted to change the carpet in the house, he would take the opinion of each single one of us. Like he really respected all of us a lot, you know, as females… We were like four older girls, and then the boys came. But he really treated us, you know, like very, very valued people in his life. When you, you know, have your ... that, uh, status in the family, I think it helps you a lot to build a good character.

Umm Omar resided and studied in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) until she graduated from the university there. Her beginnings as teacher were in the UAE, and she continued to nurture this passion when she moved to Virginia, 17 years ago, which had been her goal, “since I came to the US; that was my target, to work in Islamic environment,” and she achieved it. Umm
Omar went on to explain how, as a practicing Muslim who wears Islamic dress demonstrating her modesty, Islamic schools provided her with a unequivocal sense of belonging, “I feel so comfortable, you know, to be where I can perform my prayers on time. I don't feel a stranger [sic], you know. I feel I belong there, and that is why I feel so comfortable.” Additionally, she continued to describe the benefits of teaching in a school where her son also attends and where she has been able to remain close to him, “Other than that, my son is in Islamic school, he was 3 and a half, almost 4 years old-- Pre-K till the present time; he's 11th grader now! So, that is another plus.” Highlighting the importance of being able to honor and observe religious holidays in the Islamic calendar, she asserted how working in a faith-based school provided the opportunity to do this,

All the holy days that we have, you know, Islamically, in our Islamic calendar, we enjoy it in Islamic schools…I don't have [this benefit], if I'm working in a non-Islamic place, I will have to take off, and sometimes I will not be allowed to take these days off.

Currently, Umm Omar works in the area’s largest Islamic school where she teaches Arabic as a second language to students in 7th, 9th, 10th and 11th grade who are not of Arab origin, and whose home language is not Arabic.

**Teresa.** Born and raised in Texas to Mexican parents, Teresa accepted Islam over 20 years ago when she married her husband. She describes herself as a Hispanic Muslim and has been teaching in the Washington DC metro area’s Islamic schools for five years, after having taught in various public schools in Texas. Teresa has worked in three such establishments and explained, “My daughters first started going to an Islamic school when I moved to Virginia…I thought I would like to see what it is like to work in an Islamic school” and this became the impetus for a long-term career choice for her. Additionally, Teresa asserts the Islamic
environment created a sense of comfort for her and appealed to her as a convert to the religion, “the way the girls, actually the students, treat each other…I feel that working in a Muslim environment, I don’t know, allows for us to be a little bit more, how can I say…it keeps me closer to Islam.” While Teresa currently teaches a junior kindergarten class in her present school, she did teach conversational Spanish to high school students, and English as a second language to newcomers in grades 7 through 12 previously.

Teresa explained how prior to pursuing education she was a successful retail manager, and through her training and professional development, was able to develop a sense of solid leadership from which she gauges her perceptions of the leadership that she has encountered in Islamic schools.

**Participant Demographics.** The participants of this study represented the epitome of Islamic culture. On a small microscopic level this group characterized the tapestry that is Islam - people of different colors and backgrounds united in their belief of one God and His Messenger. Table 4a lists the demographics of the study participants. While they were all females, one was indigenous to the United States, two were the children of first generation immigrants, and one was a naturalized citizen to the country. Each of the participants had taught at least one of the Washington DC Metro Area’s Islamic schools for at least two school years; the duration of the service was not necessarily consecutive. The degree to which they practiced Islam ranged from moderate to orthodox according to choice of attire; however, all of the participants agreed that they practiced and upheld the tenets of their faith, and all of the participants identified with their religion in conjunction with their nationality or country of origin. Each of the participants had some degree of college education ranging from a two-year associate’s degree to being a doctoral candidate.
Table 4a – Demographics of study participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of Service in Islamic Schools</th>
<th>Highest level of Education</th>
<th>Islamic Denomination</th>
<th>Nationality identified with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 females</td>
<td>40-70</td>
<td>5-30+</td>
<td>2-year Associates Degree – Doctoral Degree candidate</td>
<td>4 Ahle Sunnah wal Jammat to varying degrees</td>
<td>1 Eritrean – Born in the US</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All participants consider themselves practicing Muslims</td>
<td>1 Irish American</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 Palestinian – Born in Amman, Jordan</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Mexican – Born in the US</td>
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<td><strong>ALL participants stated that they identified themselves as Muslims first and foremost</strong></td>
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**Emergent Themes**

This study was developed on the assumption that it would aid in developing protocol for decision-making in Islamic schools. Specifically, since this study focused on the lived experiences of Islamic school teachers, regarding their perceptions of how school leadership affects school climate, it aimed to provide a foundation for developing a program of pre-service training, as well as professional development for prospective and current principals. Additionally, it has the potential to guide and inform the interrogatory portion of the interviewing process for school board members to use when engaging in dialogue with prospective candidates for leadership roles. With this being said, Smith et al. (2013, p.4) assert, “the reader of the report is able to assess the evidence in relation to their existing professional and experiential knowledge.” Hence, while these stories come from somewhat of a homogenous participant pool, and generalizations can be made to a certain degree as the reader correlates findings with his/her own experiences relating it to their current situation, it was vital to consider the uniqueness of each participant’s experiences on their own merit.
The themes that emerged from the data shed light, and gave meaning to, the way in which Muslim female K12 Islamic school teachers understood and perceived the concepts of effective leadership, school climate, and the interaction and interdependency of the two pillars in the school dynamic. This was achieved through them providing examples and stories that highlighted their experiences of each of these factors. From these themes, sub-themes emerged and these have been charted in Table 4b below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Correlating Interview Questions</th>
<th>Sub-Theme(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Effective School Leadership</td>
<td>What does effective leadership mean to you?</td>
<td>a) The Indigenous Muslim</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell me a story about a time when you interacted directly with your principal</td>
<td>b) The Problem Solver</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Describe an event when you experienced “good” leadership</td>
<td>c) The Caretaker</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Share examples of the acts of “good leadership”</td>
<td>d) The Hard Worker</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How do your understandings and perceptions of leadership relate to school climate?</td>
<td>e) An Organized Leader is a Prepared Leader</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tell me a story or recall a time when the actions of your leader(s) led to an overall shift in the atmosphere at school</td>
<td>f) A Knowledgeable Leader is a Professional Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Ineffectual Leader</td>
<td>What does effective leadership mean to you?</td>
<td>a) Nepotism: Who’s your daddy?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tell me a story about a time when you interacted directly with your principal</td>
<td>b) The misleading leader</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describe an event when you experienced “good” leadership</td>
<td>c) Feeling betrayed by an untrustworthy leader</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Share examples of the acts of “good leadership”</td>
<td>d) Religious Guilt</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do your understandings and perceptions of leadership relate to school climate?</td>
<td>e) The Autocratic Dictator</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tell me a story or recall a time when the actions of your leader(s) led to an overall shift in the atmosphere at school</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Closed School Climate</td>
<td>How did the interaction with your leader affect your performance at school?</td>
<td>a) Poor leadership = Poor Climate</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Describe the feelings of teachers in your school when they interact with leaders</td>
<td>b) Public School is a better option</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What factors do you believe affect school climate?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tell me about something that changed the atmosphere of the school; like an event or a time that specifically stands out in your memory</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How do your understandings and perceptions of</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open School Climate</td>
<td>How do your understandings and perceptions of leadership effect school climate?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Recall a time / times when your school leadership had an impact on how everyone (fellow teachers, students, parents, office and custodial staff) felt at school.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tell me a story or recall a time when the actions of your leader(s) led to an overall shift in the atmosphere at school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What happened to make everyone feel positively or negatively?</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) Positive You, Positive Climate!</td>
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<td>b) Principal as the Galvanizer</td>
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<td>c) Creating a welcoming environment</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 4b – Themes and Sub-Themes developed from responses to interview questions

**Theme 1 – Effective School Leadership**

“**Effective leadership? That’s easy! Being professional and organized. Very Organized, and knowing the school system**” - Teresa

The theme that developed first through the process of interviewing, was that pertaining to perceptions held of effective leadership that were born out of the umbrella question, *what does effective leadership mean to you?* During the interviews, participants had varying perceptions and while responses varied in length and depth, the overarching theme of what it means to be an effective leader prevailed as being a person who was fair, caring, who wholeheartedly trusted
their subordinates, and who was professional, and organized, and hardworking. Umm Fatima laughed as she contemplated her interaction with her teachers when she had recently assumed a leadership role,

The only thing I did was I really had a lot of respect for my teachers and gave them absolute leeway. Anything they wanted to do, I was, like, behind it and asked, “What can I do to help you?” You know, because I just talked to them and made them comfortable.

Using this definition as the umbrella theme for effective leadership, several sub themes resulted, when participants were further asked to divulge and share experiences of good leadership.

**Sub-Theme 1a: The indigenous leader.** Umm Hassan, Umm Omar, and Teresa all agreed that a leader who possessed a high level of cultural competency, with regards to working and operating a school in the United States, was very important. They each cited examples, which demonstrated how salient a characteristic this was. Umm Hassan laughed, “I have worked where the leader was just not in touch with the teachers, not to knock on educators from overseas, you know? But seriously, someone who has been educated here and is familiar with protocol and well, the wrong and right thing to do and say.” Umm Hassan continued by sharing an example of one of the leaders for whom she had most recently worked. She described him as a “visionary,” who had spent the best part of three decades in the United States acquiring his education from the University of Maryland. She explained, “He was attune to the needs of his staff.” Umm Hassan went on to share examples of how this leader was always present in the hallways, would greet teachers and students by their names, and compared this to schools where she had previously worked, and where the leadership comprised leaders who were from “overseas” but who had largely been absent from the day-to-day operation of the school. Umm
Hassan elaborated, “For a guy to exhibit this kind of openness was unusual” and a trait that had seldom been exhibited by leaders who had recently immigrated to the United States.

Similarly Umm Omar shared an example of an indigenous vs. non-indigenous leader that she had worked for. Her experience was eye-opening as she described the way in which she was asked to carry out tasks that she felt were beyond the scope of her job description, she explained,

I was just walking, and then she [one of the school’s leaders] said, "Can you take this," I think it was 3 years ago. She bought food for her son from McDonald's. She said, "Can you take this to my son?" She was in a hurry. And, you know, when you're in a situation you just do it because I felt as like a mom, OK, I took it, went upstairs, gave it to her son. After like two or may be three days, I felt bad about it to myself. I thought this is not my duty. You can keep the food in your office until it gets colder; it's not the teacher's job to deliver your son's food. This was my dignity.

Being a relative newcomer to the United States herself, Umm Omar explained from a cultural perspective that while this may have been commonplace in the country where the principal was from, it was peculiar, “unnecessary,” and made her feel “very uncomfortable.” She went to describe her experience with an indigenous leader; she smiled as she explained,

But, I had one of the most wonderful principals really. He really influenced me a big deal [sic], mashaAllah! Like he lived like the Prophet [Muhammed]; you got the feeling he was living the time of the Prophet even though he was from here. And, you know, one time, a lady was carrying a bag of cans for the food drive donation, and you know; it fell in the hallway. He left his office, came and helped her, and picked everything up for her. He was like an excellent role model for us and for the kids. He was a very, very positive leader.
Uh, I love, you know, working with him. He worked one, one or two years in that school.

Uh, whoever works for him now is a blessed person, mashaAllah!

Umm Omar continued that his humility was a reflection of his experiences and upbringing here, and that he did not let the “power” get to him.

Teresa’s experience working with a principal from overseas mirrored those shared by Umm Omar and Umm Hassan; she explained how immigrant leaders implemented the same techniques in dealing with their staff members, as were common “back home.” She explained how her experience influenced her in developing the perception that those leaders who were indigenous to the United States exhibited, among other traits, fairness in the workplace. She described,

I feel that an American principal knows the laws very well of America, and that they can't just be toying around with their employees or students. A foreign national might not be too aware, but then again they might not realize that if they caused harm to an employee, they can be sued because they feel that their, I don't know, maybe their government protects them. I don't know. Honestly, I can't really tell you why they act the way they act, but all I can see is that it's not a very professional way of doing things.

In contrast, Teresa described her experiences working with an indigenous school leader when she explained,

Having worked for principals from Arab countries, or Pakistan, and having worked for a principal in the Islamic school who was not from overseas, but actually she's an African American, I feel that maybe that's the difference that this American principal in an Islamic school has made. She knows, and she understands, the system in America, where the others, I think, still have the system from their countries.
When probed to provide a specific time that she had witnessed how and when these differences were apparent, Teresa offered the following,

For example, the students the come into school that register for classes, they pay a high tuition. For example, the foreigners, I'm referring to the non-American leaders, the people who have not lived or been born here I guess, they tend to focus mostly on the money that comes into the school. Whether the students are given a great education or not is not really too important to them, but an American leader or a leader who is an American national, understands that these students are going to be going to college, and that these students must be prepared.

**Sub-Theme 1b: The problem solver.** The traits of the *Effective Leader* manifested themselves throughout the interview when the participants spoke about the heightened inclination of some Islamic school leaders to change their, less than favorable, observations into solutions. Umm Hassan shared a time when, as the mother of an infant, she was overwhelmed with grading and how, while she attempted to remain abreast of deadlines, she struggled significantly. To the behest of her direct supervisor, this issue was resolved. She was provided with extra support and assistance by way of the “roving-substitute.” Umm Hassan described,

I wasn’t really grading papers as quickly as I should have been, you know. The girls’ school vice principle talked to me about it, and she had a way of explaining it in a… she was firm, in the sense of *this is what you need to do*, and *this is what we expect* and *this is why*. But, she was also like um, *I’m going to find somebody to help you grade papers*, and she did. You know she found another teacher who was like a permanent kind of roving sub, who would come in twice a week take a pile of papers from me, no questions asked, and be like look, “*I’m going to grade these papers for you*” and she would do it.
Umm Fatima also shared her perceptions of what effective leadership meant to her when she spoke hypothetically,

Good leadership is when you, um, listen to teachers’ concerns and, you, try to address them and, if you would like to see changes you openly discuss it with, the teachers and get their feedback on how best to achieve those changes. You work together to devise solutions to the problems you see. Um, I’m not sure I’ve seen that, though!

When discussing an optimal leader that she had worked with in an Islamic school, Teresa described how, “She listens to your problems if you have any problems, and she tries to come up with a solution.” When asked to share an example of when this was exhibited, Teresa highlighted the time when her instructional assistant “called in sick for work at the last minute,” and how she was momentarily alone with “twenty little ones” referring to the size of her junior kindergarten class. She said that the principal, who she described as “very level headed,” asked for her to remain in control of the situation while she worked to solve the issue, and within an hour help in the form of a substitute was organized. She explained, “This was a last minute sick call, so she was really not prepared. I totally understand it, but she acted quickly. She did something about it. She sent some help.”

**Sub-Theme 1c: The caretaker.** Teresa frequently referred to a leader in light of her experience as a long-standing and successful retail manager. She said, “A leader who expects a lot needs to be willing to give a lot; a lot of love and a lot of care.” She was able to use this standard to gauge her understanding of leadership efficacy in Islamic schools, and described an example of her principal’s actions when recalling an experience. Specifically, this was when a colleague had a last minute emergency and was late for school; the way in which the principal reacted to it was by expressing sincere care, “This was a last minute thing, the teacher’s son was
sick, but she [the principal] acted, she cared. She did something about it. She sent some help. You know, she cared.” She continued, “The principal is very professional. She's very caring. She listens.” Additionally, when recalling other competent leaders that she had worked with, she recalled, “They were so professional, but then they were also so human. They had a very strong human side, and that showed that they cared for us.”

While working in a school where Umm Hassan described the overarching ethos to be in strict alignment with the ethical and moral tenets of Islam, she stated, “There was a very, very strong adherence to following the Qur’an and the Sunnah, but additionally they have a strong emphasis on Tazkiya An-Nafs,” which she described to mean purification of the heart, and which in turn reflected in the practices of the leaders at the school. She asserted,

So the way that that is played out is basically how you interact with people in terms of your manner and how you express that through your level of concern and how much you care. In terms of the way you speak to people. As such, they were very, very strict about not allowing gossip among the staff. And they cared that no one should be spoken ill of.

Umm Omar demonstrated her experience with assertive, attentive, and caring leadership in an example that she shared of a recent incident at her school. She described how students in the school were required to adhere to a “dress code that was in alignment with Islamic rules.” At a school sponsored function, where she had been asked to volunteer, where she assumed the same rules would and “should apply,” and where “parents were also present,” she noticed how many girls were wearing shorter skirts. A few parents expressed their disapproval to her. She was reluctant at first to raise this issue, but approached her leader and described her interaction, and the resulting action taken:
I talked to one of the leaders. And she was a Muslim. And I was so impressed. During one of our staff meetings she said, *we're going to enforce our students to follow an Islamic dress code; to be decent in their outfits whenever we are in the campus of the school or in any of the event of the school.* And it really happened; she cared about my opinion and what I had to say. And they made the girls sign a uniform contract at the beginning of the year. She didn’t only care for what I thought, and for me as a teacher, but she also showed that she cared for the girls and their parents. She understood why parents sent their kids to this school.

**Sub Theme 1d: The hard worker.** Born out of the question that asked participant to, “Describe an event where you experienced “good” leadership,” one of the most prominent themes to transpire was that of the hard working principal who was a team player, and who reassured teachers, as Umm Hassan described, “we’re in this together.” She recalled a recent event where members of the administration did not only offer their assistance at the start of the school year, but also “stepped up to the plate” as teachers prepared their classrooms “during those first days back.” She described, 

You know, the staff and the principal and the vice principal were very, very open to just coming in and helping us out whenever. Like they were, they're very, very hard working. As much as they expected the teachers to work hard, they worked extra hard. I mean they were and, and I think that's part of the reason why as teachers we didn't complain a lot, because they worked really, really hard you know. And you could see it. Umm Hassan elaborated with a story that exemplified this trait, as she retold her experience with her direct line supervisor, with whom she had previously not interacted. She set the scene for the conversation; it was the beginning of the school year, and this would be her first experience as a
boys’ homeroom teacher for elementary aged students, previously having only taught in the girls’ high school section, she described,

You know he [the vice principal] would um, help me get the boys in line. He gave me very good tips with organizing my classroom material. Because prior to this, I had been with high school girls you know and they were really neat and tidy. I had a smaller class then. So I really appreciated that, the administration at this school, they are really not trying to make things harder for you. Like I feel like they really definitely want to help you, and support you, and they work hard to make sure you are happy and well looked after.

She augmented her description of the vice principal’s willingness to help, to work hard, and offer his assistance in asserting,

His office was right next door to my class and for the short time that I was there this year, honestly he would come in, in a very unobtrusive way at least three to of four times a week, just to kind of pop his head in, offer to help out.

Umm Omar shared a similar perception of effective leadership through her experiences in Islamic schools, where she recalled a leader who was never scared of “getting his hands dirty,” always “present and willing to help.” The most profound point that Umm Omar made regarding this principal, after describing his strict and steadfast adherence to the example set by Prophet Muhammad was, “you know because he really lives what he preaches. He follows the values and Islamic, you know, traditions and teachings in his life. This is why he was so strong and truthful.” Here, Umm Omar was overwhelmed with emotion and as she cleared her throat she reconfirmed, “if he expected teachers to work hard, then he worked even harder. He worked
hard for students who were not able to pay their tuition, and he worked hard to keep them in the school.”

Furthermore, Teresa stated concisely that the secret to success of the most effective leaders was, “hard work, that’s all!” When asked to elaborate, Teresa gave examples of school leaders in the past that had shown little to no inclination to help out, or to work beyond the school day. Conversely, the principal who she spoke of most fondly, and with great admiration, had demonstrated her tendency to work hard and “go the extra mile” by staying later after school, helping to organize school wide events, and by stepping in to assist teachers who were “in a tough situation” with students, or their parents.

Later, Umm Hassan recalled a principal at one of her schools highlighting the positive aspect of his leadership style, and based her perception of his efficacy on the fact that he himself was an educator, and had been educated in teaching and pedagogy as well as classroom management and methodology:

He was one of my favorites; he was very sweet. But the number one thing that I appreciated about him; he was a teacher himself for many years you know and he is educated in that. Another one of the things that I appreciated was that we were a very small staff and he was very hands on and offered practical advice and lots of help.

**Sub-Theme 1e: An organized leader is a prepared leader.** Teresa valued this trait perhaps more prominently than the others and reiterated how her own leadership experience influenced this. Through the course of the interview, Teresa mentioned the word “organized” eight times and “prepared” four times. Her tone became very intense when she spoke about this issue, sharing a story of her most recent interaction with a principal that demonstrated these traits. She described the reasons for her success as, “Being very organized before anything, she
always has enough backup like in terms of substitutes that can cover for classes when teachers are not able to come to school. I have never seen her panic or be unprepared.” When continuing her discussion of leadership efficacy, Teresa went on to describe,

Well first of all, to be very prepared in your field, in whatever it is that you're going to be leading, or to be a leader in, is very important. And she [her most recent principal] was very well qualified and had lots of experience dealing with many tasks. She had a sense of what organization was. She knew that if she were not organized then running a school would not be possible. But, she wasn’t a demon, she believed that to be organized meant that she would have delegate tasks and everyone should be entrusted to do their part. She wasn’t how do I say… a control freak.

Teresa could not emphasize enough the importance of being prepared during a sudden teacher absence; she asserted that in a previous school she had experienced unprepared and disorganized leadership who did not have contingency protocols in place “to help avoid situations of confusion if teachers called out.” Teresa continued, “being organized, knowing the school system, and most importantly if you are going to be following a specific district as a private, Islamic school, follow the that district without making up your own rules when you feel like it, and without telling anyone.” This was a salient issue; Teresa reiterated that following the protocol of an established public school district would help the school to be prepared and organized in the sense that “everybody will be on the same page and know what to expect when it comes to policies on snow days and student absenteeism.”

Additionally, Umm Omar’s perception of what it meant to be a leader was formed in her earliest childhood days. She described how her father’s career as a Military Officer is what enabled her to develop a gold standard for what it meant to be “a great leader.” She fondly
described how “organized, well prepared and punctual” he was; a trait that she described was not nearly as prevalently, exhibited by Islamic school leaders that she had worked for.

Umm Hassan’s experience with leadership yielded some mixed feelings regarding organizational skills in Islamic institutes; she described the “flippancy” exhibited by past Islamic school leaders with whom she had interacted,

I get the impression with a few of the Islamic schools I've worked in, that the administration is kind of lenient. Just sort of making things up as they go along, and so there is a lack of organization and for the staff that translates into a lack of transparency and a lack of consistency.

Continuing on, Umm Hassan contrasted this experience with what she regarded “exemplar leadership,” exhibited through the ability to maintain “excellent communication and community engagement,” by way of the school website that was “organized and very well maintained” at her most recent school. She elaborated this by stating that the school board had been wise in hiring personnel who were “prepared and experienced in IT” to the extent that the school would project an air of professionalism. This, she went on to say, “increased the trust that parents had” because organization, to her, was translated as transparency which in turn created trust.

**Sub-Theme 1f: A knowledgeable leader is a professional leader.** Umm Fatima raised some striking points when discussing the importance of an effective leader being knowledgeable in his/her field. It became apparent that mention of this caused a heightened sense of emotion; she prefaced her story with the following, “My idea of someone who would be a good principal would be someone who would be able to teach an elementary classroom.” Umm Fatima went on to describe the specifics of her experience with a school principal that she recently interacted
with, who demonstrated a “lack of awareness.” She explained that while the principal was educated, “he had no, well, he had no elementary experience at all, and he had been a university professor.” Her tone became incredulous as she continued,

A principal is someone you could go to for advice or something and I knew that he had really no idea…that there was not a lot of knowledge about, you know, the needs of children and I just, had no, I had no trust that this person was going to be a good principal…he was a, I think, a physicist or something and taught physics at the university.

Umm Fatima described how she had expressed this concern through her actions and was faced with “some hostility” as a result.

This trend was continued when Umm Hassan was presented with the opportunity to share her experiences. She spoke of school leadership from the perspective of the school board members who she argued undermined the principals despite their level of expertise and credentialing. She explained, “It doesn’t matter how good the principals are because they often at the behest of the school board members who provide the money to the school, and essentially pay their salary…they have to do as they’re told.” She proceeded to elaborate how each of the area’s private, Islamic schools were controlled by “a board of directors that is, how can I put this politely, you rarely will find an educator on the board, because they’re not the big donor, you know!” At this point she chuckled and continued in a tone that exhibited significant disapproval,

So you know, you have like an overabundance of doctors in varying specialties you know, engineers or whatever. You’ve got a big disconnect between the people who have the most authority and their skill set, you know they don’t have the right skill set but they have the authority and then teachers just have to, just sort of do as they’re told, and I
think this is where you see a lot of this data driven type of emphasis or complication with what constitutes a good education or measures of a good education.

Teresa shared very similar observations of leaders who she felt should be appointed, as such she explained, that a leader needed to be “knowledgeable about whatever she or he is leading in so they can understand their staff and students.” Furthermore, she continued that this subject specific knowledge needed to be augmented by “the knowledge of leadership” and “knowing how to deal with people.” This was offset when Umm Hassan offered examples of how her immediate leadership, with whom she and her counterparts collaborated and worked with on a daily basis, were adept to trends in the educational arena, as well as building an effective network to develop community relations through communication; she stated,

They [the principals] have a lot of young educated people working for them, and they have people who work there who are very, very good at web design, at graphic design, at um… you know like IT so they have very advanced assistance in terms of you know social media. They use social media very effectively, you know Twitter and Facebook. Their website is very, very organized with frequent updates. They frequently add video, so it's very professionally done. And, and they've made some very strategic partnerships with University of Maryland and with Prince George’s County Public Schools. This wouldn’t be possible if they were not knowledgeable in the right area.

Using this example as her backdrop, Umm Hassan went on to describe the pleasure expressed by stakeholders on the whole of the way in which business was conducted within and amongst the immediate key components of the school.

Umm Hassan also referred to a principal who she admired, and who while being “an older gentleman of Arab origin” was very effective, primarily because he had been a teacher for
the whole of his career; “he was very knowledgeable and highly educated in the field.” Despite earning his doctorate several years prior, he was not arrogant, and his passion for elementary education rang true through the advice that he offered the teachers, and the pillars of integrity and consistency upon which the school was built. Sadly, Umm Hassan described how the principal was unable to remain at the school beyond his first year; the board of directors consistently disagreed with his ethos and the situation became too intense for him to tolerate.

Theme 2 – The Ineffectual Leader

“Okay! Again a no brainer! Principals that are not supportive of their staff are useless. You know that... that do not have their staff members’ back.” – Umm Hassan

A second and very prominent theme that developed by virtue of their stories and experiences was that of “the ineffectual leader.” Participants raced to highlight these points, over the positive aspects of leadership, in Islamic school even though this was not necessarily asked as a direct question through the course of the interview. Several sub-themes developed that highlighted traits and behaviors that they had experienced.

Sub-Theme 2a: Nepotism: Who’s your daddy? Umm Omar indicated her disapproval at the “unfortunate injustice” that resulted from nepotism. She related a story where a colleague who was also “a very close friend of the principal” resigned from her position “more than just once.” She continued, “This lady was a good teacher, to be fair,” but also seemed as though she was instigating a reaction from the principal. Rather than accepting her resignation and hiring other “more qualified candidates… this lady got back to her position due to their friendship.”

This was not an isolated incident of nepotism; rather, Umm Hassan described four such incidences through the course of her interview. Specifically, she made reference to one particular school that she had recently worked at where the administration was largely from the Middle East and Arabian Peninsula. She asserted, “Islamic schools unfortunately have a pretty
high degree of nepotism… And really in Islamic institutions in general, you know. Um, and I think that, that's probably a carryover from the leadership styles in Muslim majority countries.” She continued to explain, that the governing style of the school was “largely autocratic” allowing nepotism to occur and perpetuate, such that it was “hidden in plain sight.” Umm Omar’s experience with nepotism had caused her to draw the same conclusion, “it’s what they do in their country.”

Umm Hassan was able to share an experience from the school she referenced, and stated that one of her reasons for her short-lived stint at this institute was because it was clear that the chances for “career advancement were limited,” she explained,

What I didn't like was um, as part of their rules or whatever, the head of the school always had to be of a specific nationality, regardless of their qualifications, or whatever. They always had to be a Saudi national. The principals had to be Saudi nationals, and so when I was working there it was never something that I saw as long-term because I knew that you know I would only be able to um, to advance so far, you know?

Furthermore, Umm Hassan went on to describe her observations as a board member on a local Islamic school board, and said with much distaste and a despondent tone,

I still don’t understand some of the decision-making that goes on um, and we have a long way to go, really in our community. I mean we only see some of the rationale for why people are hired or why certain programs are not adopted, or not retained. We just kind of wonder like, what is the reasoning behind it all, you know? The extent of nepotism is so great, and so what we're seeing is a lot of Muslim teachers going into the public school system.
The saliency of this point was again highlighted when Umm Hassan reported, in response to the question: *How do your understandings and perceptions of leadership relate to school climate?*

I mean just straight out… Hiring people because you’re somebody's cousin, somebody's daughter, or somebody’s son, and are not qualified! That's the thing, that’s what makes things bitter. If you're qualified it's one thing. But if you are not qualified and oftentimes that's how nepotism works and so that's another one. Because it's very demoralizing for the rest of the staff, and they end up feeling rejected.

Teresa’s response was in alignment with Umm Hassan’s wherein she reported “I feel that some people are hired to do a job they were really never trained to do” decisions that are based solely on a few factors like, who the candidate happens to be, the person in leadership that they happen to know, or how wealthy they are. She argued, “Just like they hire their own friends, by way of their friends, or by the good contacts that they have.” At this point Teresa cheekily raised her eyebrows indicating the sinister intentions that the leaders had. Moreover, she expressed an extended level of concern about an incidence of employee preference citing an event that she personally experienced; she felt that she had been treated unfairly, in effect, this altered her perception of the leadership style in the school, and this affected her performance thereafter. She recalled,

*When the leadership prefers a certain employee over another…When leadership decides that, *OK, you're no longer going to have this [job] title because a friend is coming to school, and she needs a job,* and so they replace you. They give you another [job] title, which you were not hired for, which you've never done in your life. Then she [the leader] gives it to her friend. I think that's a terrible thing any leader can do.*
**Sub-Theme 2b: The misleading leader.** Most participants in this study recalled events in which leaders had exhibited some form of deception, whether in the case of Umm Fatima where the leader she referred to “lacked clarity,” or Teresa who recalled an event in which teachers and staff at her school had been misled into believing that they were “not accountable for filing taxes” on the income generated at their non-American run school. Inevitably this led to sudden shifts in morale that affected “how well teachers worked.”

Umm Fatima recalled how she had been misled into believing that she had the approval of her principal, she described, “I went from being a favorite to a, you know, outcast or something,” she laughed ironically as she continued,

I’m not sure what it was, no one ever told me, but it got to the point where that she, the principal, actually came in and tried to tell me how to teach, you know, as if, you know, I hadn’t been doing it for 20 years. I’m not sure what her point was, but that incident made me wonder, like, *what’s happening here*, you know?

Teresa shared her experience; she recalled “In this particular school where I was working, they don't take taxes from your salary… so they [the staff and faculty] got into a lot of trouble, and leadership did nothing about it… but it was their fault, because they told us we didn’t have to file.” Teresa concluded, “I know some people that until now, they're paying on taxes owed to the IRS.” Following this event, Teresa was able to recollect the backlash that resulted; there was considerable friction between the leaders, one of whom rallied the staff and faculty and encouraged them to “build a union.” She stated that he was “deceiving the staff into believing their rights would be represented.” She reported incredulously how staff members had been misguided into believing that they would gain free and fair representation from a lawyer pertaining to the matter of unpaid taxes.
He was deceiving us because he said; all you guys have to do is to join. Let's make a union so that we can get out of this trouble that we're in with the taxes and with the IRS. They made you sign that document, and they did not tell you that you would have to pay the lawyer that they hired. That was not a good thing. We did not know how much this lawyer was going to charge.

Umm Omar shared her experience in a similar way to Teresa, wherein she described, “We had a very, very, very mean, very, very tough principal and everybody was, you know, scared just to be around her.” She went onto to retell a story in which she had been coerced by the principal into signing a paper without the knowledge of its contents. Umm Omar recalled her shock when she realized what had happened,

One time, she [the principal] came and she asked us to sign a paper, and she didn't show us what was the paper was. Like I think she put her hand on or in a way that we couldn't read. Afterwards, I knew that it was like, a warning and it's going to be in my file. IN MY FILE!

She continued her story by describing how disheartened and despondent she had become, she was being asked to admit to accusations of which she had no knowledge, and like Umm Fatima of which she had not been previously informed.

Sub-Theme 2c: Feeling betrayed by an untrustworthy leader. Working in an Islamic school epitomized Teresa’s affirmation of her love for Islam. Her experience has yielded many mixed feelings, and among them the feeling of being betrayed by a principal who she felt was incompetent to carry out the duties associated with their role. She explained, as she continued to speak about the issues surrounding the tax dilemma at her school,
I witnessed the same leadership in easier situations not performing the way they were supposed to. How could something as big as this be resolved by those same leaders?! I don't think they had the capacity to do so. They lied to us, to begin with and then denied responsibility…Oh gosh! It was a very, very tense time. Everybody was so stressed. Everybody was angry. They felt they've been betrayed. No one was ready to trust the leaders.

Through her recollection of an event in a different capacity, Umm Hassan was able to provide examples of how leadership had lost the trust of their staff when she described the actions of leaders as “taking sides” and behavior that indicated they “were not weighing things in a way that's just.” Umm Hassan described how through interaction with parents and students, the leadership would “rarely have our back” and would unequivocally support the students and their parents “without giving an opportunity to the teachers to defend their position.” She described that teachers felt they had been “letdown” or “betrayed” and that teachers would avoid sharing information with their leaders for fear that they “could not be trusted with its sensitive nature.” She went on to elaborate her point, “It's that kind of manipulative, abusive lines of reasoning that you see a lot of times and it's couched as leadership because things just fall into place despite the lack of trust.”

Another point that resonated through the interviews was the lack of transparency that leaders exhibited which led to the teachers doubting the integrity of their leaders. Umm Hassan described how trust was hampered as one school’s leaders failed to divulge information regarding the future of the school, and its ability to sustain itself. She described how, on more than one occasion, “our paychecks bounced” and how the silence of speculation was deafening; to this effect she explained, “There was a lot of insecurity; we didn't know what was happening.
There was a lot of speculation. And again, it was because they [the leadership], they just weren't straight with us.” She described them as possessing a level of “paternalistic perception” and further developed this when she explained, “they acted like we didn't need to know, and like the future and long term stability of the school was not our problem and we couldn’t handle the information or that they didn’t trust us.” Feelings of mistrust disseminated through the staff that year, and Umm Hassan describes how she “found a job at another, more established school.”

Umm Fatima’s account also demonstrated a lack of trust for specific leaders that she had worked for, her description elucidated her perception of an untrustworthy leader; she shed light on one such example,

We had a principal who was just always angry and you just never knew what would happen next. She [the principal] was very unpredictable, and people were on edge if just, if she walked in the room, you know, or even down the hall, because you never knew what she might say. This created mistrust and second-guessing on so many levels.

Umm Fatima continued to make sense of this concept when she recalled another leader who had shown a lack of respect for her position as a teacher; this further enhanced her perception of mistrust and betrayal. She recalled incredulously how her principal had entered her multiage classroom without acknowledging her presence and, “began speaking to the students who were all busy working on different activities,” Umm Fatima felt as though she had been disrespected and that any trust that the two had, had diminished almost instantly. She recollected,

And so, after ignoring my presence, he found it kind of difficult to get the children’s attention and then, even though they were all actively engaged in work, um, he came to
the conclusion that they were undisciplined and unruly and, and that was somehow due to my shortcomings as a teacher.

Sub-Theme 2d: Religious guilt. This was a theme that gradually resonated through the course of most interviews. As participants spoke about topic centering on unrealistic expectations presented to them, the overarching argument that developed spoke to the use of religious guilt from leaders to force teachers to comply. Teresa worked in a school where the faculty was relatively small comprising a twenty strong team. On several occasions, she was told that aside from her contractual duties, she would also have to substitute for teachers who were not present. Teresa explained, “During my lesson planning, that's when they pulled me out to substitute for teachers who were absent.” She went on to explain; “They would say you are doing this for the sake of God, for the kids.” Teresa confirmed that she felt as though she had been “strong-armed” into making a choice that she may have otherwise contested, had the fear of God not been brought into the situation. Similarly, she described a time when she involuntarily forced to make a decision pertaining to her teaching duties, she reported,

Well for example at another Islamic school that I worked at, I was hired to teach Pre-K. I was content about that, but then, the assistant principal… no, sorry, the principal called me in to the office a day before school started and said, Well, I need you to teach pre-K half day, and then high school students the other half of the day. And, that was odd because I thought how was I going to be teaching two different levels? For pre-kinder, I knew you must be there full-time all day. It was really, really hard. I told the principal, I said, this is hard! In other words, I was doing the job of two teachers. She told me that we were a small school and we were doing a service to the community and that I would have to agree, for the sake of the kids, fisabeelillah. She left me with no choice.
Umm Hassan’s observations and experiences of working in Islamic school enabled her to frame the justification of unreasonable demands on employees as a form of religious guilt. She confirmed,

And so a lot of times not just at any particular school, but at every Islamic organization I've worked at, the leadership would often use guilt you know, religious guilt to get their employees to work harder, they'll say you're doing this fisabeelillah, you're doing this for the sake of Allah. You're reward is with Allah, you know.

She continued, “So you'll feel bad for asking for what was just and what was fair,” and as she referenced an example of teachers begrudgingly attending school for an in-service session on Thanksgiving Day, she remarked how the administrator, who ironically was an African American convert to Islam, cautioned the staff:

His whole talk that morning was about why Muslims should not celebrate Thanksgiving, and for any of us feeling salty about being at work that day, we need to just suck it up [sic], you know. And he said how we would have to answer to Allah for our resentment. He was almost chastising us for having any kind of resentment, and used religious guilt to basically shut us up.

Sub-Theme 2e: Autocratic dictatorship. The ubiquitous nature of this theme resonated through discussion with the participants who, to varying degrees all confirmed that leadership in Islamic schools was at the very least “unlikely to change,” and at the most severe “operated like an autocratic dictatorship.” Set on the backdrop of discussing school climate, and the feelings of teachers in general, Umm Hassan confirmed, that members of the school board where she worked “… act in an advisory role, but they ultimately don't have any voting power. All decisions are ultimately made by one person.” She continued to explain
I think the way these schools operate is just indicative of a very autocratic, very authoritarian leadership style that you see in a lot of Muslim majority countries. And so that has trickled down into a lot of our institutions here, you know?

When asked pertaining to the relationship that faculty members had with their administration and their leaders, she described the facade that existed, “there is camaraderie but I think that camaraderie is sort of mediated by how willing the staff is able to accept you know, like a benevolent dictatorship, which is usually the leadership style that I've seen happen.” Umm Hassan elaborated her description of this leadership style by citing an example of the way in which the leadership in her school dealt with conflicts and differences:

You know, if you don't like what they're doing, or if you disagree with something as a staff member who has children there, you have very little recourse. Like they have an arbitration system BUT if there is something that you just fundamentally don't like, or if you disagree really, you end up leaving. You know there is not much room for debate.

Umm Fatima and Umm Omar both described, if only to a lesser degree, the level of autocracy in these schools, but Umm Omar did imply that members of leadership in her school had the expectation “that I should be happy to do work that is outside of my duty… if it is not my duty to do your personal work, why should I?” She also spoke of the fear that many teachers expressed towards the end of the school year, a fear of “upsetting the administration” and being punished by not getting a contract to work for the following year. Umm Omar retold a story where she was caught off guard and was ask to run an errand for the Director General of the school, and she agreed since her Department Head was also in the vicinity. She felt highly
uncomfortable and a few days later was able to raise her concern with the leader who had initially approached her, she recalled,

I thought *what am I doing? That's not my job to do that.* But, you know, the thing is that I am happy that I told her how I felt, *You shouldn't have even asked me to do that. But I thought of you as a sister.* So I think she will never ask again. You know, sometimes, you're like, *No, no, no bother. That was my pleasure. I'll do whatever you ask.* No! It wasn't my pleasure at all and I let her know.

Umm Omar described how she felt in response to the interaction with her autocratic leader; she described how steadfast she had been in speaking up for herself, “The only thing they will not do, I thought, is they won’t renew my contract, masha'Allah, and thank you so much. I'll find another job! That's it! I was not scared of them.”

Umm Fatima spoke about her relationship with a leader with whom she had disagreed, and the antagonism that resulted from his reaction to being, as he perceived it, insulted. She described their relationship thereafter; “it was very antagonistic because I had not supported him being principal, at the beginning, you know, so there was unpleasantness there as he sensed his authority being undermined.”

Teresa perceived the autocratic leadership model to be fully implemented in least two of her Islamic schools where she reported she was often told to fulfill duties that were beyond her professional capacity and area of specialty. She recalled that her interactions with leaders, in circumstances that required her to be “subservient,” were tense; she describes, “Well, the thing is that I was being…uh, what can I say? I was being… intimidated. I was asked to do things that honestly I was not hired to do. I was almost forced and I couldn’t say no because I didn’t want
to lose my job;” she went on to confirm that leaders at this school “didn’t ever step up and substitute if teachers were absent.”

**Theme 3 – Closed School Climate in Islamic Schools**

“She was often stressed out. I was stressed out. You know, we would commiserate about it together. You know because we were, we were both in the same situation and because working there was stressful” – Umm Hassan

School climate was prominent theme to develop throughout the interview; by and large the participants alluded to a poor school climate when responding to 90% of the questions asked; evidently this was a salient point for them. While they all spoke about poor school climate in varying capacities, only two sub-themes emerged. All of the participants spoke about how their experiences had led them to believing that there was a strong reciprocal relationship between a poor leadership and poor school climate. The other significant theme to emerge indicated that the participants believed that public school offered a “more lucrative and less stressful job” opportunity, as Umm Hassan shared.

**Sub-Theme 3a: Poor Leadership = Poor Climate.** While the information listed in Table 4b indicates that the participants’ shared information about poor school climate in tidbits throughout the interview, the unanimous correlation amongst their responses demonstrated that poor leadership was an indicator of poor school climate. For example, Umm Hassan described how school leaders in Islamic schools would often attempt to “replicate the practices of public schools” but,

They would have really high expectations of their teachers without the benefits… really, really high standards in terms of how many grades we were supposed to upload on a weekly basis. We would wonder how we were supposed to, you know, document what we were doing all the time if we had no time to do it!
She went onto conclude, that while leaders wanted to closely follow the model used in the public school districts, there was a missing link in Islamic schools and essentially it spoke to their lack of consistency, she explained,

We don't have the benefit of a teacher's union or 401K or a viable salary in Islamic schools, whereas when you're working in other environments where the salary is like ample; it wasn’t like other places that we could augment our salary after work with a second job because we were so bogged down with work.

Umm Omar expressed her disapproval at the actions of one of the leaders she worked for as he created a sense of instability and doubt amongst the staff. As a result of his actions, and his ultimate attempt to create an uprising against the board of directors of the school (namely the Saudi Arabian Ambassador, the Saudi Arabian Minister for Education and members of the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Washington DC) she stated the mood and vibe at school was “very negative.” She described the plight of the staff as,

I don't know why he [the leader] wanted to do that. Did he have any conflict with other leaders in the school that he wanted attack them through the staff? I don't know whose benefit was it to do this, but it just really confused people about it, and it became unpleasant to be at school.

Umm Fatima described a situation in which the leadership of her school made a decision to shift their pedagogical focus from conventional to Montessori. She described the series of events as,

Two Montessori teachers who were Muslim and both trained in primary and elementary were invited to come on board, and it created some friction between the people who were already working there and the, the people who were coming in. The old teachers had no
idea that the school would be changing to Montessori. So yeah, the leaders had disrespected the people who were already there; they got the feeling that they weren’t wanted and that the new teachers were better. This made for pretty poor climate.

Umm Fatima went on to report how she believed the situation should’ve been dealt with, and the underlying tone of her statement indicated her displeasure at the way in which leadership had reacted on impulse, she recalled, “what would’ve been crucial would be, you know, the leaders should have been prepared the others or the leaders should’ve mentioned or discussed it or gotten to a point where we all agreed.”

Teresa’s persistence in driving home the point that professionalism was a key indicator of a successful leader echoed through her interview, she asserted,

I love my Muslim sisters and brothers, but leadership has not been the greatest in several of the schools I’ve worked in, and this effects the way everyone, you know the teachers, parents, and kids, feels about the school. For example, by being unorganized, these leaders show people that they don’t care and so everyone stops caring.

Umm Omar agreed that a positive climate stemmed from having a leadership team that was “assertive, organized and awake to what was going on,” she expounded her perception by providing the following example,

You will not be creative as a teacher if you have the feeling of being watched by an administrator or monitored 24/7. I think anybody, even if you're excellent in your job, even if you are a good person, and you're doing your work, if you think that you're being monitored, this takes away a your confidence and you will not feel good. You will feel negative and your students will also notice that you are not feeling good about your work.
Umm Fatima had similar observations to Umm Omar, she described, “Whenever the principal was not interfering, trying to micromanage, and was trying to give me the impression that there was respect and trust, that made for a good school climate.” This was contrasted when she reported, “when I felt that I was being watched and I was somehow going to be called on, that someone was looking for mistakes so they could catch me, then I felt, of course it’s uncomfortable and I didn’t really enjoy that climate very much.” Umm Fatima confirmed that the latter description was commonplace in many Islamic schools, wherein she stated, and “the issues were always relating to administration when there was a problem at school.” Teresa augmented this theme when she said, “eventually, I felt like I was burning out and not being very productive because in my mind if anything went wrong, I could not count on the leadership of that school, because the leadership was not professional enough” she added, “my morale was low and things started to go wrong because I wasn’t focused. I wasn’t happy.”

**Sub-Theme 3b: Public school is a better option.** Umm Hassan and Teresa were both adamant about highlighting their comparisons between public schools and Islamic schools. In essence, both agreed that Public schools offered qualified teachers a setting that was “accepting,” “organized,” and “professional.” Teresa shared,

I encountered good leadership when I worked in public schools; and honestly, I really never had to talk to no principal or no assistant principal, because everything is done so professionally in public schools. I hate to say this but it's the truth. There was a mutual respect that we had for one another that even if we had problems we would talk them out professionally.

Teresa added, “I think the best leader or leaders that I've had have been in public schools, honestly… they were fair and that’s when teachers feel better about themselves.”
Umm Hassan referenced her friend and colleague who she described as holding a “dual Master’s degree in Special-Ed.” She explained, “My friend is credentialed in Maryland,” further, she went on to highlight how the friend had always seen “Islamic school as something short-term.” Further, Umm Hassan described how “she [the friend] had always planned to go to the public schools.” She spoke fondly of the candid nature of their relationship, and how they would often discuss “career and financial goals” and aspirations, and described her friend as saying, “look I got student loans, and this is an expensive area to live.” Umm Hassan summed up the reason for high teacher turnover in Islamic schools by proclaiming, “They're [Islamic schools] not able to offer the incentives that a public schools can.”

Umm Hassan went on to elaborate the reasons why teachers were turning to Maryland’s school districts a more favorable and long-term option, and one where they are not subjected to “covert racism” that she described as “rampant, rampant in our community.” She continued, “I mean I, I think our kids and teachers at Islamic school are probably some of the most diverse and have the most opportunities to really, really learn from each other and we dropped the ball on that, a lot.” To clarify, Umm Hassan provided the following example,

Um, so it can be, it can be something as benign as like okay we're gonna have International Day and we're going to have flags for like you know Afghanistan, Jordan, Syria, Pakistan and then a section for Africa, you know. And then you notice that they’re like totally leaving out America for like African-Americans. Where do they fit in? What if they aren’t from Egypt or Sudan? It makes me mad.

And as a result of this “covert racism” Umm Hassan explained,

What we're seeing is a lot of Muslim teachers going into the public school and working in public school. I can speak for my friends who work in Montgomery County and Prince
George County in Maryland, they have reported zero, zero instances of being
discriminated against. If anything, they feel very supported, very welcomed because both
of those school districts have relatively large population. And you know Prince George
County and Montgomery demographically are very diverse, politically very liberal, and
so they appreciate having that diversity.

Umm Hassan concluded,

Prince George’s County actually has several Muslim principals, you know. And so, I
think that Islamic schools are kind of at a cross roads, you know, to that degree because
they want to increase the quality of their teachers, which is wonderful but they're not able
to offer the incentives that a public schools can.

Theme 4 – Open School Climate in Islamic Schools

“Well, I guess, you know, when people feel like they have a voice and their opinions are valued
and they have a say, such that they feel empowered somehow and they feel motivated to do...to
make suggestions or, you know, they come into school feeling like they have ownership of the
school in some ways. So I think that helps create a, a positive atmosphere where everyone’s
working towards a, a, you know, the same goal.” – Umm Fatima

The fourth and final theme to emerge from the data spoke to an Open School Climate.
The reasons for this perceived openness in climate varied; the impetus was also different across
the data ranging from “if you are positive, everything will be positive,” as Umm Omar reflected,
to “Well, good leadership will mean there is a positive climate,” as Teresa perceived. Sub-
Themes were developed accordingly.

Sub-Theme 4a: Positive You, Positive Climate! Umm Omar’s feelings regarding a
teachers’ inherent positivity dictating their perception of school climate resonated significantly
throughout the course of her interview. She beamed with pride as she spoke of interactions with
leaders who were considered “mean, very, very mean and tough,” and how her positivity made
her feel like “I am in control and I am happy, and I do a good job, and that’s what matters.”

Umm Omar elaborated this point, she looked calm and confident as she spoke,

I think when you are following the right path, people fear you. I don't know why. I'm just a teacher. But I am happy and feel positive about my work. Wherever I am, I have a certain, I don't want to say power, but there is that ... because you, you don't do something wrong, you are very strong and that’s why people’s negativity cannot bring you down with them.

Umm Omar summarized,

You know, for me, Al-ḥamdu lillah, all thanks to Allah, that whenever I go to school, I'm so happy. You know, I'm happy when I walk in the hallways. Uh, you know, I feel I'm really blessed to work there. Um, you know, just being there with the kids...I love teaching. You know, just having a teaching career is, uh... it has been my dream all my life.

Umm Omar expressed her displeasure, and ultimate relief, when she recollected how she encountered a colleague who had attempted to make the climate uneasy, the colleague ultimately left the school,

I had only one colleague who used to be very negative, but I don't have her anymore in the school. Al-ḥamdu lillah! Because, you know, negative people are very... very... They try to put you down by their negativity every single day. But they can’t change the whole school, just like I can’t change the whole school.

Umm Omar’s overall positive demeanor was unflinching, and she rationalized how her positive environment resulted from her own actions; avoiding negativity, and staying in her classroom, which seemed to be her sanctuary,
Most of the time, I sit by myself in my little room, and I work. If I need people, I go to them. But I feel that it is a plus most of the time not to be around people and talk and talk and waste your time. And listen to them complain.

Ultimately she summed up her feelings in a very poignant and profound way,

You know, Allah doesn't put in your shoulder more than what you can bear. So, for me, I try my best to set a good example to influence my students to do their best. But, you know, you can't change the whole school. I make my own climate, and I am happy, and my kids and parents are happy.

Umm Hassan described her perception of this concept from a different trajectory, she spoke of how one of her colleagues had said something quite profound that resonated with and that she continues to adhere to. She set the backdrop as the beginning of the school year, the staff were having their initial orientation meeting; “feelings were mixed… there was talk of wanting a few more days off” and as the speaker approached the microphone, he began, she described, in a frank and “no-nonsense” tone,

For the new staff members, you're going to hear, you're going hear some negativity, there'll be complaining about what happened before, what people don't like. So, he kind of informed everyone in that first day, like basically, reassess your intention as a teacher.

He basically asked us to frame our job as a teacher in a way of like saying look, you signed a contract, and you're here. So you might as well make the best of it!

And so, explained Umm Hassan, that this “stuck” with her, and she was able to readjust the way she framed her position and the role she played in creating a positive environment for herself, because, as she chortled, “it all begins with how you feel and how you project that.”
This theme arose in Umm Fatima’s interview when she spoke about a negative interaction that she had experienced with a school principal. She chuckled, “I hope that I was able to maintain my professionalism no matter what.” She recollected that while the interaction had made her feel “demoralized” she was able to put that aside; the impact that she was having on the children was the main impetus for this, the fact that “the students and parents were so grateful” helped her to “put things in perspective,” she summed up,

You know, the joy that you had, once you’re in the classroom with the children, it’s [sic] kind of different. You know, you’re kind of in your own, world and, and things are fine. That makes for a good climate, I think. And that’s all I had to do, to make me happy to go to work in the morning.

Teresa’s comment, “I think that being positive no matter where it is that you work, or what you do, is very important,” demonstrated her belief that a positive climate could only be achieved if a person had the inherent desire to seek the positive in a situation, and to monopolize it.

**Sub-Theme 4b: The Principal as the galvanizer.** When asked to recollect events and share stories of when school climate had been impacted significantly, without hesitation most of the participants rushed to events of which the principal had been the impetus and from which resulted a very positive climate and a sense of unity. Umm Omar spoke delightedly,

I can't find one particular time you know, there are so many. Our principals encourage us to organize events…like the Qur’anic Recitation competition; it is truly amazing. And everybody who participates gets something. But, you know, it’s not about the winners because the parents come, they’re proud of their kids. They're so happy, full of joy. Our principal brings everyone together.
Along the same lines, Teresa described a time that stood out to her, she recalled the “Mock Hajj Ceremony” that had been organized as a “community wide event” by “our principal” who “invited everyone.” She explained,

> From grades pre-k all the way to high school, everyone participated. We asked the parents to join us. As a matter of fact, she [the principal] even asked the community. They were welcome to come and witness, and everybody joined in. We shared a meal after the ceremony. Everybody was so united, I feel. Of course, this is an Islamic school. I think that Islamic schools should be united, and it helps when your leader brings everyone together.

Umm Hassan described the leadership model in her school, referring to it is as the “Shura Model” explaining “it is a leadership style that's supposed to be consultative you know.” The head of the school or “the Amir has a group of people that discuss something and come to a decision together.” Umm Hassan went on to explain

> One of the pros of that leadership style is that it yields a very cohesive community. You know, they've been able to move ahead and get a lot done because they have a very tight you know, transparent leadership style that is open and honest with its stakeholders. And people have confidence in their decisions.

She concluded, the principals and vice principals always made themselves available and present, “they were visible, and they frequently interacted with kids, the families and stuff like that. So that was nice. And that brought everyone together.”

**Sub-Theme 4c: Creating a welcoming environment.** Umm Hassan started her discussion of positive school climate by introducing the idea of “the way the desks are arranged,” she spoke of her most recent K12 school and explained how at the elementary level “the desks
are organized and arranged in ways that are not necessarily military rows, you know,” and how a
culture of “collaboration” and “group work” was born out of this. Additionally, she emitted a
sense of pride when she explained, “I saw a lot of group work, kids sat in groups, and there were
a lot of really beautiful classrooms.” She expounded her point later when she said, “in terms of
describing the physical environment, an Islamic school in Maryland really stands out in my
memory. I think that they do a really good job of displaying student achievement,” she
continued,

So when you walk in it's, it's a very…It's very beautiful when you walk down the halls…
especially there is one hall where they have like the kindergarten through third grade, and
it's lined with lots of student work; very colorful art projects, you know bulletin boards
that they rotate on a monthly basis, at least. So that was really nice.

Umm Omar’s described how the welcoming environment at her school lent itself to the
overall “Islamic behavior” of students and teachers alike, who would not shy away from
“greeting guests and parents at events” which set the scene for a welcoming atmosphere. She
referred to the school as, “safe environment for the teachers and staff to work in.” Teresa’s
observations augmented this train of thought. She asserted, “The kids are very happy in an
environment where everybody greets each other, says good morning, good afternoon, have a
good weekend or have a good week,” and to this effect Umm Hassan agreed, “It's a very kind
of…collegial… you know, family-like environment.” She went to discuss how her personal
situation has been quite challenging of late, and how the school’s environment provided her with
a sense of warmth and belonging,

There were many days when I would be upset and depressed on my way to work because
of my personal situation. Sometimes you know, I would be like crying on my way to
work because of things, and I would get to school and we would start the morning assembly and I would feel better. You know because it was that warmth of the environment.

Conclusion

This chapter addressed the salient themes that emerged through the process of data analysis. In order to gain a better understanding of the research question: *How do the experiences of female K12 Islamic school educators shape their perceptions of the impact of school leadership on school climate?* The interview protocol that was developed asked participants to answer a series of thought provoking questions, and sub-questions; these questions aimed to trigger a thought process in the minds of the participants, by way of which they would share thoughts, feelings, and stories pertaining to their experiences in Islamic schools. Four female educators who worked in the Washington DC metro area’s Islamic schools were interviewed; they were encouraged to augment their responses with any information they felt relevant, even if they thought that it may not be directly related to the question. This enriched the data, and provided a fertile ground from which four major themes sprouted namely *The Effective Leader; The Ineffective Leader; Closed School Climate; and Open School Climate.*

The richness of the data collected led to the blossoming of a total of 16 subthemes. A subtheme was only considered salient if two or more participants raising the issue in a contextual setting that related to their Islamic school experience. Double hermeneutics was employed as a method throughout the data collection and analysis processes; this enabled the participants to make sense of their experiences, while the researcher made sense of what the participants said in a context with which they were familiar and able to relate.
The following chapter will discuss the significance of the findings from the study; participant experiences will be framed culturally, and results will discussed in relation the theoretical framework as well as the literature introduced in chapters one and two respectively. This chapter will also discuss implications for future research; the assumptions developed through the process of data analysis as well limitations of the study, and will conclude with the researcher presenting a personal reflection.
Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings

Introduction

Emerging from the rubble and ash of the catastrophic events of September 11th, 2001 were a generation of Americans who had gained, through the conscience-shocking brutality of those behind the heinous attack, a skewed awareness of Islam (O'Sullivan, 2001). Resulting from feelings of rejection and discrimination, Muslim parents were conflicted as they witnessed events such as the Chapel Hill Shootings, in North Carolina, take place in their neighborhoods and community mosques. K12 full time Islamic schools, which by 2011 had proliferated through North America, were born out of such confusion. Having been established during a time of heightened emotion, and haste these schools inevitably faced some degree of erraticism ranging from a lack of funding to high teacher turnover, from inadequately trained leadership to high student attrition rates, and from low student achievement to leadership practices that have left teachers feeling insecure. And, 13 years on, they continue to struggle. Having spent the majority of my teaching career in three of Washington DC metro’s most successful Islamic schools; my experiences provide a rich backdrop, which formed the impetus for this study.

Summary of the Problem

The goal of this interpretative phenomenological analysis was to address the following research question: How do the experiences of female K12 Islamic school educators shape their perceptions of the impact of school leadership on school climate? Through this research Muslim female K12 Islamic school teachers were given the opportunity to: share their experiences with regards to leadership and school climate; to examine how the two tenets meet at a juncture; as well as to examine the resulting interdependency of one tenet on the other. Through the interview process, the participants were afforded the chance to share how they made sense of
their experiences. Data was collected in semi-structured interviews that were conducted privately, and at the requested location of the participants. The data that was derived from the interviews was analyzed using the following theoretical frameworks: school climate theory, servant-leadership theory, and Islamic leadership theory. The theoretical proposition that school leadership and school climate have a reciprocal effect upon one another, and that Islamic moral characteristics inevitably play into the way Islamic schools should be led, meant that these theories would be used to untangle participant responses to shed light on, and to draw conclusions about, the way in which teachers made sense and rationalized the way Islamic schools are led and the school climate that results from the leadership practices. Since the interview was semi structured, participants were welcomed to discuss issues that they felt would help support their stories, and that were pertinent in describing their lived experiences. The interview design lent itself to empowering the participants to share beyond what was being asked.

In this chapter, I will apply the method double hermeneutics (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013) to make sense of the experiences described in Chapter 4. Through this process, I will contextualize the way in which participants made sense of their experiences working in the Washington, DC metro area’s full time K12 Islamic schools. On examining the themes that emerge, and how they make sense to me in light of my personal journey, assumptions will be developed where necessary. Furthermore, the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 1 and the literature review presented in Chapter 2 will be utilized in order to develop implications for future research, and recommendations for best practice.
Emerging Themes

Through the process of data analysis and coding, four salient themes were generated that uncovered how K12 Islamic school teachers make sense of the leadership styles they encounter, and how these perceptions further impact the lens through which school climate is observed. These themes were:

1. The effective leader
2. The ineffective leader
3. Closed school climate
4. Open school climate

Summary of the Themes

As indicated above, four main themes emerged from the data that was gathered during the in-depth semi structured interviews, which focused on understanding the perceptions and beliefs of the participants. These insights were authentically captured through the words of the participants, and while there was a significant level of interconnectedness of the themes, the most prominent amongst them was the prevalence of ineffective leadership. This became a central issue based on the intensity of emotion with which the participants addressed the issue, the words that they used, and the stories that they were able to share. In order to facilitate their dialogue on ineffective leadership, participants were probed to address their perceptions of what it meant to an effective leader; this then became a second theme. As they progressed through their interviews most participants were able to share stories that exemplified either an “open” or “closed school climate.” As they saw it, an effective leader was one who operated on the basis of mutual respect and trust and this translated as an open climate. Hence two further themes
developed. Stemming from these themes were the most salient points that recurred throughout the interviews, and these became sub-themes.

As a rule of thumb a sub-theme was considered significant if two or more participants raised the issue, or had experienced the phenomenon. The themes that resulted were meaningful to the extent that evidence of their existence in a priori research was unapparent.

**The effective leader.** Every participant in the study eagerly shared her perceptions of what it meant to be an effective leader. Initially, two of the participants used themselves as a standard against which to measure efficacy rather than their Islamic school leaders; Umm Omar cited her father as the role model responsible for instilling the concepts of discipline and organization. Furthermore, she spoke of herself as leader; she elaborated, she was a leader amongst her students. Her tone lent itself to indicating that the level of accountability towards her students, which she held on her own shoulders, was unequivocal. To clarify, she expressed that good leadership started with being a good person; specifically she used the words like “be honest,” “do your work,” “be punctual,” and “try your best.” As a result she believed that a leader would inevitably be “good to you,” and she continued, “I have to, to the best of my knowledge, deliver the curriculum. This is the amanah, the trust, that the parents put on my shoulders to teach their kids, I am leader.”

Umm Omar was convinced that if you “live what you preach” success follows, and so she cited the example of one of the principals with whom she had worked, she referred to him as “he lived today, but we felt like he's [sic] living at the time of the Prophet,” she went on to describe, “He was like a role model for us. I loved, you know, working with him,” and “whoever works for him now is a blessed person, Masha 'Allah.”
Teresa used her personal experience in retail management to gauge her understanding of effective leadership; her emphasis was on “organization” and “professionalism,” she was also adamant about a leader showing “consistency and fairness.”

Umm Hassan’s experience was slightly different; her work in Islamic schools had enabled her to develop an understanding of what it meant to be an effective leader. She was able to cite several examples of when leaders had exhibited traits that demonstrated they were conscientious, “They were very, very hard working. As much as they expected the teachers to work hard, they worked extra hard.”

Umm Fatima’s description of an effective leader stemmed from “what a good leader should not do,” most significantly she described good leadership as someone who “listen to teachers’ concerns” and addresses them, additionally she spoke of how a leader needed to exhibit a sense of awareness and consideration for their teachers in the event that they wished to implement changes; here she described “if you would like to see changes you openly discuss it with the teachers, and get their feedback on how best to achieve those changes.” So, Umm Fatima believed that transparency and good communication as well as trust were key components in leading an organization effectively.

Overall, the participants shared stories and experiences that enabled to make sense of the concept of effective leadership, and as result the following sub-themes emerged: The indigenous Muslim; Umm Omar, Teresa, and Umm Hassan all agreed that while they “loved” their “Muslim brothers and sisters” that a leader who had, at the very least, been raised and educated in the United States was more adept to understanding the needs of their stakeholders. Essentially, these leaders were thought to be attuned to developments in educational research, and were able to relate to their teachers. A principal who was a problem-solver was also seen as effective, and
most participants were able to recall at least one story, or experience, in which they had worked with an Islamic school leader who had proactively worked to “iron out the kinks” in the day-to-day operation of their building.

Furthermore, three participants cited examples and shared stories of how leaders in their experience had demonstrated their assertiveness towards the needs of their teachers. This developed a sub-theme of “The caretaker,” wherein participants used words and phrases like “I was impressed at the way she took notice of my concern,” as well as, “the leaders were cognizant of the way they spoke, in terms of their manners,” and “She showed me that she cared.” Teresa raised a very poignant point here, she asserted, “They [the leaders] were so professional, but then they were also so human. They had a very strong human side, and that showed that they cared for us.”

Further emanating from this umbrella theme, there also emerged, two additional and equally salient ideas, “the hard worker” and “an organized leader is a prepared leader” which both appeared to be significant offshoots. The former was raised by three of the four participants. At times it seemed as though this theme emerged after the participants spoke of the leaders in a less desirable way, and therefore, this represented a way to justify their words leaving them feeling less guilty. This assumption was built from the words and tones that were used, and the reoccurrence of the mention of “hard working.” For example, after having highlighted an observation such as “they would walk in to our classrooms unannounced,” the participants would offset this action by justifying it as “he was very helpful.”

Another indicator of effective leadership that materialized through the words and stories of the participants was that of the importance of knowledge. Umm Fatima spoke passionately about how she didn’t agree with the selection of a principal who she believed “had no elementary
experience at all... he had been a university professor... I had no trust that this person was going
to be a good principal.” Umm Hassan supported this point when she described one of the few
things she appreciated about one of her principals was, “a teacher himself for many years,” she
elaborated, “he is educated in that and so he understood our challenges.”

The ineffectual leader. Analysis of the transcripts yielded four sub-themes stemming
from this prominent idea; the level of emotion expressed when sharing thoughts and stories of
the “ineffectual leader” ranged from cynically stating, “what else do you expect?” to being
mildly annoyed. A culturally relevant idea that was prevalent through the interviews was that of
nepotism; three out of four of the participants believed that this method of candidate selection
had “trickled down from Muslim countries” and was being implemented here in the USA.
Furthermore, each of the participants used words and phrases like “unfair,” “not right,” and “not
qualified to do the job,” to demonstrate their frustration.

Further analysis of the data yielded two very closely related themes, “the misleading
leader” and “feeling betrayed by an untrustworthy leader.” Here, participant tone became rife
with annoyance. All four participants were able to share stories describing how trust had
diminished because of underhanded behavior displayed by their school leader. Umm Omar
described how incredulous she was when a past principal had demanded that she sign a paper
with no knowledge of its content; similarly, Teresa felt that the leaders in her school had not
been honest when hiring staff, “they said we didn’t have to file taxes because this was not an
American school.” Umm Fatima, remained amazed at the way in which her leader, several years
prior, had given her the impression that she was fulfilling her duties exceptionally, until a sudden
shift in attitude towards her, for which she still remains unaware today, “I went from being a
favorite to an outcast,” she reminisced. She recalls being offended, “I’m not sure why she [the
leader] hadn’t said anything before.” Umm Hassan described how, through interaction with parents and students, the leadership would “rarely have our back” and would unequivocally support the students and their parents “without giving an opportunity to the teachers to defend their position.”

Religious guilt was another factor that gradually emerged through the course of data analysis. Three out of four participants defined “religious guilt” as being the unrealistic expectations placed on teachers under the guise of it being “our Islamic duty.” Words and phrases like, “you will have to answer to Allah,” “this is for the sake of Allah,” “I felt strong-armed,” and “fisabeelillah,” illustrated the way in which unreasonable demands at school were often couched as a teacher’s religious duty.

Closely intertwined with this theme emerged the notion of the “autocratic dictatorship;” to one degree or another, all participants unanimously confirmed that Islamic school leadership operated on the premise of “it’s my way or the highway.” It should be noted at this point that the leadership in this context referred not only to the principals and vice-principals, but extended to the board of directors. Umm Hassan articulated, “it doesn’t matter how qualified a principal was, how dynamic he or she was as leader, they were often at the behest of the board of directors.” All participants spoke about the fear that teachers expressed towards the end of the school year, “like children summing up whether they had been naughty-or-nice.” Mature, qualified, and rational teachers would quiver with fear that they had upset the status-quo and would be at “risk of not getting a contract” for the following school year as Umm Omar divulged. Teresa described how she had, on more than one occasion, been required to fulfill duties beyond those laid out in her contract, and when she raised the issue with the principal she was told, “We are a small school, you have to do it, and if you are not happy you can leave.”
Closed school climate. School climate, particularly a negative climate, was a very salient point; participants alluded to it in response to 90% of the questions asked. As a result two sub-themes resulted, one suggested that a poor climate is as a result of poor leadership, and the other demonstrated the inclination of Islamic school teachers to turn their back, and take their knowledge, skill, and expertise to public schools. All four participants were able to relate to the first sub-theme, using words and phrases like, “it was our leader who created the confusion;” “by being unorganized these leaders show people that they don’t care and so everyone stops caring;” and “micromanaging and interfering.”

On the other hand, only Umm Hassan and Teresa were able to share experiences pertaining to the second trending theme in this category, and their expressions ranged from, “Everything is done so professionally in public schools. I hate to say this but it's the truth;” to “Islamic school is something very short-term” for highly qualified teachers. Moreover, Umm Hassan shared that the “covert racism” that she believed was “rampant” in Islamic schools was not evident in the Maryland’s multicultural school districts where she claimed, “Prince George’s County actually has several Muslim principals,” illustrating the diversity and acceptance of Muslims of all backgrounds. Additionally she concluded, “Islamic schools want to increase the quality of their teachers, which is wonderful but they’re not able to offer the incentives that a public schools can.”

Open school climate. Participants in the study were able to relate to an open or positive school climate based on several factors, the three most prominent of which were, “positive you, positive climate!” Also, “the principal as the galvanizer,” and lastly, “creating a welcoming environment.” All of these themes emerged through the course of the interview when phrases and words such as, “the principal was a team player,” “I am in control and happy,” “I feel
positive about my work,” “You're here. So you might as well make the best of it!” “The leadership style was consultative,” as well as “beautiful classrooms,” “safe environment,” and “warmth” were stated. There was definite uplift in the teachers’ tones as they spoke about a positive climate, a proverbial spring in their step appeared when they described a principal who brought the community and stakeholders together, and when they described the feeling of being safe and “part of a family.” Most interestingly, the participants considered themselves accountable for creating an open climate before placing the responsibility on any other key figure. Participants alluded to their level of introspection and references to Allah were made significantly.

While a little unusual this perception is not altogether surprising; as part of their core training through the acquisition of mandatory knowledge, Muslims are required to follow the examples presented to them in the Qur’an and the Sunnah. To bolster the understand of their belief, Muslims refer to a hadeeth narrated by Abû Hurairah, a close companion of the Prophet, who is reported to have said, “The most perfect believer, in respect of faith, is he who is best of them in manners” (Ahmad, 2011, p. 143). This hadeeth indicates that one of the core tenets of Islamic ideology to believe that positivity stems from one’s own behavior and attitude towards others.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Theoretical Frameworks

To better understand and navigate the tapestry of data three theories, namely school climate theory, servant leadership theory, and Islamic leadership theory were used as a lens through which perceptions, experiences, and understandings could be framed.

Islamic leadership theory. Kriger and Seng (2005) assert the role and attendant responsibility of leadership in Islam is not to be chased after as an ambition. Rather, the process
of attaining a leadership role involves the ability to improve the status quo to the benefit of all members of the organization (Beekun & Badawi, 1999). As Elsegeini (2005) posits, it is the inherent responsibility of Islamic school leaders to empower others, project a clear image of the organization’s mission and vision, and model the way for stakeholders, whilst concurrently supporting, motivating and encouraging followers.

With regards to the participants in the study, evidence suggests that leadership in Islamic schools lacked consistency; the threads of incongruence, intertwined within the data, dominated the experiences shared. While the participants were able to offer isolated examples of effective leadership, by and large, the focus was on the top-heavy governance of schools.

That being said, three participants shared experiences of leaders in their settings that had been effective, and in essence shared many of the traits that are laid out in Islamic leadership theory. These leaders possessed the inherent desire to want to listen, to help, and to be a part of the team; problem solving for these leaders was commonplace, and establishing a “family-like environment,” as one termed it, was part of the protocol. Reference here is specifically made to the “indigenous leader;” the principal, who has at the very least, received the majority of their education locally, and at the very best, was raised in America. The marked similarity between the traits of the indigenous leader, and the leadership traits which are Islamically prescribed, demonstrated that leaders who had not been raised in a democratic setting were not accustom to leading amongst their stakeholders. While the assumption may be sweeping, it is important to highlight the autocratic leadership style that is practiced in the majority of Islamic countries, a notion that diverges from the tenets of Islamic leadership theory. Aabed (2006) asserts the most pressing problem for Islamic schools is that they lack competent leadership. Fattah (2009) further argues that the skewed perceptions held by Muslims in America regarding leadership, are
what hamper the success of Islamic organizations, specifically since leaders are unable to transfer the tenets of Islam in a Western setting. Siddiqui (2002) bolsters this argument through her observation that the top-down leadership approach imported from the Islamic world has clashed with a more team-oriented and horizontal approach that is prevalent amongst many of the teachers who have been raised and educated in North America.

**School climate theory.** For more than a century the educational community has been interested in the effects of school climate, or a school’s environment and atmosphere, on student learning (Freiberg, 1999). Studying this phenomenon is imperative since even in the 21st century, where school is largely dependent on advances in technology, it still remains “the primary vehicle for a youth’s transition into adult society,” (Freiberg, 1999, p. 2). Born from the ideas of Arthur Perry’s 1908 *esprit de corps* philosophy, school climate saw a reemergence in the 1960s when Halpin and Croft studied the influence of a leader’s behavior on organizational climate; the focus of their study were four elementary schools. Their analysis yielded eight dimensions of school climate, that were divided into two groups, four referencing the characteristics of the faculty, while the remaining four defined the behavior and characteristics of the leader (Black, 2010; Freiberg, 1999).

With reference to the participants in this study, school climate fell under two main themes: words and phrases that alluded to a closed climate, and those that referenced an open climate. Saliency regarding this issue was clear among the participants who referenced traits that indicated, according to their experiences, the climate in Islamic schools was, by and large, considered “closed.” Their experiences indicated that school climate was dictated largely, as Halpin and Croft (1963) suggested, by the attitudes, behavior traits, and actions of the leaders in the school. Participants agreed that while Islamic school leaders attempted to replicate the
standards set in public school districts, teachers were expected to work on a minimal salary with no benefits. In school climate theory, this example closely relates to the idea of “esprit” (Halpin & Croft, 1963) where morale develops from a sense that teachers feel their social needs are being met, and that they have a high level of task accomplishment. Teachers claimed how they were frequently required to take on responsibilities that were beyond their contractual duties, even if they were not qualified to do so. As result one participant dejectedly explained, “I was burning out and not productive.” Halpin and Croft (1963) described this as “hindrance;” wherein a teacher feels unnecessarily burdened, and strong-armed by their principals, to complete extra work.

Additionally, they described how major decisions would be made without mutual consultation, and how staff members would feel disconnected, referred to in school climate theory as “aloofness.” The fact that leaders were not trained adequately was another salient issue. This, claimed two of the participants, was the reason for a lack of professionalism and zero transparency resulting from “shady behavior;” “an unorganized school;” and “no one knew what to expect.” The feeling of being “watched 24/7” and was also a factor that spoke clearly to a closed climate, Halpin and Croft (1963) referred to this as “production emphasis;” one participant mentioned how her ideal school would be one where the leader who have “trust” and “not micromanage my classroom.”

When participants alluded to a positive school climate, they did so in reference to the tenet of “intimacy;” Halpin and Croft (1963) describe that teachers perceive intra-school relationships to be warm and friendly. Most of the participants did describe how Islamic schools provided them with a sense of belonging, and how they felt they were part of a family; how instrumental the leader was in creating this sense of security remains blurred. When one
participant described the actions of leadership in securing the purchase of land for the purpose of school expansion, this correlated well with the characteristic of “thrust” wherein a principal works to move the organization towards improvement (Halpin & Croft, 1963).

**Servant leadership theory.** Coined in the 1970s by Robert Greenleaf, servant leadership defines a philosophy that describes the leader as a servant, before all else. To this effect a servant leader governs from among the people rather than from above the people. Further, he identified ten characteristics that defined a servant leader as one who excels at - listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, and foresight, commitment to the growth of people, building community, and stewardship. Moreover, Black (2010) asserts, a servant leader empowers subordinates to feel competent enough to meet their own needs, equipping them with the skills and tools necessary to serve the organization and society as a whole. It is pertinent to make mention of the reoccurrence of servant leadership as a concept in the Qur’an and Sunnah, wherein Muslims are taught and guided to lead through service (Aabed, 2006). Moreover, Siddiqui (2002) posits the concept of servant-leader originated from the Islamic system, which promoted leaders as servants of their followers. Prophet Mohammad said, “The leader of the nation is their servant” (Daylami, 1997).

Data collected in the study reflected incongruence to the theory of servant leadership; that is, there was a clear distinction made on what should exist, and what actually exists. The experiences shared, demonstrated that while leaders attempt to establish a consultative model of leadership, wherein most participants reported some form of arbitration system, rarely were voices heard. Afar from demonstrating commitment to the growth of people, Islamic school leaders were reported to “micromanage 24/7;” additionally participants reported the lack of trust that leaders felt for their teachers. Hence, the commitment to empower teachers to gain in
professional competence was relatively nonexistent. Rather, participants shared stories of the lack of sympathy shown for personal issues that they were going through, Umm Hassan recollected a time when a group of colleagues requested that they be provided clean private space with an electrical socket in which they could pump breast milk for their infant children; incredulous, the female administrator reluctantly organized this, but seemed “put out.”

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature

A comprehensive review of literature was conducted prior to undertaking the research. While a significant gap in literature exists relating to how Muslim female K12 Islamic school teachers perceived, and made sense of, the effects of leadership on school climate, current research helped to bolster an understanding of the findings. As detailed in chapter two, this research relates to the relationship between school climate and leadership, Islamic leadership style (including literature detailing the moral character of Prophet Muhammad), and school climate in faith-based schools.

Islamic leadership. The Shura model has been detailed throughout Islamic literature as the archetype for leadership. The practice of shura in Islam is a long-standing tradition; it was executed over 1400 years ago during the era of Prophet Muhammad when heads of lineages would meet to discuss matters. Through collaboration and consultation they would reach a consensus, in a time-honored manner. This practice was first laid out in the Qur’an when Muslims were instructed, “And those who answer the call of their Lord and establish prayer, and who conduct their affairs through consultation,” (42:38), and was practiced by the Prophet whose nature it was to seek and accept advice (Beekun & Badawi, 1999; Beekun, 2012; Mir, 2010). Data collected throughout the study indicated that while Islamic school leaders seemed to feel
inclined towards setting up a system of shura, in reality the picture was somewhat bleaker according to the perceptions of the teachers interviewed.

Umm Hassan spoke regarding the consultative nature of the leadership style practiced at her school; however, she hastily added how ultimate decision-making power was in the hands of one leader; she referred to him as the “Amir.” She added, while there was a system of arbitration, and an instituted method by which to submit feedback through electronic surveys provided on Google Docs, there was very little recourse if a staff member or parent fundamentally disagreed with something in the school.

Throughout her interview, Teresa was also noted as alluding to a system entrenched in double standards; she recollected a time when she had approached her school principal regarding unreasonable demands that were made of her; she was told that she had no choice and that the matter was “not up for debate.” She added the “the principal never did anything extra, like covering for absent teachers, and that was not good leadership.”

Umm Fatima recalled a time when a sudden decision to change her school’s philosophical underpinning, from delivering the curriculum in a conventional manner to implementing the Montessori methodology, had been made by the leader alone; therefore a lack of consultation led to uproar among the teachers. Sadly, the decision had already been made and the teachers who would deliver the newly instituted curriculum had been employed.

Moreover, Umm Omar spoke in a tone demonstrating bravado about several incidences when she had spoken up insubordinately to the astonishment of her leader. She described that her confidence stemmed from an understanding that she was “accountable to Allah alone,” and that while double standards, and a sense of entitlement was commonplace for leaders in Muslim
countries, she refused to comply with the same injustice and self-assumed sense of entitlement, for fear of losing her job.

**School climate.** Howard, et al. (1987) define a school’s climate as its atmosphere for learning. The feelings that people have about the school, and whether they believe that the atmosphere is optimal for learning, are the most prominent indicators of school climate. Therefore, a positive climate sets the backdrop for a school setting where both faculty and students express the willingness and desire to spend a large portion of their day; fundamentally, it is a good place to be (Howard, Howell, & Brainard, 1987). More specifically, and in relation to the findings in this study, Haynes et al. (1997) report, school climate is defined by the quality and consistency of the interpersonal interactions between the key stakeholders at the school which are believed to influence a child’s cognitive, psychological, and social development. Therefore, while a child’s socioeconomic status, ethnic minority classification, domestic value system, and level of poverty are thought to be the main determinants of school efficacy (of which student achievement is a prominent factor), studies indicate that there is a stronger congruence between school climate and school efficacy (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1977; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Cook, Murphy, & Hunt, 2000; Creemers & Reezigt, 1999; Lehr & Christenson, 2002) thereby lifting the focus off these factors, and essentially ruling them out as key players in the school efficacy debate (Astor, Guerra, & Van Acker, 2009; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2013).

The findings of this study demonstrated a similarity to the arguments posed in the literature; specifically that a positive climate is defined by consistency of the interpersonal interactions between the key stakeholders. An in depth review, and analysis, of the findings indicate that while most teachers were able to recall at least one example of positive school
climate, it was frequently countered by a negative experience. Teresa, Umm Fatima, and Umm Hassan all mentioned the term “lack of transparency,” indicating that communication was not consistent among the faculty and administration, if it existed at all. While there were isolated examples of effective communication, these did not negate the point highlighted in literature, hence its saliency.

**The relationship between Islamic leadership and school climate.** A review of literature indicated the strength and nature of the relationship between school climate and leadership. Hall and George (1999) assert, similar to the teacher’s responsibility to maintain a healthy classroom climate, the principal plays a significant role in establishing school-wide positivity. In regards to this study, the most pertinent point raised by Hall and George (1999), that was also prevent throughout the data collected, was that a teacher’s perception and interpretation of the actions of the principal leads to the construction of school culture; however, this only somewhat governs the resultant culture in each classroom. The theme, “positive you, positive climate” was entrenched through the data collected in this study. Frequently, the negativity stemming from the perceived inability of the leader to meet the needs of their teachers was offset by the spoken words of the teachers that demonstrated their ownership over climate. The participants refused to allow a leader’s attitude or actions to dictate their efficacy or their mindset. This demonstrated resilience and strength. Three teachers confirmed that doing their job “fisabeelillah” for the sake of Allah superseded a principal’s desire to create or instigate an atmosphere of animosity.

**Study Limitations**

As discussed in Chapter Three, there were numerous study limitations. Of most prominence was the lack of transferability of the study. Since Islamic schools are few in number
compared to other faith based schools in the United States, this study will only be relevant to a small practitioner population base, and due to its cultural references it may not be transferable across the board.

Given that Islamic schools are in their relative infancy and that currently, first generation immigrants to the country largely operate them, it should be considered that as they evolve change and progress are inevitable, and the picture painted in this study may appear bleaker and less representative over time.

The fact that the study was conducted in the same geographic area may be considered a limitation since all of the participants had at some point worked in the same three or four schools, and thus their experiences spoke to the same leaders, or leaders of the same mind-set. Moreover, participants volunteered to be part of the research.

Two out of the four participants expressed a preference to conduct the interview via a telephone conversation. In these cases, while detection in tonal change was possible, it was difficult to predict or assume changes in body language or social cues.

While IPA methodology indicates the use of a small sample size for a study, as was the case in this research synthesis, the number of teachers chosen was relatively small compared to the total number of teachers working in Islamic schools in the USA, today.

**Implications**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of female K12 Islamic school teachers, and to discover their perceptions regarding leadership in their schools, and its effect on school climate. It is hoped that this study provides the impetus for dialogue in the Islamic school community. The findings may make a contribution towards augmenting current research on leadership and climate in faith-based schools; moreover it may help teachers and
leaders in Islamic schools better understand their own predicament. Furthermore, it is hoped that it serves as a stimulus for leader introspection and as tool for teachers who face similar challenges as described by the participants in the study. In effect, by understanding the way that female K12 Islamic school teachers make sense of leadership, and its effects on school climate, we may be able to foster an environment in which leaders enter the field culturally prepared, and academically aware, of their role in an American setting. This research could help the effort in establishing, pre-service and in-service, training protocols and credentialing requirements for current leaders and prospective candidates. In effect, it would enable those entering leadership positions to have the cultural awareness necessary to operate effectively.

**Scholarly significance.** The apparent gap in literature concerning Islamic schools provided the platform for this research. Among the studies that exist, the prevalence of observation versus actual field research is overwhelming. Moreover, where field research has been conducted, it generally pertains to understanding the role of leadership from the view of the leader (Aabed, 2006; Elsegeini, 2005) rather than delving into the richness of teacher perceptions through a process of double hermeneutics. Research demonstrates that when teachers are engaged in dialogue, for instance, where a culture of open communication between leaders and teachers is fostered, school climate improves (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). Furthermore, Richard Ingersoll (2003, p. 211) describes teachers as, “caught in the middle…between the contradictory demands and needs of their superordinates – their principals, and their subordinates – their students.” This highlights the pivotal yet complicated role that teachers play, and the fact their voice has seldom been heard in studies on Islamic schools, leaves a gaping hole.

The IPA approach adopted in this study empowered teachers to share their voice and allowed for a dialogue that provided a rich understanding of how they make sense of leadership
and school climate in their settings. While a plethora of research exists illustrating the perceptions held by teachers of the effects of leadership on organizational climate in public school settings (Awan & Mahmood, 2010; Black, 2010; Dinham, Cairney, Craigie, & Wilson, 1995; Gunbayi, 2007; Hall & George, 1999) Islamic schools have not been addressed. By virtue of its hermeneutic nature, the IPA approach employed here allowed for the emergence of themes that were intertwined between the participant responses, which moreover, spoke to my own personal experiences. As they shared authentic lived experiences in their own unique words I was able to make sense of how they made sense of the phenomenon.

**Practitioner Significance – An action plan.** Due in part to their relative infancy, there is a great deal of work to be done in Islamic schools. Findings from this study indicated that leadership is a pivotal factor in determining the overall success of the school, specifically in relation to school climate. In light of experiences shared, and the themes that developed, the following action plan has been suggested; a plan that will take into consideration the contributions of teachers, to reassess the role of leaders in Islamic schools. While it is easy to negatively portray leaders, their unique predicament in Islamic schools (where they may take on several roles such as Chairperson of the Board of Directors, Parent Liaison, and teacher) must be taken into consideration when tackling the challenges that are faced by the leaders. It goes without saying that Islamic schools are in need of reform, and policy makers must prioritize the enhancement of school leadership making it sustainable. While this is a hefty task, the findings from this research can serve as the catalyst for reform; I suggest several mechanisms, which taken together can improve school leadership practice, and improve school climate. As such these mechanisms can be placed under the following categories:
Redefining the role of school leaders. Based on the findings of research and the personal accounts of teachers in this study, the predominance of bureaucratic management systems has led to feelings of exclusion from decision making processes as well as the feeling of subordination. Findings indicate that teachers expressed preference to what can be termed a “head teacher,” a leader who is the first among his or her equals. This seems relatively straightforward. In theory, leaders should have the autonomy to make decisions that will support teaching and learning, but because Islamic schools are often funded by a board of directors who comprise the most significant financial donors, the degree to which leaders can make decision is often very ambiguous.

To this effect, the first stage in reform would be to redefine the role of the head teacher; what does he or she have the discretion to make final decisions regarding? Based on this, board directors and donors would need to be fully supportive of decisions made in the school, and without undermining the head teacher, would have the role of intervening during a dispute only after a thorough investigation of the dispute has been carried out.

Additionally, the role of the head teacher should be built around fulfillment of the following goals:

- The implementation of an assessment system – based on the demographic of the school, which assessment battery or style would be the most appropriate?

- The strategic use of resources – head teachers should be given the autonomy to examine the availability and distribution of resources; if intervention after school classes are an absolute necessity, and the resources are available, the head teacher should be given the ability to make that decision.
• Furthermore, the evaluation of faculty members should be given primarily to the head teachers who will conference with teachers pre- and post-observation allowing them to understand what is expected of them and how they will be assessed.

• Additionally, the collaboration with community partners should comprise the role of the head teacher, who should be visible throughout the school, during school events, and at community gatherings where their support of student achievement will be evident.

The parameters of these responsibilities should be based on an explicit mandate focusing on school wide improvement developed through collaboration with the Board of Directors and the senior administration at the school.

*Skill set development through continuing professional development.* One of the most salient points to arise in the findings indicated that Islamic school leaders were ill prepared for their role as a principal. While participants indicated that most principals came from a teaching background, many did not. It is unreasonable and unrealistic to expect that they possessed the skill set necessary to deal with the broadened roles of a leader which are not only limited to teaching and learning, but also extend beyond this to managing resources, goal setting and measurement, and the important role of community engagement. In consideration of these issues, and the findings of this study, a protocol for continued leadership development, from mandatory pre-service training through the institution of induction programs to quarterly in-services, and state licensure endorsement, would be necessary. A basic requirement would be to ensure that prospective head teachers were holders of fully endorsed state license. Following this would be a sequential progression of training that would cater to the changing and developing needs of the
leader through their career. Mentoring and coaching would have to become routine providing expertise, and assistance, especially catered to fit the stage of the leader’s evolving career. Likewise, professional learning communities, and opportunities for networking through attendance at conferences would be made available enabling exposure to the experiential knowledge of other leaders.

Islamic schools are decentralized institutions that are not mandated by the state to adhere to regulations, thus the responsibility of developing leadership is not held by a regional government or organization. Consequently, this may make it challenging to establish coherent approaches to leadership development across the board. However, working in collaboration with organizations such as the Islamic Schools League of America (ISLA), and Islamic Teacher Ed, it may be possible to establish regulations that promote consistency. This could be as simple as requiring leadership credentials (attained from accredited institutes) at progressive points in their career, or as complicated as designing a cohesive provision for Islamic school leaders that caters to their specific needs in light of their student populations and cultural constraints.

Making a career in school leadership attractive. While it takes little effort to make observations about the shortcomings of leaders in Islamic schools, as demonstrated through this study, findings have brought to light an issue that is salient in school districts throughout the world (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008) that is that, the number of candidates who are applying for leadership positions are declining. This could be one of the possible causes of inadequate leadership as reported in the study; for example, the low ranging salaries coupled with high levels of responsibility make this seem like an unappealing profession for candidates. In order to retain talented and committed leaders who have the energy to propel Islamic schools towards
success, adequate remuneration must be offered. Periodic bonuses that align with increased responsibilities or the meeting of targets must be more than hearsay.

Additionally, the recruitment process needs to become streamlined; a list of competencies should be prepared that takes into account current responsibilities, as well as those that are projected for the school as it evolves. Furthermore, carefully analyzing the leadership capacity of a candidate is important. By addressing the extent to which leadership opportunities were availed as a teacher, will be a key factor in determining the leadership capacity of a candidate.

A recommendation to Islamic school governing bodies would be to establish opportunities for teachers who show the initiative and capability to take on leadership roles. The benefit of this will be two fold-- not only will the morale of the teachers increase, it will also provide the school with a bank of likely candidates when future opportunities and openings arise. To create a sense of loyalty at the school, where teachers express the preference to seek hierarchical promotion within the building, it is important that in-service training be provided; proactively engaging teachers in continued pursuance of their education is paramount. Likewise, to ensure the retention of skilled leaders, Islamic schools must work together, within umbrella organizations such as ISLA, to plan and provide the opportunities for leaders to embrace new roles, enabling them to diversify their knowledge. This will also enable the dissemination of skills and expertise amongst leaders who may be struggling with challenges that are specific to Islamic schools.

Double Hermeneutic Analysis

The uniqueness of the IPA methodology enables the researcher to interpret the participants' understanding of their experience relating to the phenomenon being studied. In this case, I was able to relate my experiences as an Islamic school educator to the way the participant
teachers understood leadership styles and their resultant effects on school climate in Islamic schools. My personal journey allowed me to humanize the experiences of the participants as I recalled similar situations; the use of the reflexive journal was invaluable in this case.

On a cold and blustery November evening, thirteen years ago, my life was about to change forever. As I waited with sweaty palms behind a queue of scores of people, the murmur of “Islamist” echoed through the sterile hall. I was called to the counter by a voice that bellowed, “Next! I said, next!” I readjusted and tightened my hijab and nervously answered the questions the immigration and customs officer asked. Sternly, he looked at me and asked why I had come to the United States. I answered fearfully, my mouth was as dry as a rock, and as I fumbled with a piece of paper inside my coat pocket, I recall him saying with a slight smile but devoid of any eye contact, “Welcome to the United States, Ms. Uhh….” I sensed he wouldn’t say “Khalid” – that was the name of one of the Al-Qaida masterminds behind the monstrous terror attacks, so he stuttered in his thick Hispanic accent, “Welcome, S-So-Sofia.” This marked beginning of my journey of what would become my American Dream.

I arrived amidst a nation rife with heartache agonizing over the loss of so many innocent lives in the heinous attacks of 9/11, and unintentionally I became a victim of harassment, discrimination, and verbal abuse. So began my quest to make an impact on the Muslim youth in the DC Metropolitan Area. I dedicated 12 years of my service to Islamic schools. My objective was to develop well rounded, balanced, and tolerant students who were open minded rather than bigoted and bitter. I wanted to expose them to literature that was diverse, and I wanted them to embrace their education as a form of liberation from stereotypes. My aspirations were lofty, and as I learned slowly, they were unrealistic.
It was a rocky road by all standards. The threat of school closures stemming from a lack of financial stability was commonplace, fear of attacks from anti-Muslim lobbyists were no longer considered a surprise, bounced paychecks were all too frequent, high teacher turnover, and low student retention, were dilemmas faced by the schools each year. Parent complaints were abundant, and there was either a lack of academic rigor, or a lack of attention to Islamic practices. Nepotism was all too frequent, grade inflation, and unfair disciplinary treatment of certain students was witnessed. Students who struggled academically because of (in certain situations) severe special needs that had gone unaddressed (due to issues surrounding cultural taboo) were placed in ESOL classes where teachers were not qualified to attend to their needs. The combined effect of these factors manifested themselves in students who were ill equipped, as they left these institutes, in search of opportunities in the surrounding public school districts.

My rudimentary observations yielded that, teachers who were not adequately credentialed were teaching students using the same methods that they had been taught by, and taking into consideration that many of these educators were first generation immigrants, they were attempting to transfer practices from their native countries. As my research into this problem evolved through the course of my doctoral studies, where I was given the academic freedom and empowerment to analyze these schools, I realized that accountability for this epidemic lay primarily in the hands of the leaders.

Recognizing the gap in peer-reviewed literature relating to Islamic schools, I was compelled to study the topic further. Where research did exist (e.g. Aabed, 2006; Elsegeini, 2005), it focused on the role that leaders played in these schools, and furthermore, from the perspective of the leaders themselves. Experiential knowledge led me to understand that the
majority of faculty positions held in Islamic schools were by females, who had largely been ignored in literature.

This IPA study used a semi-structured interviewing technique in which guiding questions were used to understand how the participants made sense of their experiences with leadership, and how, in turn, they perceived leadership practices to impact school climate. Through a double hermeneutic process I was able to make sense of their perceptions through contextualizing them in relation to my own lived experiences.

The resultant data was rich, and has set the backdrop for further research. The most pertinent point that emerged was that teachers need a voice; research on effective school organization indicates the “collaboration, which is one manifestation of teacher voice, is an important component of school quality,” (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014, p. 6).

Concluding Remarks

The results from this study indicate a few salient and noteworthy points. First, the culture of nepotism in Islamic schools indicates that everyone may not always be treated equally. Next, teachers confirmed that their state of mind is what led to the positive climate that they experienced. Moreover, the teachers reported a lack of transparency between leaders and stakeholders, and a lack of cultural competency; furthermore, a deficiency in academic proficiency regarding policy and curriculum meant that leaders were ill prepared to deal with common issues. Participants also reported the common use of religious guilt; and most prominently, the implementation of a dictatorship under the guise of the Islamic shura ideology, which conversely promotes mutual consultation and honors the voice of all community members.
To this end, I intend to share the findings of this study with organizations like the Islamic Schools League of America (ISLA), a national organization that works to promote quality Islamic K-12 education through research, networking, sharing knowledge, and nurturing leadership. The findings will also be disseminated to Islamic Teacher Ed - the online professional development movement for Islamic schoolteachers, school leaders, and Muslim educators at large. I would welcome the opportunity to share this information with school leaders, and school board members, as they design protocol for hiring criteria.

**Areas for Further Research**

While this research has provided the impetus for dialogue in the Islamic school community, it also paves the way for further research that has the potential to continue the exploration for meaning into the perceptions held by teachers of leadership and school climate. To this effect, it would be interesting to investigate the perceptions of male teachers, who hold only a fraction of the faculty positions in these schools, and remain largely overlooked. Additionally, it may be interesting to examine the perceptions, and acceptance, of leadership norms in Islamic schools between first generation immigrant teachers, and those who are indigenous to the United States.

To increase the breadth of this study, it would be reasonable to investigate teachers in other states across the country that are densely populated with Muslims; for example, Dearborn, Michigan and Minneapolis, Minnesota, both of which have very well established Muslim Arab and Somali community respectively. As such, these community members may be accustom to following traditionally implemented leadership practices from the Middle-East and Africa. In this case, it would be interesting to understand whether teachers in the Washington, DC metro
area were particularly sensitive to issues that may well be accepted as commonplace by Muslims elsewhere.

A study that investigates the perceptions of teachers and principals at the same school would also enrich the understandings that are currently held. Moreover, the findings from such research would bolster conclusions that are currently available in scholarly literature. As such, studies could address the following questions: how do the teachers perceive the assertiveness, and attention, provided by their leaders? Likewise how assertive do the principals in the same school perceive themselves to be?

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this IPA study was to investigate and understand the lived experiences of four female K12 Islamic school teachers relating to how their perceptions of school leadership helped them to make sense of its effect on school climate. Four major themes emerged as I employed a double hermeneutic method to make sense of the experiences that the participants had of leadership and climate. To begin, the participants were able to use their lived experiences to define an effective leader; they used words like hard work, professional, listener, and indigenous to elaborate their understandings. Additionally, the participants were able to identify with ineffectual leadership; words like nepotism and covert racism were used to make sense of the undesirable mark that leadership had left on them. Furthermore, participants were able to recall several stories, and experiences, that indicated their understanding of a closed school climate; specifically they saw congruence between poor leadership style and poor climate. Moreover participant responses indicating that teachers left their jobs at Islamic schools for lucrative options in the public school system, was also indicative of a poor school climate. Lastly, participants were able to convey that a positive school climate was one where they felt
valued and appreciated; they added that a positive mindset was the most important factor in creating a positive school climate.

In sum, this research reached a demographic that has otherwise been overlooked in literature; it empowered Muslim women to speak openly and confidently about their experiences and thus, sets the foundation for dialogue and further investigation into the Islamic school infrastructure.
Bibliography


Ramirez, M. (1979, 9-October). *Cultural democracy and the multicultural personality: effective leadership for diverse society.* Oakes College University of California, Santa Cruz, CA.


Appendix A: Definition of Terms

*Ummah* - is the overarching concept used for wider Muslim community, operative beyond geopolitical bounds. The root word of *Ummah* is *umm*, which means ‘mother’ in Arabic (Ahmed, 1992). Commonly this term is used among Muslims to convey the fact that all Muslims the world over constitute one community (Shah, 2006).

The Holy *Qur’an* - is the central religious text of Islam; a revelation by God to Prophet Muhammad which remains intact and unchanged.

*Sunnah* - refers to the recorded (religious) practices of Prophet Muhammad; several reliable companions of the Prophet have been noted to narrate these traditions known specifically as Hadith, which form the basis of Shari’ah Law.

*Qudwah Hasanah* - A good example.

*Surah* - refers to a chapter in the Holy Qur’an.

*Khuluq* – an Arabic term used to describe character.

*Shura* - refers to the consultation with others or mutual consultation.

*Taqwa* - refers to the all-encompassing, inner consciousness of one’s duty, and awareness of one’s accountability towards Allah (Beekun & Badawi, Leadership an Islamic perspective, 1999).

*Seerah* - the Arabic term used for the various traditional Muslim biographies of Prophet Muhammad

*The Ka’bah* is the sacred House of God erected by Prophet Abraham, it is located in Makkah and its circumambulation, seven times, is one of the obligatory rights of the pilgrimage that Muslims are required to make at least once in their lifetime.

*Majlis* – Place of sitting, from the root word jalsa or to be seated.

*MashaAllah* - Arabic phrase that expresses appreciation, joy, praise or thankfulness to Allah for an event or person that was just mentioned.

*Fisabeelillah* – Arabic phrase that literally translated means for the cause of Allah.

*Al-hamdu lillah* – Arabic phrase that express gratitude to Allah

*Tazkiya An-Nafs* - Arabic phrase referring to an ideology focusing the purification of the self. This refers to the process of transforming the nafs (carnal self or desires) from its deplorable
state of ego-centrality through various spiritual stages towards the level of purity and submission to the will of Allah (Al-Muhajabah, 2001)

_Amanah_ – Fulfilling or upholding trusts.
Appendix B: Letter to Participants

Dear Islamic School Teacher,

As’salaamu ‘Alaykum. My name is Sofia Hussain, and I am a doctoral student from Northeastern University’s College of Professional Studies, earning a doctorate in Education with a specialization in Curriculum, Teaching, Learning and Leadership. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. As you know I have taught at three Islamic schools in the DC Metro area, most recently, the Islamic Saudi Academy. Currently, I am conducting a research study on the effect of leadership style on school climate. The goal of the study is to understand how K12 female Islamic schoolteachers describe their experiences with leadership, and how they perceive this to be related to school climate. Since there is very little data available that describes the experiences of teachers in American Islamic schools with leadership, it is unclear as to whether leadership style is perceived to have an effect on school climate.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you have taught in a DC Metro area Islamic school for at least two years, have maintained good standing, and are a female educator. As part of the study you will be asked a series of questions in an interview. I am seeking vivid and accurate portrayals of the meanings that these experiences hold for you. You will be asked to recall specific episodes, situations or events that you have experienced through your time at your area Islamic school. All participants in the study will be given the opportunity to review the findings of the study.

Should you choose to take part in this study, more information will be provided to you, and an informed consent form will need to be signed. Additionally, the interview should take between 60 and 75 minutes, and will take place at a mutually convenient time and place; a $15 Target gift card will be offered to you for your time.

I would like to reassure you that there are minimal risks associated with participation in this study; however, the expected benefits are numerous. Leaders may choose to alter their leadership style to impact school climate in alignment with the findings of the study.

Your choice and consent to participate in the study is completely optional; furthermore, you may wish to opt-out at any point. Your responses will be treated with utmost sensitivity and 100% confidentiality is guaranteed.

Should you choose to participate in the study, or have any further questions pertaining to the study you may contact the researcher Sofia Hussain at hussain.so@husky.neu.edu or 703.901.4538. Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Jazaki Allahu Khair,

Sofia T. Hussain
Doctoral Candidate, Northeastern University
Appendix C: Participation Informed Consent

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Northeastern University, Department: College of Professional Studies

Investigator Name: Principal Investigator: Dr. Kelly Conn, Student Researcher: Sofia T. Hussain

Title: Teacher Perceptions of Leadership Style in K12 Islamic Schools and their Effects on School Climate: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have successfully taught for at least two years as an Islamic School teacher. You have maintained good standing.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to gain a further understanding under the perceptions of school leadership styles held by hearing from K12 Islamic schools teachers, and the effects that leadership style are perceived to have on school climate based on the experiences of these teachers.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to meet with the researcher for approximately an hour to answer a series of questions pertaining to your experiences in K12 Islamic schools. This meeting will be conducted in a comfortable atmosphere and will be audio taped for the purpose of transcription.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

You will be interviewed at a time and place that is convenient to you; this can be anywhere from a coffee shop or your home. The interview will take about one hour.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

No; by participating in this study there are minimal risks involved. However, if you wish to stop the interview for any reason, let the researcher know and it will end immediately. You also have the ability to refuse to answer any questions during the interview.
Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study; however, the overall anticipated research benefit may help Islamic school leaders to better understand the perceptions held by teachers of their leadership style, and the perceived effects that this has on school climate. Therefore, leaders may choose to alter their leadership style to impact school climate in alignment with the findings of the study.

Who will see the information about me?
A pseudonym will be assigned to you before the interview. Your pseudonym will correspond to all of your responses, the transcript of your interview, your demographic information and the audio recording of your interview. All documentation, including the document that identifies your real name with your pseudonym will be placed in a secured and locked safe, and will only be accessible to the researcher.

All audio recordings will be destroyed after the interview has been transcribed. Until the end of research project, the demographic information and the interview transcriptions will be saved in a password protected file and will be destroyed thereafter. In the event that a secured transcriptionist is used, the tapes associated with your interviewed will be labeled with your pseudonym.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Yes, your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Sofía Hussain at 703.901.4538 or hussain.so@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact the research advisor, Dr. Kelly Conn, at conn.k@neu.edu.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, please contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, 02115; Tel: 617.373.4588; or email: irb@neu.edu. You may also anonymously call if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?
No.
I agree to take part in this research.

__________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part

__________________________
Date

__________________________
Printed name of person above

__________________________
Signature of person who explained the study
to the participant above and obtained consent

__________________________
Date

__________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interviewee: ______________________
Interviewer: Sofia Hussain
Date: ______________________
Location of Interview: ______________________________

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes)

- Build rapport
- Describe the study
- Answer any questions
- Review and sign IRB informed consent form.

Introductory Protocol

You have been chosen to speak to me today because you volunteered, and were identified as a professional who has significant information to share about your perceptions and opinions about school leadership in K12 Islamic schools and its effects on school climate. Through your insight, I hope to gain a better understanding of how teachers perceive school leadership and how, in turn school leadership style effects school climate.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to record our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be the only one privy to transcripts and information and the tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects’ requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have emailed to you. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form).

Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form?

We have planned this interview to last approximately one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover, but ultimately it is your story that I am most interested in and that is the most important to me. Therefore, I urge you to please feel free to bring up topics or information that you feel are related. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part II: Introduction to Interview
My name is Sofie Hussain. I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. My dissertation research focuses on the perceptions held by K12 Islamic school teachers of their leaders and how this in turn affects school climate. I have worked in Islamic Schools since 2001, but currently I am working in a public elementary school as a Science resource teacher.

Part III – Interviewee Background

1. How long have you worked in an Islamic School?
2. What classes do you teach?
3. What made you decide to teach in Islamic school?
4. What do you find most rewarding about working in an Islamic School?

Part IV – Objectives

Now, I would like to hear about your understandings, experiences and perceptions in your own words. To do this, I am going to ask you some questions about leadership style in Islamic schools and the role that plays in school climate. Please know that there are no right or wrong answers.

1. What does effective leadership mean to you?
   a. Tell me a story about a time when you interacted directly with your principal
   b. How did you feel about the outcome of your interaction?
2. Please describe an event where you experienced “good” leadership?
   a. Describe the feelings of teachers in your school when they interact with leaders
   b. How did the interaction affect your performance at school?
   c. Share examples of the acts of “good leadership”
3. What does positive school climate mean to you?
   a. Describe your school environment
   b. Describe an event / time when the atmosphere amongst parents, students and teachers was optimal.
4. What factors do you believe effect school climate?
   a. Tell me about something that changed the atmosphere of the school; like an event or a time that specifically stands out in your memory
5. How do your understandings and perceptions of leadership effect school climate?
   a. Tell me a story or recall a time when the actions of your leader(s) led to an overall shift in the atmosphere at school
6. Describe what factors you believe lead to poor school climate.
   a. Share events that made you feel like the atmosphere at school was uneasy
7. Share an experience in which leadership shaped your perception of school climate
   a. Recall a time / times when your school leadership had an impact on how everyone (fellow teachers, students, parents, office and custodial staff) felt at school.
   b. What happened to make everyone feel positively or negatively?

**Additional questions may be appropriate to clarify or expand on themes developed in the research.**
Appendix E: Approval Letter from Northeastern University IRB

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: December 1, 2014  IRB #: CPS14-10-11
Principal Investigator(s):  Kelly Conn
                          Sofia Tanweer Hussain
Department:  Doctor of Education Program
            College of Professional Studies
Address:  20 Belvidere
          Northeastern University
Title of Project:  Teacher Perception of Leadership and School Climate in American K12 Islamic Schools
Participating Sites:  N/A
DHHS Review Category:  Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents:  One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval:  12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: NOVEMBER 30, 2015

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630