Muslim American Identity under Siege: Muslim Students’ perspective of American High Schools

A thesis presented
by
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Dedication

In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.

This study is to highlight the plight of Muslim youth as they experience marginalization in their own homeland. I hope and pray that this labor of empathy and devotion is seen as a sadaqa jariyah (perpetual charity) from me to the field of scholarship.

I would like to acknowledge Faisal my husband and my children, Ammar, Ibrahim, Nabeeha and Nuha for not disowning me during this journey. Their silent acts of encouragement and serving their wife and mother were priceless. They assisted with the day-to-day responsibilities, consoled me with words and actions, and inspired me to tread a consistent path toward the finish line.

I would like to acknowledge the many silent supporters during this course. You know who you are. This support included prayers, comforting comments, forced relaxation, insightful discussions and most of all, dependable doses of reinforcements. It was your reassurance that brought this project to a culmination.

I recognize Dr. Karen Reiss-Medwed for her appreciation of the need of such a study. Her words of support, reassurance and confidence allowed me to have conviction in my ability to rise to the challenge. Dr. Karen has been a brilliant cheerleader and has fortified me in ways immeasurable.

Last, I dedicate this project to my father Jamil Ahmed Shaikh and my mother Nargis Sanoober Shaikh for their guidance, encouragement and unconditional love. This journey would not have taken place had it not been for the drive to complete my father’s dream. I am grateful to both of them for serving as exemplars in my life and I honor them for their sacrifices to make me who I am today.
Epigraph

Allâh burdens not a person beyond his scope. He gets reward for that (good) which he has earned, and he is punished for that (evil) which he has earned. "Our Lord! Punish us not if we forget or fall into error, our Lord! Lay not on us a burden like that which You did lay on those before us our Lord! Put not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Pardon us and grant us Forgiveness. Have mercy on us. You are our Maulâ (Patron, Supporter and Protector, etc.) …" (Surah Baqarah, verse 286)
Abstract

Muslim students journey through American public schools with the understanding that their religious identity differs vastly from the hegemonic culture that defines the schooling experience. Given the social climate of the country and the media propaganda of Islamophobia, Muslim Americans negotiate their identities within contexts diametrically opposed to those identities. Muslim students, in striving to be citizens of their schools, undergo an acculturation process that includes a spectrum of experiences ranging from isolation, marginalization, and assimilation all the way to acculturation. Muslim student identities are limited in representation, either implicitly or explicitly, in school curriculum, infrastructure, and visuals. Knowledge of these experiences empowers educational policy makers, teachers, administration, peers, and anyone else who impacts schools. Gaining a better understanding of how Muslim identity can be nurtured and developed will lessen the acculturation stress faced by children. Achievement gaps can be lessened if the knowledge gap is narrowed. It is equally important to emphasize identity development to raise contributing, confident global citizens.
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Chapter 1

Statement of Problem

A teenage Muslim girl wearing hijab (head scarf) or a bearded Muslim boy walking down the halls of an American public high school draws the attention of many given the global social and political climate of increasing Islamophobia. Young Muslim Americans courageously wear the symbols of their religion while simultaneously hoping to be part of the school culture they attend. They carry the burden of defending their religious practices to a homogenous culture that assumes their beliefs to be the cause of global social turmoil.

Parents expect their children to carry themselves as proud Muslims as they go to school. However, many teenagers face ridicule from peers, teachers, and administrators, which has only been fueled by misinformation and preconceived notions regarding Muslims due to misrepresentations from various media channels (Bonet, 2011; Lugg, 2004; Zaal, 2012). Going to school and having to negotiate their identity is daunting for adolescent Muslims in American public schools.

Discerning Muslim parents send their children to American public schools to be educated. While understanding the value of a strong education, parents sometimes do not understand how school culture circumscribes an identity that may be different than what they desire for their kids. Muslim students are expected by their families and communities to carry themselves as proud Muslims at all times, in or out of school. However, for a significant part of their day, Muslim students are expected to conform to the hegemonic culture of their school and its guidelines and rules. Often these rules may conflict with their religious demands, causing an internal conflict and thereby making it difficult for students to prioritize the dueling expectations
they face. Sabry and Bruna (2007) state that Muslim students are expected to fulfill religious obligations that may clash with their school culture or schedule.

Coleman’s (2007) research claims that adolescents receive much less parental focus than other age groups. This volatile age group needs careful attention and support for adolescents to make sense of the challenges a high school environment presents. Muslim parents in particular have been labeled as uninvolved or passive with regard to their adolescents’ schooling (Sabry & Bruna, 2007). This general lack of support of adolescents, coupled with Muslim parents who have been labeled as uninvolved or passive, adds to the layers of complexity for Muslim teenagers who attend American public schools (Sabry & Bruna, 2007). Muslim students often have to discover how to negotiate their place and identity as they journey through high school.

Emotional energy expended in negotiating identity takes an incalculable toll on self as students struggle to construct a Muslim identity in American high school. The American high school social environment is based on a secular mindset that encourages conformity. Subsequently, the social constructs outside of the school culture emphasize students’ role within their own culture and religion. Young Muslim students often face difficulties as they see themselves as part of a marginalized group within a cultural milieu (Tindongan, 2011). Due to cultural differences between home and school Muslim students inevitably face a hyphenated identity, hybridity, double consciousness or a multiple negotiated identity (Tindongan, 2011). Simply put, Muslim American teenagers seek to answer the age-old question: “Am I the same person at school as I am at home?”

Marginalized groups such as American Muslims must constantly negotiate their identities against the backdrop of mainstream privileged culture. Muslim Americans, like many other
minorities, must find a way to cope with the significant variances between their home and school environments. Schools serve many cultures and yet maintain their hegemonic traditions and structures (Tindongan, 2011). Within the last two decades several multicultural movements have led schools to explore the creation of inclusive classrooms (Banks, 1994). These movements are among several consequences of September 11 and the war on terror. If students feel included in the curriculum and part of the school and classroom their achievement scores increase (Kaplan & Flum, 2012).

In an effort to create inclusive classrooms, schools have acknowledged multicultural education movements and simplified them by mentioning or recognizing different ethnic holidays. This superficial effort limits the ability to create a more unified nation, despite the fact that one in every three students is of color (Banks, 1994). The hidden curriculum in public schools privileges the hegemony in schools, which is then consciously or unconsciously promoted throughout the school environment. This puts an inordinate amount of demand on all students to conform in order to be recognized as part of the school culture at large.

Bonet (2011) claims that concepts of citizenship are experienced when students live and experience inclusion in their school community. Hence, schools are a place where students learn to be part and parcel of a community, understand their roles as citizens, and set their tone with regard to societal norms, beliefs, and practices. Citizenship is compromised when Muslim youth experience their sense of belonging through a portrayal as the “enemy within”. Muslim adolescents feel the need to defend one part of their identity over the other or in some cases adopt two separate identities to experience this inclusion. As Muslim youth find themselves in this predicament, it is natural for them to struggle with adhering to both religious obligations and
national obligations. The “othering” of Muslim Americans leads to feelings of exclusion from the school community or a sense of disconnection from the American nation-state.

For many teenagers in minority groups, high school is the only other significant social context aside from their religious contexts. Teenagers trying to understand how they fit within the social climate of high school are often evaluating and negotiating their religious identity to assimilate into high school culture simply to fit in. This state of “double consciousness”, where they continuously look at themselves through the eyes of the school culture, manifests itself in their struggle to be citizens of this microcosm community. Students in schools face the peer pressures to date, partake in social activities and events, conform to dress code, and prioritize social scenes of high school above their cultural or religious obligations. Most Muslim American adolescents have obligations to pray, fast, adhere to dietary requirements, and follow a particular dress code, which may not match the social contexts of school. Therefore, if their citizenship in school is minimized or demeaned, then students will develop coping mechanisms to deal with the gap between the two environments.

Muslim American youth are challenged as they navigate their educational experience in this social context (Khoury-Kassabri & Ben-Arieh, 2009). Public schools have a tremendous impact on Muslim adolescents’ ability to identify with their religion and develop a sense of belonging to their nation. After the events of September 11 and recent events of the Charlie Hedbo attacks, Muslim students became associated with the “axis of evil” and were subjected to harassment, name calling, and physical abuse by peers and teachers. Some teachers were unable to distinguish between their Muslim students and the terrorists who were committing these acts (Shah, 2011). This in turn made Muslim students feel alienated in their school community.
Many Muslim teenagers bear the weight of acquiescing to the overwhelming social demands put upon them by peers, teachers and administrators. The social context of students dictates which social identity they tap into. Every individual, especially adolescents, establishes a reciprocal relationship with their social context so that they can maintain a feeling of “continuity within themselves” to allow a sense of belonging and fluency. This confidence allows them to easily beckon a specific part of their identity to present in a particular setting (Schwartz & Luyckx, 2011). To obtain this level of fluency between two constructed identities requires teenagers to negotiate and renegotiate who they are while they are in school and at home.

**Significance of Problem**

There are approximately six to eight million Muslims in the United States (US Census, 2004). African Americans, Southeast Asians, and Arabs comprise 76% of the Muslim population in the US (http://www.allied-media.com/AM/). In the United States alone, there are approximately 11.5 million children living with at least one Muslim adult, and that rate is predicted to double within the next year (US Census Bureau, 2004). The majority of Muslim children attend the US public school system.

These children are referred to as “third culture kids”. By definition, third culture kids are those who have spent the majority of their life outside their parents’ culture. The first culture is that of the parents and the second culture is that of the host country. Thereby the combination of the two cultures makes for a third culture (Melles & Schwartz, 2011). The learning and development of third culture kids depends solely on how schools understand the culture and identities of the students they serve.
Research shows that culture and religion have profound impacts on one’s identity and sense of belonging (Dewey, 1910; Fatima, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). Over a century ago John Dewey (1910) stated that students’ learning is optimized when they have a solid understanding of self with relation to the concept being learned. Students have a sense of increased motivation and engagement to learn when they can identify with the concepts being presented (Faircloth, 2012). Navarrette and Jenkins (2010) stated that it is critical for one to include racial and ethnic identity as a component of self-concept. It is the self-concept and identity that engages students and motivates them to feel the confidence needed for achievement (Gaddis, 2013).

Unfortunately, American Muslims must suppress or disassociate with their Muslim identities in order to successfully acculturate into American societal norms; if they adhere to their religious identities they face isolation. Muslim students need to feel they are a part of the school community. The norms and guidelines need to reflect their religious identities (Bonet, 2011). However, often the social norms of community schools are not the same as those outside of the school context for these students.

Several factors, including media, teachers, and peers, lead students to disassociate with their home identity because of how it is portrayed in school. Gaddis (2013) states that negative attitudes can emerge toward the school environment due to lack a sense of disfranchisement because of the lack of representation of their culture and religion within the school infrastructure. Consequently, because students are forgoing this part of their identity at school, the cultural capital they bring with them is lost and the connections between home and school are further destabilized.
It is noted that third culture kids often undergo personality changes as they experience the acculturation process (Dewaele & Oudenhoven, 2009). These personality changes occur as they attempt to fit into social boxes that school culture insists on putting students into. Naturally, as students face this struggle their academic achievement is given a lesser degree of priority. Students who deliberately suppress their identities may forget who they are and what experiences they bring to the discussion in the classroom. This in turn, silences the sharing of cultural capital, sense of pride and feeling a part of the classroom experience. This process of feeling invisible within the school community limits the potential for high academic achievement (Gaddis, 2013).

When the identity of any one individual is threatened, coping strategies are employed to deal with the pressures of society. American Muslims can either choose to trivialize the stigma associated with them or they engage in ‘counter-stereotypic’ behavior to appear as different as possible from the stigmatized group (Steele et al., 2002). Kunst et al. (2011) found the latter coping mechanism was the default course of action. Muslims in general cope with the stigma by not affiliating with their religious groups or by decreasing their involvement with their natural identity leading to social isolation (Stoll, 2011). Isolation and/or marginalization of this cultural capital often leads to student disengagement and lack of motivation.

Researchers (Dewaele & Oudenhoven, 2009, Gaddis, 2013; Kunst et al., 2011) state that teachers must focus on what is relevant and meaningful to students in order to dissipate the negativity experienced by third culture students. Faircloth (2012) further asserts that third culture kids such as American Muslims carry rich ‘funds of knowledge’ that are rarely tapped into by school systems. Moreover, parents and Muslim communities are encouraging students to be proud Muslims. This dichotomy allows for third culture kids to naturally shift from one identity to the other, depending on their social context.
Third culture adolescents are often trying to understand and develop their identity while exposed to contradicting belief systems and national social norms. Students grapple with understanding themselves as they hold on to their roots while adopting the national identity (Kunst, et al., 2011). It is exceptionally difficult for parents of these students to relate to their children, as they did not have the same experiences. Therefore, it is important to understand how complex this process is for third culture adolescents. Chaudhury and Miller (2008) show that American Muslims develop a sense of self-identity by either external or internal methods to address the opposition between what they see as the school cultural norms and what their religion mandates. This research study is the only one of its kind dealing with American Muslim identity in high schools. Furthermore, it is essential that we begin to understand how this identity is affected in the current xenophobic environment and the greater stereotyping of Muslims in general.

We have a responsibility to build support systems to assist American Muslim students academically, emotionally, and socially. A richer understanding is needed of their experiences in order to decipher how to do so and what such support looks like. This understanding would help educators identify the measures needed with regard to curricula, guidance, or teacher development to ensure that this population of students is being served within the American public school system. Finally, understanding the “knowledge fund” that Muslim culture brings to a school culture will aid educators in better engaging students in meaningful and relevant work in the classroom, thereby improving the instructional quality.

Contextualizing learning only accelerates the process toward academic achievement. In order to attain social justice, we must provide an equal opportunity in our educational system by providing all students a safe environment in which to learn. It is the US Department of
Education’s mission to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access (https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/mission/mission.html). Therefore it is essential that we understand what factors contribute to marginalization of Muslim students in our American school systems.

This literature review seeks to understand what being Muslim means and what research is found related to the experiences of American Muslims in the US. Additional research is examined to discover what support systems are in place for these students with regard to curriculum, inclusive classrooms, multicultural training for teachers, teacher bias in the classrooms and how these factors affect Muslim identity and achievement. This review seeks to further understand how curriculum has impacted the American Muslim identity with regard to inclusive education, how pre-service programs have helped to train teachers on a multicultural classroom, what role counselors have taken with regard to crisis management/social climate, and how teachers’ own biases influence minority student achievement.

**Position Statement**

Terrorism has placed the American Muslim identity under siege. According to Zarate, Bhimji and Reese (2005), adolescents’ ethnic label can predict their predisposition toward schooling. However, American Muslim students constantly struggle in merging their religiosity with western ideologies (Fatima, 2011). Fatima (2011) further asserts that for Muslims the Islamic ideology is the fabric of their culture. Therefore, forming a bicultural identity is critical for students to have rich cultural capital. It is this very capital that enables students to make connections and serves as a significant predictor of academic achievement (Zarate, Bhimji, & Reese, 2005).
The US Department of Education claims that social justice is part of the American education system. Social justice principles insist that there is equity not only in the instructional delivery but the outcomes, recognition of marginalized groups and their experiences, and full and equal participation of all groups (Hyland & Heuschkel, 2010). However, research (Akiner, 1997; Briscoe, 2005; Maliepaard, 2010) shows that ethnic and religious marginalization occurs within American school systems and has a direct negative impact on academic achievements.

Given the social climate of our nation and the endemic Islamophobia, Muslim identity formation has been difficult. Research shows that labels are particularly important to students and have a correlation with their academic achievement (Elashi, Mills & Grant, 2009; Zarate, Bhimji, & Reese, 2005). A sense of self-concept is what allows students to feel the confidence needed to acculturate within the American societal norms. Therefore, as Gaddis (2013) suggested, American Muslims have to either disassociate with their identity and then venture into society norms or maintain their identity and be excluded from the social norms, thereby risking isolation (Stoll, 2011).

Third culture kids are challenged with integrating their ideologies with the ideologies of the American culture. Often these principles are diametrically opposed. During the acculturation process, Muslim American students are continuously evaluating what beliefs they will maintain, what beliefs they will reject, and what beliefs require integration so that they are successful socially and academically. Therefore, Muslim students seek to develop their identities by either an “external method or an internal method” (Chaudhury & Miller, 2008). If students seek to understand their sense of self and look for ways to retain their Muslim identity within their self-knowledge of the cultural capital they possesses, they are internal seekers. However, if they look to further understand their cultural capital from what they see in society and at school, then they
are external seekers according to Chaudhury and Miller (2008). Therefore, it is essential to understand how students decipher their self-identity amidst conditions of heightened sensitivity toward and negative labeling of Muslim.

Briscoe (2005) makes a powerful claim that the “other” is often marginalized because construction of the “universals” favors the privileged group. The “other” is often seen as having different traits and is thereby condemned to being inferior. In school systems the majority of programs lack cultural sensitivity. The activities offered, PE uniforms, and general curriculum taught are all examples of lack of awareness of the needs of the religious and culturally diverse student population. It is these very institutionalized deficiencies that promote the “othering” process when it comes to American Muslims in schools. The very reason a particular group shares social identities is so that their interests can be protected as a whole. Students must have a platform in which they are made to feel safe and included with their beliefs. Muslim American students need to be included and feel part of the social fabric of their own schools and not consigned to isolation due to stereotypes and negativity regarding their identity in the society at large.

Institutional oppression further aids and abets the lack of social justice within our schools. Schools with teachers who understand the plight of marginalized groups are often the most successful in reaching the diverse student population. Assignments and curricula need to be further aligned with the understanding and experiences of students who have cultural richness and have lived experiences different from US societal norms. Teachers are expected to uphold social justice, communicate across a multi-cultural student population, and work with families within marginalized cultures (Hyland & Heuschkel, 2010). Teachers are encouraged to develop strong teacher-student relationships to foster a love of learning. Last, understanding the
“knowledge funds” that Muslim culture brings to a school culture will assist educators to better engage students in meaningful and relevant ways in the classroom. Contextualizing learning only accelerates the process of academic achievement.

As a Muslim American growing up in the United States, I often found it difficult to assimilate into my high school. My parents are from Pakistan and we came to the US in the late 70s. Growing up as a third culture kid, there were many things that I adopted from our host culture (American) and many customs that I was expected to maintain. The learning and development of third culture kids depends solely on how schools understand the culture and identities of the students they serve. My parents did not understand the demands of an American school because they did not have the experiences that I was exposed to.

There was a tremendous amount of bullying because I looked different and often, I would be too timid to say anything because I did not want to be ridiculed. I did not have a strong relationship with any of my teachers or guidance counselors. In fact, I did not even know what our principal looked like. I just wanted to fit in and be “normal”. At times, I shunned my own identity and began to discount my culture for the sake of the school’s culture. The desire to be accepted overrode the need to do well in school. These conflicting feelings take their toll on a person, lead to a much lesser desire to do well academically, and increase the desire to do well socially.

As a mother I naturally had the same fear for my children. Society has changed since I was a high schooler. After the terrorist attacks, many friends and family were hurt by the increased stereotypes. I did not want my children to face these experiences and disassociate themselves from their identity as Muslims nor as Americans. The acts of a few do not define the
entire group. Therefore, in order for my children to gain a healthier understanding of self, we enrolled them into Islamic schools so that they would not have to expend energy in figuring out their identity and could focus more on their academic needs.

While my children flourished in the Islamic schools and were comfortable as Muslim Americans, the lack of academic rigor was a growing concern for us. To continue to nurture their identity, we moved to the Middle East so that we could continue to cultivate their sense of self and return home at a time when their identities were completely rooted. I am fully aware that my research may conclude that there are not a significant number of individuals who are adversely affected in high schools. However, I do not wish to impose my own biases in the research. I merely would like to ground the data that I will be gathering in my qualitative study.

Research Questions
1. What are the experiences of Muslim adolescents in American public schools?
2. How do they articulate their Muslim identity as public school students?
3. How do they understand their faith identity in the context of their public school experience?
4. How does the public school affect their Muslim identity?

Theoretical Framework

Overview of Topic/Concepts. The study of Muslim Americans in public schools and their experiences can be viewed through multiple lenses. To name a few, the critical race theory, the cultural mismatch theory and the terror management theory have all been used to describe the phenomena that third culture Muslim kids face while in public schools especially, in this ongoing Islamophobic environment. The experiences of Muslim students in western social contexts are
vivid and provide a unique perspective. For the above problem of practice, the cultural mismatch theory and the critical race theory have been chosen as the lenses to best describe the experiences of Muslim American adolescents in US public schools.

**Critical Race Theory.** Critical Race Theory (CRT) assumes that there is a natural inclination among people to be racist in our society. Individual racism is prevalent in dominant culture. CRT claims that power is based on the needs of the dominant culture and marginalizes any other culture that does not fall within those boundaries. Tindongan (2011) stated that public schools are “microcosms” of society and reflect the representation of Muslims in the world. She further asserted that schools fail to meet the needs of students from many different cultures and backgrounds. Muslim students in general experience bias based on how they look and dress. Yosso (2005) claimed that researchers can learn from communities of marginalized groups concerning their cultural capital. Additionally, CRT is used as a “framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourse” (Yosso, 2005).

Pierre Bourdieu, Ladson-Billings, and Yosso are all researchers who have used CRT as a framework for their research. They have identified how social inequalities due to racism or partiality lead to different social structures for marginalized groups. Yosso (2005) described the CRT as stemming from a broad base of literature and critical theory in law. CRT has evolved from being in the realm of legal action to racial injustice as it relates to social structure of society. CRT began with the civil rights movement, which slowly has evolved into including other groups (i.e., Latinos). Furthermore, intersectionality, immigration status, sexuality, culture, language, and visible symbols of religion have also begun to join the CRT family.
While CRT’s inclusive range is widening, researchers are still investigating (Ladson-Billings, year?) how the cultural capital of marginalized groups benefits groups in education. There are tremendous gains to be made from understanding the insights of marginalized groups so that we can improve their educational experience. This theory depends on the fact that racism exists and that it challenges white privilege. It further contests educational systems’ claims toward objectivity and equal opportunity. CRT proves that there is privilege with dominant groups in power and that people of color are to accept the dominant norm.

CRT begs the question of whether social justice is being served in American public schools. Ladson-Billings’ research in multicultural pedagogy and multicultural education has been cited quite frequently and is considered seminal in this field (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2005, 2009). Ladson-Billings is known for her revolutionary research in theories of pedagogy and critical race theory. Ladson-Billings (1995, 2005, 2009) asserts that students of color in the classroom have different needs than their majority counterparts. Her research stems from the basis of critical race theory and her seminal work directly applies to third culture Muslim students and how they face differences in the educational experience when compared to their majority counterparts. Therefore, teachers who are aware of these traits are more successful in reaching students with diverse needs.

Muslim Americans are a targeted group pre- and post-9/11. Their race, religion, and physical appearance have placed them in the limelight of prejudicial attacks in society and schools (Bonet, 2011). CRT provides an ideal framework for researchers to understand the plight of Muslim Americans in American high schools. Female students who wear the head cover (hijab) have experienced patronizing interactions with high school teachers and reported several incidents of being treated differently by teachers.
Further building on this argument, CRT claims religion and race have a significant bearing on students’ achievement in school. CRT is based on the premise that racial barriers affect personnel and curriculum. Students from different backgrounds internalize these differences. This “lack of privilege” is very subtle and accounts for the discrepancies in achievements by Muslims in school (Bonet, 2011). The experiences of young Muslim adolescents have exposed a unique perspective that is currently lacking in scholarship. This perspective may assist educators and others to problem solve and arrive at unique solutions to help Muslim Americans to attain academic success.

Yosso (2005) stated that CRT empowers people of color to ensure that their interests are being served. It also utilizes the experiences of marginalized groups to learn from their stories and their plight to see where cultural gaps exist. It is these very gaps that cause unequal opportunity and unequal access to success. CRT gives an analysis of the ideologies of racism and allows what others perceive as normal to be seen from a different perspective. More importantly, CRT is determined to include the perspectives of all groups so that a solution can be discovered that will enable universal access to success. However, before we can make the changes needed to improve the success of Muslim students in public schools, we must first identify the gap between the internal culture and the culture in school. The second framework used in this study would best describe this gap analysis: the cultural mismatch theory.

**Cultural Mismatch Theory.** According to Neito (2000), the cultural mismatch theory is when the failure of minority students is not a result of any inferiority of culture, religion or genetics but instead is a result of the gap that exists between the home culture and the school culture. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the extent of the gap in order to account for the academic failure of minority students. The cultural mismatch theory examines three main
elements of the school environment to account for the lack of minority student performance: curriculum, instruction and the home-school relations. All three areas help to describe the challenges of Muslim students’ experiences and the various domains of schooling.

According to the Washington Post (March 10), Obama’s Race to the Top Act, coupled with the Common Core Standards, considerably widened the achievement gaps on standardized testing. Minority contributions were represented minimally if at all in the American Common Core Standards. Neito (2000) claimed that if these minority groups see themselves in curriculum it is through the viewpoint of the dominant culture. Sabry and Bruna (2007) reported their findings that mention of Islam and Muslims within the curriculum were inaccurate and biased. Parents recounted that their children reported teachers inaccurately describing Islamic landmarks or giving credit to Europeans as the inventors although the inventors were actually Muslim. It is this very lack of balance in the curriculum that gives the impression that Muslim culture has made no contributions to society.

Instruction in public schools also underwrites the gap that the cultural mismatch theory refers to amongst minority students. Instruction in classrooms deeply depends on the level of competency that the teacher possesses to know and understand their students. Sabry and Bruna (2007) contended that deeply held prejudices may hinder the resources, time, attention and feedback given to Muslim students. This in turn creates an inequity in terms of students’ self esteem. According to Elnour and Bashir-Ali (2003), students should not be made to feel out of place when in the classroom nor humiliated or punished for practicing their religious beliefs. Muslim parents reported teacher instructions to be insensitive and simply uninformed. Parents and students both described teachers who could not hide their biases while in the classroom, according to Sabry and Bruna’s research (2007).
Finally, students encounter a cultural mismatch when the home and school relations are strained or absent. The expectations of Muslim students from the home and self are to uphold religious obligations such as praying, fasting, adherence to dietary restrictions, and Islamic dress code requirements. Many of these expectations directly contradict the culture at school, where there may not be a place to pray, or accommodations during the lunch hour to go another place as they fast, or basic dress code accommodations as they have physical education. Students bear the burden of communicating these expectations, only to have them shrugged off by educators as unimportant. These practices divide the Muslim homes and the public school, leaving students to manage this created gap.
Chapter 2

Muslim American Identity

Acts of terrorism on American soil have caused the United States public to question the reality of their safety. Media networks have perpetuated the terrorism news reports, which have elicited unprecedented amounts of fear (Das et al., 2008). Anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamophobia have risen due the attacks of September 11, 2001. The term ‘Islamophobia’ has been used more frequently to describe the fear of Islam and of Muslims as a social group. Mass media has heavily depicted the negative stereotypes of Muslims via vivid imagery (Kunst et al., 2011).

As a result of the increased fear and the association of Muslim identity with acts of terror, approximately 83% of the Muslim-American population reports facing an increase of implicit racism and discrimination following the events of 9/11 (Sheridan, 2006). Mass media perpetuated and reinforced emotions of hate and fear (Panagopoulos, 2006). For Muslims across the United States, this meant that they had to maintain a delicate balance between identifying with their parents’ country of origin, religion, and culture as opposed to America, their host country, the prevailing religions of America, and American culture (Deaux, 2000).

Americans of the Muslim faith refer to themselves as Muslim Americans (Sirin et al., 2008). However, studies of Muslim American identities are not of religiosity or ethnicity; rather, they are constructs of an emerging identity as a result of September 11 and the War on Terror (Sirin et al., 2008). Sirin (2008) asserted that if students were to maintain a dual identity in schools, it would require them to participate within the host culture (US) while trying to uphold their Muslim identity. These third culture kids (TCKs) have often had to educate themselves in
their faith while trying to figure out how to be a Muslim within a majority non-Muslim society (Williams, 2011).

The events of September 11 and subsequent terrorist events have allowed for an “American Islam” to arise. The emergence of “American Islam” refers to hybrid practices and identities that have developed as children of immigrant parents find new ways to interpret their religiosity through an American lens (Williams, 2011). Many concepts such as the masjids (places of Muslim worship) in America are created and developed around the community social construct. Masjids in other parts of the world do not have a community congregation element to them as they do in the US. Sirin (2008) claims that because of the minority groups (Muslims) within a majority context (American), a dual identity is bound to emerge.

Such a dual identity has caused Muslims in America to have significant troubles understanding its meaning (Sirin et al., 2008). Sirin (2008) had students draw what having a Muslim American identity meant to them. Some students drew the Statue of Liberty with some cultural features of a Pakistani household, some drew the globe with it saying ‘God bless America’ with an ethnic twist, and many depictions showed the west and Islam going in polar opposite directions.

Islam in America

Islam is the second largest religion of the world, with approximately one billion followers (Muslims). Muslims in America are estimated to be approximately 6 to 8 million, encompassing several ethnicities: Arabs (26.2%), Caucasian and Native Americans (11%), Middle Eastern non-Arabs (10.3%), and East Asians (6.4%) (US State Department, 2001). It is a stereotype that all Muslims are from the Middle East and all Middle Easterners are Muslims. Muslim history in
America predates that of the Native Americans. It has been reported that several African American slaves were Muslims. Therefore, it is evident that Muslims have been part of American history even before its inception as a nation. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States. It is one of the Abrahamic religions and considered as a continuation of Judaism and Christianity (Gonzaga & Reza, 2002).

**Muslim Students in America**

Research (Abdel-Khalek, 2010; Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Cole & Ahmadi, 2010) that suggests Muslims in post-secondary schools are conflicted between the American values and their religious beliefs. There is apprehension among Muslim students when performing their Islamic duties that include the five daily prayers, the modest dress that may include the hijab (veil or head covering), fasting, and lack of socially acceptable norms such as drinking alcohol or dating (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). A lack of understanding and a lack of accommodations by administrators and professors in the universities have made created difficulties for Muslim students.

These students have dietary restrictions that require them to abstain from pork and/or have halal (slaughtered according to religious practice, similar to kosher in the Jewish tradition) meat and the prohibition against alcohol. Muslims vary in their levels of observance of these religious practices. However, students living on campus have a difficult time, especially if they are fasting in the Month of Ramadan, during which students are only permitted to eat before sunrise and after sunset. Campus dining facilities usually do not service students at these times, making it very difficult for students to adhere to their religious practices and maintain their academic standing (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). In addition, due to the prohibitions on dating and alcohol, students on campus have little alternatives for entertainment while in college.
It is also noted that when students interact with their peers in academic-related activities they see significant negative effects on their grade point average (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010). Therefore, isolation and lack of opportunities made available by schools, teachers and educational programs create missed opportunities for integration and interaction between diverse groups. Sirin et al. (2008) claimed that American Muslims prefer engaging in social and cultural activities in both their religious and ethnic communities, as well as mainstream US society. In this study, participants mentioned that they had developed either an integrated identity or that they had a parallel identity. Crafting such an identity and developing a sense of belonging for this group of 18-28 year olds was a time-consuming process.

Additionally, the emergence of the war on terror and global terrorist attacks, along with increased racial profiling, has been an increasing source of concern to many Muslim American citizens. These young Americans who normally would see no contradictions between being an American and being a Muslim now have to bear the blame for the actions of others who happen to belong to the same faith and rob them of their social belonging (Sirin, et al., 2008). The more stress put on this relationship and identity by society, media, and peers, the more their sense of American identity is weakened (Sirin et al., 2008). The result is that Muslim Americans either have an overwhelming need to protect their religious beliefs or they remain silent so that they are not associated with the “enemy from within” (Jamil, 2012).

Subjective well-being is defined as a person’s “cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life” (Abdel-Khalek, 2010). There are positive associations between religiosity, subjective well-being and quality of life. Therefore, students find comfort when they identify with their religious practices. However, given the existing social climate for Muslim students, they are often not able to display their identities as openly and freely because they are often the minorities
in the classroom. Students fear vocalizing their thoughts because the teacher is seen as an authority figure within the classroom and determines their grades (Ali & Begheri, 2009). The majority of the existing literature focuses on post-secondary students. There is a paucity of research on Muslim American adolescents and their identity formation in American K-12 school systems.

**Anti-Muslim Attitudes**

Muslims in America quickly became targeted as the ‘out-group’, making it especially difficult to live in a host country where their group was stigmatized (Elashi, Mills, & Grant, 2009). They either had to accept the ‘American’ practices or isolate their own identity in order to avoid the stigma associated with being visibly Muslim. This has caused many Muslim Americans to face difficulties with integration into the host culture (Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR), 2006). Acculturation does not mean that one must abandon their native culture. Rather, it incorporates prior cultural experiences with American norms and blends them into a new culture for this group to identify with. Without a proper understanding of how cultural identity is formed while in a school environment, Muslim Americans risk enabling discrimination and prejudice to be perpetuated in our school systems (Elashi, Mills, & Grant, 2009). Institutionalized discrimination inevitably leads to diffidence in the development of self-identity (Rich & Schachter, 2011). To achieve success, students need to use the cultural capital they have from their heritage, families, communities, and prior experiences (Gaddis, 2013). Maintaining positive bicultural identity is a significant predictor of academic achievement (Zarate, Bhimji & Resese, 2005).

For American Muslims, Islamic ideology is the fabric of their culture (Fatima, 2011). However, this is in direct contrast to Western ideologies, with their strong tradition of separation
of church and state. Ironically, among the founding principles of the United States are freedom of religion and freedom of speech. However, misunderstandings of the separation of church and state have been carried to the extreme, with discourse on religious topics considered taboo (Ballinger, 2011). There is a fear of open dialogue regarding one’s beliefs and value systems. These barriers have led to a lack of understanding of people’s cultures and religion. An individual’s identity is central to who they are and what types of cultural assets they bring to the conversation (Ballinger, 2011).

There is ample research that shows the correlation of identity to academic achievement (Flashman, 2012; Ly et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2009; Zarate et al., 2005). There is also ample research discussing the anti-Muslim attitudes and perceptions post-September 11 (Bectovic, 2011; Fatima, 2011; Tinker & Smart, 2012). However, there is limited information on the experiences of Muslim Americans as they undergo the acculturation process in an American public high school. The purpose of my phenomenology study is to describe what support systems are in place to assist Muslim Americans attending high school in the US post-September 11.

**Teacher Pre-Service Programs**

Students’ relationships with their teachers have a profound effect on their academic achievement. Therefore, teachers, administrators, and counselors must be well trained or have experience in dealing with multi-cultural students in a classroom so that they may attend to the needs of their learners. Teaching in a multi-cultural classroom requires that teachers are fully trained and exposed to methods of teaching in a diverse classroom in pre-service programs. It has been the goals of most pre-service programs to integrate service learning into curricula, cultivate positive beliefs and dispositions about students and communities of color, and work with
families and children who have been marginalized (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Burant & Kirby, 2002; Kidd, Shanchez & Thorp, 2008).

Research (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Chang, Anagnostopoulos & Omae, 2011; Frybeg et al., 2012; Masterilli & Sardo-Brown, 2002) indicates that the teaching workforce is primarily white and female. The multi-cultural programs in place aim to help students in teaching programs learn how to relate to minority students and families. However, Chang, Anagnostopoulos, and Omae (2011) claim that many pre-service teachers retain their beliefs and blame low academic performance on students and their families.

Masterilli and Sardo-Brown (2002) discovered that pre-service teachers lacked rudimentary knowledge of their Muslim students’ religious beliefs. The survey responses indicate that many of the pre-service teachers not only lacked a basic understanding of Islam, they also did not understand how the Muslim populace would potentially impact our nation. They did not grasp the diverse nature of ethnicities and equated Islam with the Middle East, Arabs, oppression of women, or terrorism (Masterilli & Sardo-Brown, 2002).

Programs such as Multicultural Service Learning (MSL) and Individual and Cultural Diversity are in place at some universities to address this gap in pre-service programs (Chang, Anagnostopoulos, & Omae, 2011; Hyland & Heuschkel, 2010). These programs have helped students in teaching programs to recognize their own personal biases and constructs as they approach the multi-cultural classroom. In addition, the Individual and Cultural Diversity program run by Dr. Nora Hyland has attempted to aid pre-service teachers in understanding and identifying institutionalized oppression as it occurs in society and school (Hyland & Heuschkel, 2010). However, Yang and Montgomery (2013) claimed that a single course in pre-service
programs is not enough. Instead, one of the first steps toward understanding a multicultural classroom and diversity of students is to develop positive attitudes toward diverse students (Yang & Montgomery, 2013).

Teacher-Student In-Group vs. Out-group

In the United States the majority of the teaching workforce is white female (Little & Bartlett, 2010). Teachers or students are referred to as in-group if they are part of the majority and as out-group if they are the minority. Thijs and Verkuyten (2012) claimed that if positive interactions of the majority group exist with the minority group, more favorable relationships develop in the classroom between students and teachers. Students begin to trust teachers and members of the in-group based on these interactions. However, if these interactions are negative, further strengthening of the boundaries and confirming of the stereotypes occur (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2012).

This study shows that if students are fewer in number and are out-group members, their perception of their teachers may be positively influenced. However, if there are more out-group members this may not hold true. Furthermore, research (Hamre & Pianta, 2001) shows that student-teacher relationships are more important for minority students with regard to school adjustment. Shah (2011) quotes Melanie Kilen, a professor of human development at the University of Human Development at University of Maryland’s College of Education: “Children who experience bias are not going to do well academically…if you are excluded from your peers you don’t really want to go to school”. Kilen insists that the problem of in-group and out-group will persist if the problem is not addressed and understood systemically and at an institutional level. Moreover, pre-service teachers lose their motivation to carry over what they have learned in their educational programs to the actual classroom because the difference in practice is so
great. There is a great mismatch between what they have learned during teacher training and what the state has mandated in schools (Waitoller & Kozeleski, 2013).

Agirdag, Loobuyck and Van Houtte (2012) compared out-group teachers to in-group teachers in Islamic schools, where the majority of students are Muslim. This research concluded that Islamophobic attitudes of the out-group teachers contributed to problematic relationships with Muslim students. Empirical studies (McKown and Wienstien, 2008; van den Bergh et al., 2010) found that prejudiced attitudes of majority teachers significantly enlarge the achievement gap between in-group students and out-group students. It is also noted that older teachers are more negative toward Muslim students and their religion in comparison to their majority counterparts (Agirdag, Lookbuyck & Van Houtte, 2012). Additionally, secondary school teachers are found to have more negative attitudes than elementary school teachers (Agirdag, Lookbuyck & Van Houtte, 2012).

Educational environments are considered a “cultural match” if the norms and values promoted by the school or teacher are those of the student. The educational environment is a “cultural mismatch” if the students’ norms and values are not promoted by the school or teacher (Fryberg et al., 2012). Naturally, when the context of education matches, students feel more connected and experience a greater sense of belonging to the class and the school. This lends itself to the Islamic schools that have been emerging across the United States.

The development of Islamic schools has provided students and families a safe haven to continue to practice their faith without having to compromise their identity and an appropriate means of defense against institutionalized oppression (Tinker & Smart, 2012). Despite the heightened negative stereotyping of Muslims, students in Islamic schools did not hold negative
in-group attitudes toward Muslims or their Muslim teachers (Elashi et al., 2010). In fact, they were more likely to attribute positive characteristics to members of their own group than to individuals outside of their group.

**Institutionalized Oppression**

**Curricula and Pedagogy.** The curriculum in American schools is highly centered around Eurocentric ideology. According to Susan Douglass (2003), the United States is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse countries; therefore, the educational leaders of the nation should offer a more inclusive model for social education to address this diversity and need for a “more perfect union.” Teachers have such powerful positions to impart knowledge and concepts to secondary students in light of the current social climate of the world. For example, English teachers have consoled students and helped them cope with the September 11 tragedy via literature and writing (Rosenberg, 2008).

Curriculum should be used to provide each student a platform to learn. However, there are limitations when the curriculum is Euro-centric in nature and minority students are unable to relate (Douglass & Dunn, 2003). The social studies curriculum has omitted many important features of Islam and in some cases deliberately shown a compartmentalized understanding of the religion. Islam is discussed in the textbooks with bare facts and limited connectedness to its influence on the remainder of the world. Rather, Islam has been depicted in books as the religion that emanated from the harsh desert land with little connect to the rest of civilization (Douglass & Dunn, 2003).

Students walk out of a secondary education with a limited or broken sense of understanding of Islam and how it relates to Muslims in the world. The fragmented narrations
often do not help students, Muslim or otherwise, in context of the remainder of the world. Teachers also misunderstand how to handle teaching religion in the public school system (Moore, 2006). Pre-service teachers reported that teaching religion is in direct violation of the separate of church and state (Chang, Anagnostopoulos, & Omae, 2011). However, it is a teacher’s obligation to teach about world religions and their tremendous impact on world civilizations. Teaching of this subject needs to be carefully crafted, without proselytizing or expressing individual points of view (Moore, 2006). Moore (2006) further asserted that very often administrators and teachers offer only a single perspective, failing to account for opposing views or varying views that Muslim students in the classroom can identify with. Very often, Muslim students do not correct teachers out of respect for authority in the classroom (Ali & Bagheri, 2009).

Physical education (PE) is yet another subject that exemplifies institutional inequities in curriculum. PE has been part of the educational system since the 19th century (Stoll, 2011). Because of the ruling of Brown vs. Board of Education that “separate education facilities are inherently unequal”, PE offers few options for Muslims. Muslim students are unable to wear the PE uniform and have been physically assaulted in the name of sports (Bell, 2003). Students have been verbally abused in locker rooms and on the playing field since the September 11 attacks (Stoll, 2011).

Many educators are adopting multi-cultural approaches and resources to dispel these inequities and aid people in changing their perceptions of others. Such an approach highlights the differences as well as the similarities in others, so that we all can be accepted as different and not better or worse (Baer & Glasgow, 2010). Critical Race Theory is very much alive in the US and is founded in the idea that racism is part of American society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As
educators, we have a responsibility toward students to address fears and prejudices as we embrace the ideas of CRT and involve students via carefully designed lessons to negotiate a better understanding of all cultures and religions (Baer & Glasgow, 2010).

**School Infrastructures.** US school systems operate on the Gregorian calendar, with most if not all breaks aligned with significant Christian holidays. Most school systems mark Muslim students as absent if they miss school for a religious holiday. This affects any awards they receive and their academic attainment. In addition, US public schools do not accommodate students who are fasting for the month of Ramadan. Students wake up at sunrise, eat and then have to carry go to school. Students must meet the daily demands of a regular school day and physical challenges (i.e., PE classes), all while fasting. Students are made to go to lunch and canteen areas when they are refraining from eating. In addition, students do not have designated places to pray. Students also have to work around their class schedules to fit in their prayer so that they may offer their prayers at the prescribed times. The current infrastructure of school systems in America does not accommodate the differing needs of religiously diverse students (Ali & Bagheri, 2009).

Schools are important in an adolescent’s life. Therefore, the mission of schools is not only to foster academic achievement, but also to support students in becoming active and responsible members of society (Khoury-Kassabri & Ben-Arieh, 2009). However, when Muslim students have not been accounted for in their neighborhood schools, they face an inordinate amount of confusion and pressure as they struggle to consider themselves American and to integrate into the fabric of society.

School climate is the total environment within a school building. In order for students to feel they are part of that climate, schools must attempt to acknowledge and meet their needs if
they are to have positive academic attitudes and outcomes (Khoury-Kassabri & Ben-Arieh, 2009).

One response to the systemic exclusion of minorities is the global movement toward inclusive education (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013). According to Waitoller and Kozleski (2013), inclusive education consists of (1) the redistribution of opportunities to learn and participate in educational programs; (2) the recognition that differences can be assimilated into content, pedagogy and assessment tools; and (3) ensuring that marginalized groups have opportunities to represent themselves in decision-making processes. This enables schools to continually adapt to accommodate the diverse classrooms and student body. Inclusive education involves all stakeholders and especially relies on building teacher capacity. Teachers need to be the bridge between the scholar-practitioner gaps and the new pedagogical practices recommended for implementation for inclusive classrooms (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013).

Conclusion

Muslims comprise a substantial number of students in the American public school system. America is known to be the most diverse country in the world. Despite the American reputation as a melting pot, American history has marginalized many simply for being different. Native Americans, African Americans, Irish, Italians, and more have been “othered” at some point in history. American Muslims across the nation have experienced hate crimes against them for no other reason than their religious affiliations (Shah, 2011). They are considered the out-group (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2012). Ironically enough, one of the reasons for the establishment of the “land of the free” was religious freedom.
It can be surmised that the social climate of the US significantly changed after the September 11 attacks. Innumerable hate crimes against Muslim youth occurred in American public school systems after the war on terror was declared. Muslims have been vilified in the media, which has had a shocking effect on Muslim Americans in the public school system (Zaal, 2012). Young women who wear the hijab (Muslim head cover or veil) have been harassed by school administrators and threatened with suspension if they did not remove their scarf (Bonet, 2011). Teachers and non-Muslim peers have harassed Arab Americans with death threats, mocking attitudes, and physical violence (Bonet, 2011).

Teacher preparation programs must be willing to explore programs that will help our educators approach content and instructional practice based on the needs of the students in the classroom while realizing their own biases and limitations. However, teachers often face the jarring realization that what they have learned in their training programs is difficult to apply due to the imposed teacher-centered mandates. Teacher must realize that they also perpetuate the in-group and out-group biases when they do not cater their lessons to be more inclusive.

Understanding the experiences of Muslim Americans in our school system will enable policymakers, administrators, curriculum developers, university programs, teachers, and parents to grasp the dire need for a more inclusive education model. In order for change to take place, we must first understand and admit that there exist institutional inequalities for students with diverse backgrounds (Agosto & Karanxha, 2012). After we establish that these inequalities exist, we must then be willing to reorganize and restructure in order to deliver quality education to the multicultural student populations school systems serve (Agosto & Karanxha, 2012).
Chapter 3

The adolescent years can be a difficult journey. Emotional and social turmoil, coupled with academic pressures, complicate students’ journey through high school. Students are often forming their own identities during this time and many are soul searching about who they are. Muslim Americans and many other racial and religious ethnicities have an added layer of complexity to the equation. They are trying to formulate an understanding of their own racial identity in the context of a thriving American high school, a culture that significantly differs from that of their own.

Student identity significantly contributes to student achievement. Research on adolescent Muslim American experiences in public school enables educators to have a better understanding of what support measures are needed to help Muslim students as they journey through school. This study was designed to discover and unveil experiences of Muslim American students as they experience high school. More specifically, the goal was to show how Muslim students feel in relation to their peers in school. Another goal of this study was to ascertain what support measures are in place and what measures need to be developed related to Muslim Americans.

An interpretive phenomenology is the best method to capture the lived experiences of Muslim adolescents and their experiences with high school. This chapter explains how participants were recruited and selected. Procedures for data collection, storage, and the confidentiality of the qualitative interviews conducted are clearly outlined. Furthermore, a discussion of the trustworthiness and reliability of the data gathered and protection of the participants is presented. Finally, I discuss my role as the researcher as it relates to this study.
Methodology

A phenomenological study is the method by which the following questions were addressed. It captures how American Muslim high school students experience school post-9/11. This research sought to identify the lived experiences of American Muslims with regard to answering the following central question: How do Muslim adolescents in American public schools describe their experiences post-9/11? Additionally, this research explored not only the experiences of Muslim Americans, but also sought to understand what support looks like from their perspective.

Research that conveys and interprets the experiences of others is naturally associated with an interpretive phenomenological study. This methodology was selected over other methodologies because it shares the stories of the participants involved. An IPA study allows for rich descriptions of lived experiences as well as enabling researchers to make interpretations based on the emerging themes regarding the phenomena experienced. The main goal of this research was to share stories and experiences of young American Muslims and relay those experiences to others who may not have access to them.

Participants, Recruitment, and Access

Participants for this research came from a purposeful sample of Muslim high school students from a national competition: Muslim Inter-Scholastic Tournament (MIST). Thousands of students across the nation register for this competition. MIST organizers were requested to send a call to participation flier to their email listservs and on their Facebook page. This initial step enabled the use of non-probability sampling to identify students who are Muslim and attend public schools. This sampling method aided in selectively choosing students with common demographics and who matched the research criteria. The call to participation survey requested
public high school attending students enrolled with MIST in grades 9-12 to volunteer for participation.

This allowed the study to have a more purposeful sampling. The call to participation flier to students was distributed via email, Facebook and/or mail listserv to explain the purpose of the study and to seek consent from both students and parent/guardians. Seven participants were selected for the more in-depth responsive interviews regarding their experiences in schools. Students provided consent forms from themselves and their parents to participate. Additionally, students’ permission was requested to record the interviews. Conducting interviews with minors required the interview to be witnessed by another adult in the interview room. However, if parents felt comfortable they were not required to stay for the duration of the interview. This was for the safety of both the participant and interviewer. Transcriptions of the recorded interview were sent to the participants to ensure that the messages/stories relayed to the interviewer were in fact those intended and not misunderstood. Recordings were destroyed once they were transcribed. Interview confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms instead of the participants’ names and their school name, location, and staff.

This IPA-phenomenology used interviews of five Muslim girls and two Muslim boys who attend American public schools between ninth and twelfth grades. The approximate ages that were targeted for the study were 14-17 years old. The survey sought to inform participants that they might be part of a more focused study to explain the experiences of Muslim youth in public schools a decade post-9/11 (Creswell, 2012). In order to ensure a high response rate, students who filled in the survey received an Amazon gift certificate for $15. All participants of the responsive interviews received $15 gift certificates for being a part of the study.
Data Collection, Storage and Management

Data collection, storage and management are important in any study (Creswell, 2012). Data was collected by the means of responsive interviews, with seven participants identified based on the criteria. Interviews were conducted over Skype or Google Hangouts at an agreed-upon time. The participant determined the location. The allocated time for each one-on one interview was approximately 45 minutes to 60 minutes, and an iPhone app was used to record the interview.

The interviewer took time to review the questions and their order to ensure a smooth delivery as well as smooth transitions with the participant. The interview began with introductions to the study and to the interviewer. The participant was asked if the interview could be recorded. The interview began and ended by thanking the participants for spending some time with the interviewer. It was also mentioned that the shared information would not be used with the intention to harm the interviewee. Each interview and follow-up interview was carefully spaced and scheduled to avoid fatigue on the parts of the interviewer or the interviewee. This enabled the interviewer to provide each participant an attentive interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

The participant at any time had the right to request the recording to stop or to withdraw from the study. After the interview, the participant was notified that the recording would be held confidential and stored in a safe location, accessible by the interviewer only. Once the interviews were transcribed, the audio recording would be destroyed. Only the interviewer had access to these recordings (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The transcriptions and recordings were held in the interviewer’s office under lock and key. Confidentiality was maintained via pseudonyms
of student names, schools’ faculty names and locations of schools. Transcripts were made available to the participant to ensure accuracy of the message conveyed.

**Protection of Subjects**

The purpose of the study was to describe the shared experiences of Muslim Americans in public school systems post-9/11. All participants were given an optional intent to participate in the study. Once the intent to participate was received, an email was sent to the participants to inform them about the details of the study and the purpose it served. Parental consent was also sought for students who were under 18 years of age. Individual meetings with parents and students further explained how the data would be used and consent forms were requested. Participants or parents were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

Each participant and parent received ample information of what the study would consist of and what benefits were to be accomplished via this study. Likewise, all participants were also informed of the minimal risks that could occur during the study and with the data obtained. All participants were informed of the methodology used for the study to ensure that consistent practices were applied and that equal opportunity was prearranged for all participants.

Each participant’s identity remained confidential and findings were reported under pseudonyms. Data gathered from participants remains confidential and the intellectual property of the researcher. Transcription data only included the site of study; all other identifying data was not included to protect the identities of participants. Transcribed data was given to each participant to ensure that the information captured was accurate and was intended. Any changes to the transcribed data were revised afterwards and redistributed for feedback. Transcribed data
will be stored for three years and then destroyed once the study is complete and the designated
time elapsed.

**Trustworthiness, Quality and Verification**

Concepts of trustworthiness and quality are constantly challenged in qualitative studies. In this phenomenology study, it is critical that the data and its methods are triangulated to ensure that the data is transferrable between the researcher and participants. It is important to test whether data can be confirmed rather than seeking the data to be objective (Creswell, 2012). Data in qualitative research is also not necessarily validated; rather, it is held credible or capable of verification. Validation in qualitative research means several things to different researchers. In this study the major concept was to understand the phenomenon behind the experiences of high school as third culture Muslims.

Rich descriptions of experiences allow for a more encapsulating analysis of the phenomena experienced by the participants. These accounts needed flexibility with interpretations as they grew and changed based on the perspectives of the participants. The researcher spent extensive time in the field with participants gathering rich descriptions of the participants’ experiences. Additionally, participants were solicited for their feedback on the accuracy of the data. The findings were verified for intent and meaning. This process allowed participants to have an active voice in developing the data analysis and reporting in the research. This practice ensured that each voice was heard and that the data reliability was high.

It is important for me as the researcher to disclose any researcher bias that may exist. My personal experiences drive this research. As a third culture Muslim student post-Iraqi war, I experienced a general lack of support from school administration and teachers academically and
socially. This perspective allows for me as the researcher to question in depth the emotions of students’ experiences in American public schools. It is essential for me, as a product of the same school system, to disclose my position to establish credibility for the research.

**Role of the Researcher**

As a Muslim American growing up in the United States, I often found it difficult to acculturate into my high school. My parents are from Pakistan and we came to the US in the late 70s. Growing up as a third culture child, there were many things that we adopted from our host culture (American) and many customs that were expected of me to maintain. It is duly noted that third culture kids often endure the acculturation process (Dewaele & Oudenhoven, 2009). By definition, third culture kids are those who have spent the majority of their life outside the parents’ culture. In other words, the first culture is where the parents were originally from; the second culture is that of the host country; the combination of the two creates a third culture (Melles & Schwartz, 2012). The learning and development of third culture kids depends solely on how schools understand the culture and identities of the students they serve.

My parents did not understand the demands of an American school because they did not have the experiences that I was undergoing. There were tremendous amounts of bullying because I looked different, and often I would be too timid to say anything because I did not want to be ridiculed. I did not have a strong relationship with any of my teachers or guidance counselor. In fact, I did not even know what our principal looked like. I just wanted to fit in and be “normal”. At times, I shunned my own identity and began to discount my culture for the sake of the school’s culture. The desire to be accepted took precedence over my own religiosity and academic performance. These conflicting feelings take their toll on one’s emotion and lead to a much lesser desire to do well academically and a greater desire to do well socially.
As a mother I naturally had the same fear for my children. However, times had changed since I was in high school. After the terrorist attacks, many friends and family were hurt by increasing hate crimes and stereotypes. I did not want my children to face these experiences and have them disconnect themselves from their identity as Muslim Americans. The acts of a few do not define an entire group. Therefore, in order for my children to develop a healthier understanding of self, we moved to the Middle East so that their identity could be nurtured and cultivated so that we could return home one day.

I realized that I had to conduct the data gathering for this study very carefully, so as to not impose or ask questions that might lead participants to a particular response. I was fully aware that my experiences affected the types of questions that were asked. I had to ensure that the process in which the information was gathered from my study was valid and reliable, free of these biases.
Chapter 4

Research Questions

The central research questions being asked in this study are for the purposes of exploring lived experiences of Muslim youth in American public high schools given the current social climate of Islamophobia. The questions are:

1. What are the experiences of Muslim adolescents in American public schools?

2. How do they articulate their Muslim identity as public school students?

3. How do they understand their faith identity in the context of their public school experience?

4. How does the public school affect their Muslim identity?

The number of Muslim students adversely affected due to the post-9/11 social climate continues to rise in America. Many Muslim students face contemptuous comments, stares, glares and other not-so-subtle gestures that contribute to their marginalization at school. The CRT theoretical construct frames this phenomenological study and its attempts to best describe and share stories of Muslim adolescents within their social context of American high schools. The voice of Muslim students not only conveys what their experiences are but also how they maintain and negotiate their identities amidst their environments.

Dixon and Rousseau (2006) posit that this type of discourse allows for a more in-depth insight as to micro-aggressions that are experienced on the individual level and macro-aggressions that are imposed by Euro-centric school infrastructures. Allowing these voices a
platform gives the world of scholarship a small window toward understanding the complex layers of how students negotiate their identities as they attend school.

These pertinent research questions are also framed under the theoretical context of the cultural mismatch theory (Neito, 2000). Gaps that exist between the Muslim identity and the school’s hegemonic culture create an imbalance as students strive to uphold and maintain their Muslim identities while successfully acculturating in the school’s environment. As a result, they incessantly have to negotiate who they are with regard to their religious beliefs and the school’s cultural norms. This complex negotiation process is further explained through concepts of integration, separation, marginalization or a combination thereof. These coping methods are employed so that students may continue to attend high school and reap the benefits of education while camouflaging the gaps that exist between the two social constructs.

Profiles of Participants

There were seven students who participated in the study, two boys and five girls. Six students responded from the DC metropolitan area (DC MIST Chapter) and one responded from the Philadelphia area (Philadelphia MIST chapter). All students attend or attended an American public school between grades 9-12 and are between the ages of 14-17. All participants responded to the call to participation flier used for recruitment and represent a variety of perspectives within the greater DC metropolitan area as well as the Philadelphia area. Some of the participants lived with both parents, while some lived in single-parent households. Six of their parents are immigrants and one set of parents is African American. Despite their origins, race and culture they identify themselves as Muslim. None of the participants were from the Arab culture. Four of the five females interviewed wear the hijab (Islam headscarf or veil), while one does not.
Adam. Adam is 17 years old and a senior (Grade 12) in high school. He lives in the greater Philadelphia area. His father is of Indian cultural heritage, while his mother is of Pakistani heritage. His parents were both immigrants to the US, while Adam was born and raised in America. Adam currently lives with his mother in a single-parent household. He attended public school for most of his elementary and middle schooling and only attended grade 9 in public high school. Adam described his middle school and ninth grade years as the most difficult time of his adolescent experience. The constant barrage of condescending comments, name calling and bullying were a daily norm for him. Escalated experiences such as the one below became too much for Adam to bear.

It happened a little earlier than 9th grade, in the 8th grade….it’s like ignorance imbued in a way….someone had touched me with a Bible and said, “Why didn’t you burn”… in that situation I was kind of annoyed, mainly because I’d never been in a …that was the first time where I actually felt mildly offended by something…he said something along the lines of “in the Bible it says…that if you touch a demon with the Bible they will burn.” At that time, I felt irritated and displaced in a way.

Over the course of his schooling, Adam became extremely “indifferent” to the whispers and snide comments. Adam countered their responses with further hurtful words to protect his own feelings of displacement. This made Adam popular but in an unfavorable way. Adam began to thrive on hurting people if they made remarks that he did not approve of. He felt remorse looking back on his actions. However, Adam claimed that if he had not countered with such responses that his own feelings of hurt and vulnerability would have been overriding.
Especially when I started feeling indifferent toward people, I’d stop caring what they said to me…and I’d occasionally mock them…and if I thought what they said was stupid, I’d mock them…and they would get frustrated at me.

I also have generalized the entire public into one viewpoint where …I could have been rude to some people that I wish I would apologize for people now. But I don’t have a chance to do because I can’t find the people that I have hurt…that don’t deserve it.

Adam was compelled to leave his public school due to the relentless bullying and disdainful remarks. Adam and his mother channeled complaints to the appropriate school personnel; however, their attempts were futile.

Several times, I had gone to the principal and counselors and stuff to try and help me out…but if you had told one person to stop then another person would start out and it wouldn’t stop and it was just a constant…by a bunch of different people.

Their efforts were not able to remedy the repeated incidences. Adam currently attends a cyber high school where he finds himself more at peace within his home surroundings. He feels that the school environment did not allow him to focus on his educational needs; instead, the socialization process overwhelmingly interfered with his education.

**Figure 1: Adam’s pictorial representation of his Muslim American identity**
This picture encapsulates Adam’s identity as a Muslim, with the prayer mat as the backdrop to his hobbies. He has a love of gaming and photography, supported within the backdrop of his Muslim identity, which is the prayer mat in the background.

**Nahla.** Nahla is currently a 16-year-old junior (Grade 11) in high school. She lives in the greater DC area in southern Maryland. Nahla’s parents were immigrants from Bangladesh, while she was born in America. Nahla attended Islamic school up to grade 6 and then began public middle school in grade 7. She began wearing hijab in middle school and has continued to wear it into her high school years. Nahla described herself as a Muslim American or an American Muslim. She stated that these terms are interchangeable in her view, because she was born in America and practices Islam.
Nahla desires to be un-noticed when in high school. She feels that despite her religious affiliations she deserves to experience high school as her peers do, without the added pressures of being Muslim. She explained how she receives glares and stares because she covers (hijab) and that she wants to minimize this as much as possible. This is primarily because she does not want to be questioned on her identity nor be mocked because of it.

Just [want] to blend in…I feel like I stand out a lot...because I wear the hijab…I kinda just want to not stand out…just be myself…no stares or anything… …and the questions get annoying sometimes… I remember one time someone was asking me in a mocking way…I’d say…I’d love to answer your questions…but if you are going to ask me in a mocking sense …I don’t think there is a point for me to have a conversation with you.

Nahla’s picture describes her being the center of stares and glares. She explains how students in her high school are constantly singling her out and asking questions about her identity. She wants to blend in and attend high school without the stares that her obvious Muslim identity brings about.

Figure 2: Nahla’s pictorial representation of her Muslim American identity
**Dawood.** Dawood is 17 years old, a senior (Grade 12) in high school. He resides with his mother in the DC metropolitan area in central Maryland. His father is deceased and was Iranian. His mother migrated to the States from Indonesia and still maintains Indonesian cultural practices. Dawood was born in America and describes himself as a Muslim American with Indonesian heritage. Although he has some Persian qualities, he identifies with his Indonesian culture more.

Dawood described that his high school was one of the largest in the county and that it had the second largest Muslim Student Association (MSA) club. He was categorical when describing the community feeling of MIST and then describing the community sense of belonging in high school. Although he drew some similarities, he was emphatically supportive of the MIST ambience and the community building. He felt more sense of belonging to MIST than to his high school environment. Dawood’s message on his identity is clear. He wishes to be known as any other individual with similar likes and dislikes. Figure 3 represents his self-reflection of what his identity is in comparison to his school norms.

**Figure 3: Dawood’s pictorial representation of his Muslim American identity**
Dawood also claimed that middle school was a difficult time for him. As he grew and matured he found the latter years of his high school to be more tolerable and began to accept his social settings more. He explained that during the middle school years, adolescents do not necessarily have the words to express their feelings and identity, whereas in high school, there were more opportunities to develop conversations where he could enlighten others about whom he was and why he chose to do things.

Especially there was time even when no one knew I was a Muslim, I would be on the defensive side…you know, I would feel uncomfortable, especially in middle school…Middle school was a terrible time…I’d always feel like I was on the defensive being a Muslim…but getting into high school and maturing a little…

**Aisha.** Aisha is a 14-year-old freshman (Grade 9) in high school. She resides in the greater DC metropolitan area in central Maryland. Both of her parents are of Pakistani cultural heritage and are actively involved with her schooling. Aisha’s parents are both immigrants, although her father came at a young age and completed his post-secondary schooling in the States. Aisha describes herself as being a Muslim American, identifying her Muslim roots above any cultural roots, whether Pakistani or American. Aisha attends a high school in central MD where there are a limited number of Muslim peers in her grade group.

Aisha wishes to assimilate into the high school environment and not make religion a cause of non-assimilation. Aisha’s parents have certain expectations of her to be modest in her dress, which causes her to face some discomfort as peers question her in school. She often has to explain why she is not allowed to wear shorts or attend events that have clothing expectations different to her modest attire.
Aisha does not wear the hijab. She is afraid to wear the hijab, despite her understanding that it is required by her faith. Figure 4 shows a picture of a girl with a hijab, something that she aspires to be like sometime in the near future. Aisha feels that she is pretty much included with her social circle and fears that by wearing the hijab that she will lose her friends as a result. Additionally, Aisha’s first course of action toward issues that may arise because of her Muslim affiliation is to avoid controversy. She resigns to keeping silent if potentially controversial topics that relate to Islam or Muslims arise in the classroom. Aisha has some strong opinions about how school should support Muslim students. However, she is silenced by not having others as a support group to present her views to school officials. Moreover, she feels a general sense of apathy that anything fruitful with happen as a result, even if sufficient numbers of students voice their concerns.

I guess I just never like thought it wouldn’t make a difference if I said anything. It doesn’t have to be said…sometimes it’s the impression that no one cares…
I don’t think that there would be enough people to support it with me…about the issue because it doesn’t affect them.

**Jabeen.** Jabeen is a 15-year-old sophomore (Grade 10) in high school. Jabeen and her parents are African American. They were all born in the US. Jabeen and her family reside in the DC metropolitan area in central Maryland. Jabeen describes her high school as being relatively diverse, with a moderate Muslim presence. She is the current Vice President of her Muslim Student Association and is an active participant other competitions such as Montessori Model United Nations (MMUN). Jabeen wears the hijab and is often mistaken to have other Asian or Middle-Eastern cultural roots. Her peers are often surprised that she is African American.

Jabeen attended a local Islamic school for approximately four years of her schooling prior to high school. She feels confident in her identity as a Muslim American and feels proud to wear her hijab in support of her identity. Jabeen is active in voicing her opinions and is not shy to seek guidance from school authorities when faced with social difficulties. Jabeen understands that her high school experience is not about conforming to high school social norms; rather, it is a matter of creating an awareness of Muslim norms within the school community.

**Figure 5: Jabeen’s pictorial representation of her Muslim American identity**
In Figure 5, Jabeen describes her photo as “grainy” to show how unclear non-Muslim students are about what it really means to be Muslim. She holds the Quran in her right hand to show that it is her right hand guide for anything in life. She also firmly holds the flag in front of her to showcase that she is an American. Holding the Quran in front of the flag shows that her Islamic identity comes first.

Najah. Najah is currently 16 years old and a senior (Grade 12) in high school. She lives in the greater DC area in southern Maryland. Najah and her parents are immigrants from India. Najah came to the US after completing her second grade year and attended Islamic school up to grade 8. She began public school when she entered high school in ninth grade. She currently wears the hijab and expresses her confidence as a Muslim American. Below in Figure 6, Najah shares a silhouette picture with various words and verses from the Quran to describe her identity.

Figure 6: Najah’s pictorial representation of her Muslim American identity
Najah is the Vice President of the Muslim Student Association in her school and is in a school where many Muslim students attend. Her high school is fully aware of the Muslim prayer needs and accommodates this willingly for students who desire a place to pray. Additionally, institutions such as Council of American Islamic Relations worked with their organization to help bring further awareness to their school. Najah describes herself as having a “no-nonsense” personality.

I don’t think I have to apologize for being Muslim…for example, I wear a headscarf...I don’t have to apologize to others that I wear a headscarf…that I am guess not like them…because headscarf is technically my own decision… it was my own decision and I don’t have to apologize for my own decision.

Zaynab. Zaynab is currently 16 years old and a junior (Grade 11) in high school. She lives in the greater DC area in southern Maryland. Zaynab was born and raised in America, while her parents are immigrants from Bangladesh. Zaynab was in Islamic schools for five years prior to attending middle school in Maryland. She currently wears the hijab and expresses her confidence as a Muslim American. In Figure 7, Zaynab portrays her image with a Quran in her hand and a hijab that signifies her Islamic identity. Behind her she proudly conveys both her American identity and her Bengali heritage.

Zaynab is an active member of the Muslim Student Association at her high school. She takes part in other diversity-related clubs to be able to express her stance on particular issues in a safe, controlled environment. However, in the larger context of the school community she understands that not everyone is open to these types of discussions. She surrounds herself with a supportive social circle and does not involve herself with those who misinterpret her faith.
Zaynab also proudly wears the hijab in school and claims that this is how she represents her faith to others.

**Figure 7: Zaynab’s pictorial representation of her Muslim American identity**

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year in Public High School/Grade</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Parents’ cultural heritage</th>
<th>Did parents immigrate here?</th>
<th>Geographic Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Senior / 12th grade</td>
<td>America</td>
<td>(F) Indian (M) Pakistani</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Nahla</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Junior / 11th grade</td>
<td>America</td>
<td>(F) Bengali (M) Bengali</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>DC Metro area-Southern Maryland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Salient Muslim Identity of Participants

All seven participants identified themselves as Muslims first and foremost. All participants, with the exception of one, were born in America and all identified themselves as Americans. All sets of parents, with the exception of one, had different ethnic origins. No participants were of Arab cultural descent. Despite various cultural affiliations, students did not identify themselves with their heritage culture. Instead, all participants dropped the culture of origin when identifying themselves and actively chose to identify themselves as Muslim Americans. All participants partook in MIST competitions, which is widely known as a tournament heavily entwined with Islamic beliefs and themes.
All participants ascribed to having a salient Muslim identity, in which where they adhered to the five pillars of Islam in daily life, as they discussed what it was to be a Muslim. Five of the six female participants wore the hijab, while the sixth one acknowledged that she is trying to prepare herself to wear it soon in the future. Nahla described that being a Muslim for her was to put her faith before every decision to take part in school culture despite the temptations that exist. Dawood discussed his belief of being a Muslim:

A Muslim basically means that you believe in one God and the last messenger is Muhammad (sallahu alayhi wasalaam), and you try your best to follow the five pillars, and try …to do what God commanded us to do, which is the five pillars and kindness to others, and help your fellow Muslims, your brothers and sisters in Islam.

I can firmly say that I am proud to express my Muslim identity and beliefs…um, most everyone at school knows I am a Muslim. I’d even say salaams to people in the hallway that aren’t even Muslim; at football games--I wear a kufi to high school football games to show spirit...some days, I feel like wearing a thobe to school…they laugh…they like it...something different….I’m very proud to be Muslim in my school. I express that I am Muslim.

Aisha describes being Muslim as

[praying] 5 times a day, I know how to read the Quran and I read it regularly. I attended Saturday school at my mosque for about eight years, I guess pretty religious… I think religion is an important thing. I take it seriously and it’s an important part of life.
Muslim Identity Support in School

**Explicit Identity in Curriculum.** Douglass and Dunn (2003) assert that a curriculum should be reflective and inclusive of the diversity that exists in the classroom. Instead, our curriculum and infrastructure is still based on Euro-centric ideologies of what knowledge and pedagogy students need to have. Douglass and Dunn (2003) further claim that Islam and Muslims in general have been represented with the bare facts and often the facts are misrepresented and sometimes out of context. Adam states that his experiences were similar to the above assertions.

I’ve seen this a handful at any given point. Thomas Jefferson was the first person to hold the Iftar in the White House and the only other thing, Islam was represented the same year in Algebra class [when it was asked] who had made Algebra and the answer was Al Jabr. I don’t remember Islam being celebrated or mentioned or anything else like that in history books…I remember the year after I had taken a world religion course and I felt that that section didn’t explain anything well enough like they explained some of the other religions…and it was actually misrepresented.

Najah claims that in school there is an increasing amount of Islam in the textbooks when it comes to world religions in World History class. She feels that significant milestones and the basic tenets of Islam are taught. For the most part, the basic tenets are accurate, she states; however, the finer details are miscommunicated and are in fact errors in the textbook. She and her friend looked at the author’s background and searched for possible sources of this information and there was no citation of an Islamic author or source within the book.
We do cover Islamic history just like Buddhism or Christianity. In world history we cover Islamic history and all other world religions…we cover the five pillars of Islam…we covered the Prophet’s (sallahu alay wasalaam) wife…. brief main events…and caliph: Abu Bakr, Umar and Ali… and the Umayyad dynasty …! Not all [the facts were accurate] … I remember the Israa wa Miraj- the event was not covered with the correct details. They wrote that the Prophet went to heaven, met God and then came down…also the author of the textbook was not Muslim and I checked in the back…with anyone with a Muslim sounding name or anything cited and me and my friend were just talking about it.

Nahla asserts that teachers ensure that they are teaching the correct information by asking students to verify what is in the textbook. Although this approach is well intentioned, it does not guarantee the authenticity of the information, nor does it ensure consistent delivery across classrooms.

Sometimes…there are some fallacies in the textbook and I point it out to our teacher…you know, she knows that I am Muslim and that she knows that I am probably right and that the textbook is probably wrong. So she teaches what the Muslims correct her with…and there are other Muslims in class so they also point out the fallacies…and she teaches what we tell her…so she asks us to point out if there are any mistakes because she doesn’t want to teach the wrong stuff.

Implicit Identity in the Null Curriculum. Muslim students are underrepresented in the explicit curriculum. However, in the null curriculum they are minimally represented, if at all. All participants responded in the negative when asked if they saw Islamic values or Muslim representation in daily school operations. Two participants
mentioned that one of their teachers was Muslim and this bolstered their confidence and sense of security in the class. Other than Muslim faculty, students mentioned that there was no mention of Islamic holidays or representation in school events.

Jabeen noted there was a lack of Muslim values accounted for when deciding what events took place in school. She remarked that the only event that there was some representation was in the ninth grade orientation where they were given a booth for the MSA. Dawood explained how schools should be a place where students are exposed to reality and put in situations where many different people have to mix and work together. Instead, schools are blithe with regard to the hidden curriculum offered by the privileged school environment.

…I just feel as if the school…they make us [focused] on grades and not help us to focus on building us as a person…or face reality…in reality your grade doesn’t really matter; it’s your ambition…I feel as though we could find ourselves in our group more… I do feel that they tend to certain demographics of students because [they] get more support… because they get more benefits out of it…because more of the wealthy students are the white students so they get more…because a lot of social media…and they pick more of the pictures of the whites and helps them show the school spirit… [observed in his school money was allocated to those who had the majority of voices].

Aisha underscored how other religions are “baked” into the school culture because of the individuals developing the programs and making policy decisions.
School Schedule

**Salat (Prayer).** Islam requires its followers to adhere to the five basic pillars of Islam. One of the pillars of Islam is the commandment of the five daily prayers. The afternoon prayer is what is referred to as the Dhur Salah and the late afternoon prayers are referred to as ‘Asr. The prayers are timed according to the position of the sun. The time of all the prayers fluctuates depending on Daylight Savings Time. This in turn causes students to sometimes miss their prayers while in school because of the school schedule. Since the period to pray has a short window of opportunity, the school schedule needs to be able to accommodate the timings so that students can offer prayer on time. During Daylight Savings Time, students may miss Dhur prayer because the window shortens and the time for the late afternoon prayer begins.

All participants struggled with prayer while in school. There was a mix of sentiments, with a wide range of responses, when asked about prayer accommodations. Aisha claimed that she just waited to go home and pray or during daylight savings she takes a note from her mother so that a teacher can offer some space for her to pray. Najah’s school had more history of Muslim students allowed for a designated prayer room in the library to offer prayer. Students not only struggled with a location to pray but also the schedule itself.

Islamic prayers require ablution (cleansing or washing) prior to prayer. The ablution and prayer require more time than the allocated transition times in between classes. Students were creative about fitting in their prayers; however, this required them to seek permission to be late to class. Some students felt comfortable to ask their teachers while others did not feel that teachers and administrators would be as accommodating. Aisha felt that

> [it] should [made] it clear that…I’s known that Islam requires prayer five times a day…I think they should make it known that there is place for Muslim
kids to go to pray…and sometimes…there are after-school events and I don’t
get home in time to pray and I would have to make up dhur and asr at the
same time…and so I think they should make it where there is a place to go to
pray and not everyone should just have to reach out to the teachers…they
should reach out to the students and offer. I think if the teachers at my school
reached out to our students and it’s not something and made it clear that it’s
not something that should be a big deal to ask…and it should be available to
students…it is a school that is meant for all religions and for everyone to go
to…so that should be available.

Zaynab also shared similar views to that of Aisha. Missing a prayer for any Muslim is
seen as missing one of the key commandments of God. Therefore, the prayer times are watched
and closely monitored. This sense of urgency is with students within an environment where their
struggle may not even be known, much less valued. Zaynab feels teachers should be more
accommodating to these requests.

I guess…one issue that goes on in my school is the prayer time…and because
of Daylight Savings Time Dhur comes in early and a lot of students have class
at that time and by the time school ends they miss the dhur time and the
teachers don’t give them that ability to get out and pray…and that should be fixed.

Jabeen stated the following when we discussed how prayer was dealt with in her
school:

Last year, I actually started the prayer at school because I would go to pray in a
small closet…I know that sounds like something out of book, or I would pray in
the front office...and one day when I was done praying one of the administration ladies--they were just like we’ve had other people to come to pray...and she asked me if there were other people that wanted to come to pray...because I have gotten approached and asked where do you go to pray and stuff like that...and they basically gave us a room to go into the library to go and pray...

Dawood mentioned that while his school allows a Muslim Student Association (MSA) club, facilities to pray are not offered by the school. One of the teachers allows students who wish to pray to do so in her classroom. This sentiment was an overarching theme in six of the seven interviews. Najah’s high school in southern Maryland was the only school that had proactively provided a place to pray for students. Nahla mentioned that in her high school there was a gracious teacher who allowed them to pray both the afternoon prayer and the Friday prayer in her classroom. However, this was of the teacher’s her own accord and not an accommodation made by school officials.

**Jummah (Friday Congregational Prayer).** Muslims all around the world observe the Friday prayer. Friday prayer is obligatory for men to listen to the khutbah (sermon) and attend the congregational prayers. Muslim boys often face difficulties in being released from school to attend these prayers due the restrictions of the school’s schedule. The common accommodation for students has been to conduct their own khutbah and prayer at their school. However, only one of the schools in this study provided an authorized space for the Friday prayer to occur in congregation. Two other teachers provided their classroom space, and the remaining students had to forgo the Friday prayer, which is a key religious obligation. No accommodations within these schools have been made to ensure Muslim boys and girls are able to adhere to this
religious calling. Dawood felt strongly about providing a solution to this issue. He expressed with regards to Jummah prayer,

Not formally, like they offered us a place to pray…like it was a teacher out of the goodness of her heart--you know lets us use her room to pray and lets us use the room for different types of meetings and such…If it wasn’t for the teacher we wouldn’t be able to…only because of the this teacher allows us to…the school wouldn’t give us a room. We are currently…but if it wasn’t for this teacher we wouldn’t be able to.

**Islamic Holidays.** Muslims celebrate two main holidays a year, Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul Adha. Eid ul Fitr is the holiday Muslims celebrate after the month-long fasting in the lunar month of Ramadan. Muslims fast from dusk to dawn for approximately 29-30 days (depending on the lunar month). At the end of this month they celebrate with festivities and family gatherings. During Ramadan, Muslims are engaged with worship, especially the last 10 nights, where the worship intensifies due to religious significance. Eid ul Adha is the second holiday and holds significant religious importance within Islamic beliefs. Neither Eid day is recognized as a public holiday and time away from school is not allocated.

Students are expected to maintain normal studies, schedules, due dates, and assignments during their religious holidays if either Eid is on a weekday. This has caused the Muslim community of southern Maryland to appeal to the Board of Education and request to have Eid as an official holiday. Their argument was that this was preceded by having other religious holidays as time off on the school calendar. According to the Washington Post, Muslim students are allowed to take excused days off; however, “many say they fall behind in classes and should not be forced to choose between their faith and their education.”
Instead of allowing for these religious days the local government stripped all religious names from holidays while maintaining the time off on the calendars. Dawood referenced this event in his interview.

There has been a big conflict with the Muslim community trying to push for a day off for the Eids and they wouldn’t allow it… but instead they took away the religious names… they wouldn’t say Christmas break… they would say Winter break… and they wouldn’t say Easter… they would say day off because of a holiday… and caused a lot of conflict in the Muslim community because they wanted Eid as a day off.

Dawood mentioned that he felt this to be a political conflict and as long as his teachers provided support by extending deadlines and postponing assessments he was all right with the decision. In contrast, Aisha expressed that this double standard is unfair to her and other fellow Muslims. She states,

I think it’s unfair… because it should be given the same rights… because you have to … I’ve missed school times before, and I’d have to make up the work… and things that other people don’t have to do when they miss their holidays… they get a day off from school… and teachers will give them no homework… because it’s Hanukah and things like that… but they don’t do the same thing for Muslims when they have holidays.

Nonetheless, this leaves the ongoing dilemma of ensuring that all teachers will act mindfully toward the needs of Muslim students during their religious holidays.
School Services

Canteen Services. Muslim students who observe specific dietary requirements need some accommodations with regard to the canteen services offered in schools. Muslims are prohibited to consume any pork or pork byproducts. Similar to the Jewish meat requirements of Kosher, Muslims also have requirements as to the manner in which the meat should be slaughtered in order for it to be considered Halal (permissible) prior to being consumed.

Muslim students in schools are often faced with limited to no options on the menu. Even the side items that sometimes contain gelatin (most often a pork byproduct) are not an option for Muslim students. Muslim families must read the ingredients to many food items prior to purchasing to ensure that the food meets the religious expectations. Ingredients and other information regarding the food served in high school cafeterias is not an offered service.

Aisha stated that she does not eat from the cafeteria because her school does not provide a Halal option, nor do they provide a vegetarian option.

I don’t buy lunch…they don’t have any [options]…actually, they don’t have vegetarian options…that’s why I don’t really buy lunch, because we eat only [halal] meat.

The majority of the participants mentioned that their schools do not provide viable options for Muslim students. It seems that hot lunches from school cafeterias are a universal problem that transcend all religious bounds.

Dress-code Accommodations. Muslim dress codes for both males and females require loose, modest clothing. In this study the male participants did not allude to dress codes causing
any problems or interfering with their schooling. In fact, Dawood stated that he was able to wear thobes (traditional Islamic garb) to school if he wanted to without any hesitation.

For women, Islam requires loose-fitting clothing that covers the full arms, legs, neck and hair. Therefore, girls in particular face some challenges when in the public school system based on hegemonic traditions. Hijab was worn by five of the six participants, and they felt comfortable in wearing this religious symbol as a daily part of their school attire. In physical education class girls are compelled to wear the PE uniform in order to comply with school uniform rules. Female participants in this study were creative with solutions. They wore pants or leggings under the shorts and a long-sleeve t-shirt under the PE shirt to comply with both school and religious requirements.

The alteration of the school uniform often becomes a source of teasing and mocking for Muslim females. However, all females in this study indicated that they have amended the uniform to comply with religious and school needs. Their teachers had been informed of this need. All of their teachers were more than accommodating to the variations they wore in addition to the PE uniform.

**Negotiating Identity**

Berry (2005) claimed that individuals undergo an acculturation process while being in two cultures as they either try to assimilate, integrate, separate or end up being marginalized. Berry (2005) further posited that integration is when individuals hold on to their cultural beliefs and norms while interacting daily with those of a second culture. Dawood gives an example of how he has integrated into his high school culture by holding on his physical appearance, dress, and religious values while going to school. He shares with us that he has interfaith dialogue and encourages the MSA in his school for after-school prayers. Dawood shared the following:
Northwest is the second biggest high school in Montgomery county and it has a population of over 2000 kids and it’s very diverse …we have people from many different races and beliefs…we have the average White American, Protestant Catholic, Indians who are either Hindu or are practicing Sikhism, …a large Jewish community too, and the Christians also come together and form a club…they have a Christian fellowship club and they are really interested in talking…we try to talk to have an interfaith dialogue and so the minds are very open…so there isn’t a lot of ignorance and [there is] a lot of tolerance.

Figure 8: Acculturation strategies in ethno-cultural groups, and in the larger society (Berry, 2005)

**Conforming vs. Assimilation.** All of the participants are on various points of this spectrum and have determined coping strategies to help them through their high school experience. All of the participants shared how they integrated some of their religious beliefs into their school life and vice versa, some of their school culture into their Muslim identity. For example, Adam claims that he has had to alter some of his personality to suit the school environment versus his home environment.
I feel like I’m the exact same person in terms of…at home and at school…I feel like I was the exact same person…the only thing that would change is my tone of voice. Where…at home, more comfortable environment, I speak in a different tone, but when I was in public I would speak in a less loud voice…it’s just how I feel comfortable talking…but in public I would speak quieter or less strongly. Or speak softly…I find it difficult to talk out loud. I don’t know…I find it difficult to talk out loud sometimes …but at home I felt more comfortable and I talk very mildly.

Aisha felt tempted at one point to conform to the social pressures at school at the expense of her religious identity. However, she quickly caught herself and did not follow through on the pressure.

I think a few years ago we all were doing a project where we all had to do a play [and] we all had to wear different costumes…it was decided that the girls would wear jean shorts with a tee shirt and the guys something else…I was avoiding to wear shorts because I didn’t feel comfortable…it was in middle school and I didn’t want to tell them I wasn’t allowed to wear shorts…because I was scared they would make fun of me…so I just avoided it and said I don’t have any and I don’t think that I could bring it in by tomorrow. I was tempted then and then…I just ended up wearing jeans.

In an effort to not have that dual identity she admittedly states that she has been witness to other Muslims in that predicament, but she does not condone this for herself.
I know people who have done that and I’m not necessarily friends with and I know because people that are Muslim and do that…or people who do things that parents don’t necessarily approve of because of their family background…I’ve seen it before…and I know people who do that…at school and home they are two different people.

Dawood, who is now a senior, had conformed to social pressures early on in high school, when he was in ninth grade. He wanted to fit in and be accepted by his peers. He shares that his experiences have caused him to be a better Muslim today.

Back in 9th and 10th grade… I was pretty innocent till ninth grade…Ninth grade I’d never kissed a girl or anything like that…I was actually afraid of girls…but when you go into high school it’s such a different environment…and then I got a girlfriend in ninth grade for two months…it was such a pity relationship and I hadn’t ever [had] a relationship since then…10th grade… I met friends that I shouldn’t have… I essentially became a pot head…I pulled myself out of that…when I went to Indonesia the summer after 10th grade and I realized there is so much more to life and how far I was away from Islam….so I did do stuff but in the end I grew into a better person because of it.

When Dawood was asked why he felt the need to conform to the pressure he simply stated,

Because you want to be part of the tribe and you don’t want to feel left out and something different and experience the tribal experiences.
Jabeen claimed that she did not conform to the social pressures of high school. She did try to adapt certain things like clothing and language to assimilate better and be accepted by her peers. According to Jabeen she adjusted her language to incorporate more slang, she cursed occasionally and she adjusted the way she wore her hijab. She would sometimes wear it as a turban, showing her neck, or she would allow her bangs to show.

With the non Muslim girls…it's definitely where I like to wear eyeliner or knee-high dresses with skinny jeans or leggings...definitely how I speak; I use more slang…and when I first started public school, I did not understand the slang at all, and then I started to pick it up and then I started to use it…and definitely the way I talk at school is different.

Hijab

Hijab is mandatory for women in Islam. This is the act of covering the hair, neck and ears from people other than your immediate family. Hijab is considered an act of modesty in Islam. Contrary to popular belief, hijab is not a tool to oppress women; rather, it is a tool to liberate women and acknowledge them for their intellect and not for their appearance. Five of the six participants in this study wore the hijab to their school. For each of them the hijab served as a religious symbol of Islam, which has caused varying reactions within their school community.

Jabeen talks about the hijab and states that it is the first thing that is looked at, before anything else. She claims that when others refer to her hijab in a less than positive light it can shake her confidence.

I remember I would wear hijab in a turban…so that I would show my neck….or show my bangs a little bit…so they would know that I’m not bald…because I have
gotten a couple of questions on that too, but it was in a joking way...a couple of my non-Muslim friends did defend me on that...and a guy said...ok you don’t shower with that on, right...Just clarifying...and a couple of my non-Muslim friends would say [sarcastically], ‘Oh yeah, she totally does.’

Jabeen further states that she feels less than respected when others choose not to associate themselves with her because of the hijab.

Me wearing hijab...some girls don’t talk to me at all...like they don’t want to associate themselves with me...so I went to [principal] and addressed the fact that there needs to be a clarification of respect at school, because I don’t feel respected...as much as I should...and I have asked other students in my MSA, and they feel the same way; they are not respected the same way other kids are...I don’t feel that I get the same respect with me being Muslim at all...because the first thing they see is me wearing hijab and they don’t see anything else...the first thing they see is a big bomb covering my head...like they are so scared of me and that makes me disrespected that they don’t take me as a person first. I feel agitated, I feel they should be more educated than that...what they say is ignorant. And you should learn something before you say something.

Zaynab was also teased about her hijab and was asked several derogatory questions. She felt compelled to address this with her school counselor.

I remember at that time...because it was my first year wearing it...I did feel upset about it and I went to my counselor [to] talk about it...and she called the person
that did call me that…it was a guy and he was like I was just joking around and I didn’t mean it…ever since then he didn’t say anything…but I’m not exactly still thinks that way.

Aisha currently does not wear the hijab; however, she shares her views on what effects hijab would have on her school life.

I don’t think I would be picked on…it just would be harder to make friends…to be myself in front of other people …and because like going to high school …it was barely anyone from my middle school…so it was almost all new people…I made all new friends and things like that…and if I wore hijab it would take longer to make friends…and that’s not why I didn’t wear it…but it’s just if I did wear it, [it] would just take longer and I would be more self-conscious that everyone is secretly judging me.

Nahla wears the hijab, yet she relentlessly feels that she is standing out in the crowd. She is frequently asked questions about it and she feels that when she is asked repetitively she stands out more. She wishes to

…just to blend in…I feel like I stand out a lot...because I wear the hijab…I kinda just want to not stand out…just be myself…no stares or anything.

Sense of Belonging

**MIST Environment.** All participants expressed not only an understanding of being Muslim but also a longing to belong to an environment. For Najah, MIST provided the platform where students could identify with one another and feel comfortable to
express their views on a variety of topics, all while maintaining an academic learning environment as they do in school.

Personally, MIST provides a Muslim American culture because the default that many of the competitors are coming from a public HS. Although there are private HS that participate at MIST, the majority is public school kids. To me they are trying to build a bridge between our public school environments and bringing in Islamic values more Islam into it…through the workshops, through the way we interact with the judges, with the coaches, with everyone. I feel like MIST is trying to fill in the gap that many public school students, that even what I feel…there is not a lot of Islam directly visible in a public school. I think DC MIST does that.

Jabeen shared that she also takes part in the MMUN, which is primarily a non-Muslim competition setting. She felt anxious when competing in such a setting because of her hijab. In this case, she was worried about being judged for her appearance as opposed to being judged for her argument while competing. Jabeen did not feel this when she was competing with MIST.

Within the MIST environment she experienced that the competitors were listening to her authentic ideas and rated her for her genuine arguments. These distracting thoughts or worries took away from the MMUN competition setting, claims Jabeen. In contrast MIST provided Jabeen with a sense of relief that these distractions did not exist. She could focus on the task at hand and any favorable or adverse result was that of her effort and not her appearance.

Being around other Muslims…because I also compete in MMUN, and it’s mostly non-Muslims that compete. I wear hijab so it sometimes feels eerie competing…because I feel like they are thinking of me wearing hijab or the
latest news…cast about Muslims or anything. They don’t take what I say seriously and when I’m at MIST I feel they take what I say seriously…I feel safer just in the fact that…my mom always raised me that I have to be protected…and I need to make sure that I protect myself, especially living in America…there are so many different cultures and because there are so many different cultures there are so many different stereotypes and you may not know about…what they think of Muslims…and when you are around other Muslims you can be at one with them and you can be in one group…and with everyone that is dressed like you…although not everyone in MIST is Muslim but you know that they respect Muslims because it’s MIST (Muslim interscholastic tournament)….so they knew what they were getting into so they pretty much have to respect Muslims.

Nahla had similar views in that she felt a heightened sense of comfort when in MIST as opposed to her high school setting. She claimed to be comfortable and in a position to express herself more freely, whereas in high school she has a more ‘keep to myself’ type of personality.

I appreciate the MIST culture because there is just more…I can be me…I can be a Muslim person without the fear that people are going to judge me for being too Muslim or something…that’s why I feel more comfortable…with MIST…[in school I have a] Kind of keep to myself personality…not trying to express what I am that much…but in the MIST community I can express myself more….Well, when I’m at MIST I can control what I can do…but I can control myself…by at school people’s opinions control me more and I’m not comfortable with that.
In addition to the already-mentioned feelings of comfort, Adam added that MIST was more of a welcoming environment when compared to the public school scene. He described how in public school he was looked down upon and his ideas were minimized, whereas at MIST they were more openly acknowledged.

I like the environment it gets me into…it’s a really public place I guess that it lets me mingle with a bunch of other people that are like me…in the sense that we have the same thing in common, we are all Muslims. We are just come together…some people do it for fun…some people do it to interact with each other and some people do it to win, but I just find the environment comfortable to be in…I felt like I was more invited instead of rejected in a sense. Where in groups of people I would be looked down upon or kind of passed away… at MIST I was able to just kind of walk into place and I was able to converse with people without being looked down upon.

Dawood shared how MIST to him meant being surrounded by Muslim community, something that he has longed for in his daily life.

I wanted to be in MIST not just for the competition, but for the Muslim community and how they all come together and act friendly, and it makes you feel like you are in an actual Muslim community, and like everyone in that room is your fellow Muslim brother or sister. I felt that community feel which I always wanted, growing up as a Muslim American.
Fear of Othering

The academic achievement pressures placed upon adolescents today by home and school, coupled with the existing toxic social environment, is not conducive for success. Muslim youth are expected by parents to maintain a healthy and positive image as they attend school while there is limited school infrastructure in place. Additionally, since Muslim students do not identify themselves readily in the school’s academic curriculum implicitly or explicitly, they feel excluded from citizenship in the social construct of their high school. Every stakeholder in this equation accepts that the need for education is vital and mandated. Given the forced nature of this scenario, school officials create social enclaves that are imposed upon parents and students who have no other viable options for schooling.

**Feeling Silenced.** In conversations with the participants about acts of terror, students felt proud to be Muslim and wanted nothing more than to be disassociated with such radical behavior. Aisha acknowledges that people only follow what they hear on the media and react to that in her school.

…[when] things like ISIS come up and things like that they make it obvious that Muslims are involved. I want to say that they are not actually using the rules of Islam when they are doing those things because they are not…taking the wrong idea of it…but I don’t want to say anything because it can cause controversy…

Jabeen was quick to identify how media perpetuates the negative images of Muslims. However, she also noticed how teachers sustained these false images and associations when in class. Jabeen recalls in her English class they were learning about Malalah Yusuf and the teacher insisted on using the term Muslim extremist groups.
We were leaning about Malalah Yusuf Zia…and the people in the class knew who she was…and they don’t really identify her as being Muslim and even though in our packets it says that she was Muslim…that she was attacked by the Taliban…and it made them think whoa, she’s Muslim being attacked by other Muslims…so when the teacher was explaining everything she skipped over so much and she started saying how the Taliban was a Muslim extremist group and I wanted to address the fact that like sometimes you can’t identify [groups] as a Muslim extremist group just because they identified them as a Muslims…it doesn’t mean what they are doing is right…and you can’t put the word Muslim in front of extremist; it brings a bad name to other Muslims… and I didn’t know how to say that without being disrespectful to the teacher.

Jabeen provided another example from her government class. A discussion evolved from a topic that referenced Barack Obama’s religious affiliations. To her surprise, the teacher initiated the following comment:

When I was in government class and we were talking about Barack Obama…and someone said…if Barack Obama identified himself as a Muslim would everyone hate him more…my government teacher was the first one to say ‘everyone would hate him.’ I was ok with that…and then kids started to say, I hate Muslims so much and there was me and one other Muslim girl in class and I kind of felt like I was excluded …And after that point in government class no one would talk to me…at all…and the other Muslim girl…our friends were on that side of the classroom and I was around people that I had never met before…so they weren’t really open-minded to talking to me…I would turn to the person next to me [and
ask] ‘what page are we on’ and they would tell me but then they would say it [in]
like an ‘I don’t want to talk to kind of way.’

Dawood felt that being silenced was not only about keeping quiet during times of
controversy. He understands that there is a time and place to have discussion. However,
he insisted that the other person should be open to having a discussion that represents
both sides. He admittedly declared that his middle school years were the most difficult
for him in terms of expressing his Islamic identity. During those years Dawood felt
defensive of his faith due to verbal taunting and as a result felt that he did not have the
words to adequately defend his beliefs. Therefore, he chose to be silent when he
encountered these less than understanding interactions.

Let’s say eighth, ninth and …it ended about tenth grade….eighth or ninth grade I
felt more silenced….uh, because it’s [hesitation] hard expressing…what you
believe in at that time and it’s not the same as other people think and…you get
looked down upon and treated differently.

Keeping the Peace. Zaynab claimed that if one is a Muslim in school then everything
they say and do is associated with Islam. For her it is critical to think twice before she decides to
speak, offer her varying views, or even agree with the discussion at hand. Dawood’s experiences
from this year’s debate class depicted how it was better for him to stay quiet on gay and lesbian
marriages because of his clear Islamic views tied to the topic.

…I am in debate class and you know the topic in debate class was legalizing gay
marriage… and you know that is a tough subject to talk about and I didn’t really
want to talk about my opinion because I am Muslim because a lot of kids would
just not like to hear it…they wouldn’t like to hear that it would be different from theirs…another time where we were talking about the death penalty and some kids were saying to completely outright abolish it and some and I was like in some situations it could be allowed and they didn’t really like it. I didn’t share because most of the kids in that class were liberals and there were gays and lesbians in that class…so I really didn’t want to offend or seem to offend people…and it would only escalate the situation…so I just kept it to myself.

Several participants shared similar experiences of just refraining from sharing their opinions because it would not go over well with the students in their class. For example, Jabeen cites a scenario in her government class where she was given an assignment in which she had to embody a role model figure and have a debate with another classmate the following class session. Jabeen chose her debate to be on Queen Noor, the ruling lady of Jordan. She researched the leader and was adequately prepared for the debate. Jabeen stated,

There was a class called leadership and I was the only freshman in that class of juniors and seniors…and we had to do a debate competition and we had to represent a leader in the world or who we thought who was a leader.. and some people chose their mom or their dad…and I chose Queen Noor of Jordan. She was originally an American and originally a Christian and she converted to Islam…she met the King and they got married …and when I was debating basically…what became a trend in the debating process was to slander the other leader…and I did not do it at all and I did not say anything mean, because I felt if I was going to win the debate, I should not have to share anything mean about the person…so the guy I was debating against…says ‘Queen Noor follows Islam and
they are forced to cover’…and he said a couple of other mean things about 
Islam…and I looked at the teacher and she didn’t do anything...she was just
laughing ..and I was like really, you’re not going to do anything about it and a lot
of the kids were looking around saying wow that was a low blow and that’s not
funny...he ended up winning the debate because of that...and I was just like that’s
not fair...because they didn’t come prepared for the debate...they didn’t prepare
on their leader at all… all they did was slander Queen Noor...and you know what,
that’s not fair….I feel like I should have won because I had all my facts down and
worked really hard and they just came up there...started to say so many bad
things about Islam…and won.

Jabeen took a risk and chose a prominent figure that she could identify with and felt that
was condemned in the class not only by her classmates, but also her teacher. She reflects that the
safe and secure environment of the classroom was compromised because the teacher enabled and
sustained the debate against her.

Aisha mentioned that she stays clear of discussions on religion while interacting in
classes and school. She described a time where students were complaining about their own
holidays not being talked about enough. She quietly listened and formulated her opinions but out
of low self-confidence did not comment what was on her mind. Aisha describes the scenario as
follows:

I think maybe a time when they talk about the things going on between Palestine
and times like that…when they were talking about that issue. Sometimes I wanted
to say my opinion about it, because I thought of a lot of different things than what
other people thought about it…and sometimes when people would bring up things
about Hanukah not being talked about enough, I’ll want to say how Eid is talked about even less in school. Because during Christmas time they will mention both Hanukah and Christmas but they have nothing to say about Eid during that time, … sometimes not sharing your point of view is easier so that you don’t have to explain yourself later.

Protecting Image of Islam. Due to media influence, Muslim students in this study felt that they were already starting at a disadvantaged position with peers and school officials. Therefore, it was imperative to put the best image and principles of Islam forward as they interacted with their non-Muslim peers and teachers. Moreover, students felt that this was the time to preserve the image of their faith so that it was not misconstrued any further than it already had been. Najah explained how her passionate discussions were sometimes muted because she did not want to give a skewed impression of Islam.

In my English research class we were talking about the Charlie Hebdo incident… and we were having an open conversation….but he was asking our opinions and I chose to be silent …a lot of people don’t understand Islam’s point of view…so I didn’t want to offend anyone or give anyone a bad image of Islam in case I expressed my opinion incorrectly…people changing their point of view of me, you know … I don’t know…I feel like even if I do express my views…I’m scared that something else will come out of my mouth…because whenever I get passionate about anything a lot of my friends say that there is no filter; something else will come out of my mouth and I say everything that is on my mind…but then that is me choosing to be silent and I feel like it might have a bad image on the Muslims… Even when it’s not a current events topic and I am asked my opinion I
have to think twice...because of 9/11 and all other Muslim related issues, problems, and events that are happening around the world or that did happen...I do know whatever I say, whatever I wear...anything that I do is automatically associated with Muslims so I felt like if I did stay quiet that would be better than to speak.

Najah further elaborated that it was not just fear of giving a wrong impression but she also felt that peers were not open-minded and willing to listen. Dawood further added that he did not want his peers to have a damaging view of Islam as a result of his own shortcomings of understanding Islamic principles.

A lot of people don’t understand Islam’s point of view...so I didn’t want to offend anyone or give anyone a bad image of Islam in case I expressed my opinion incorrectly...people changing their point of view of me you know...like I thought he was a fun kid and all but he had this point of view...

**Feeling Marginalized by Peers**

Cohen et al. (2006) argued that academic achievements could only be developed in conjunction with a healthy social and emotional disposition. He further asserted that social, emotional, ethical and two main areas of concentration--pedagogy and assessment and mental health--shape academic education.

Nahla described how her high school has a MSA and they accommodate for the Jummah prayer after school is finished. They do not have the khutbah (sermon) but they do have a location to pray. However, Nahla described her discomfort in going to pray. She claimed that the prayer was not common knowledge and if anyone saw the Muslims going into a room to pray they would judge her as being “too Muslim”. Nahla at some level was afraid to fulfill her
obligations to pray out of fear of being labeled or judged; therefore, she chose to keep this clandestine.

It's not a known thing…but if someone knew about it..I would kinda feel ashamed…shy about it…because you're being too Muslim…you're being too much of this…you know how people are like that….all] because you're going to Jummah. You’re being too Muslim because you’re being lumped in with the extremists.

Dawood further explained how the teasing began for him in middle school and how as a Muslim he was constantly viewed as an extremist or terrorist. In middle school Dawood was unable to have discussions with his peers. He either felt silenced or had to be defensive because of his Islamic beliefs.

... an average American hears you are Muslim, the first thing that comes to their head is what the media broadcasts …whether it's with ISIS or like that…so you know a lot of people at first, would joke you were Muslim...you know? At first I felt uncomfortable. I never really felt offended because I didn’t want to take it to heart, but I think that’s the fault of media…media portrays an image of Muslims ...so they portray a picture of Muslims in a negative way and that’s how they are thinking and they joke around with me…say terrorist…and just makes me feel uncomfortable not really offended...I just had to explain what Islam was.

Aisha, Nahla, Najah, Adam, Zaynab and Dawood were all constantly questioned about their faith in a mocking manner. Aisha expressed that she was constantly being judged or lumped
into a terrorist group as a result of her Muslim affiliation and she was therefore unable to take the step to put on the hijab.

Hijab is hard…I think just because everyone…it’s just so obvious that you’re Muslim…people have that idea of …that people wearing hijab and things…and they think of all those different stereotypes about Muslims…and I get the feeling of being judged would be greater if I did wear hijab in high school…and high school by itself is a big change than middle school.

Some students pulled off Nahla’s hijab in school and after the incident she spoke to her mother about wanting to take off the hijab. Nahla confided in her mother that she wanted to remove the hijab to “fit in” with her peers. However, her mother reminded her that she covers to please her Lord and not anyone in particular. Nahla opted to keep on her hijab on but continued to feel the unceasing glares from peers.

When I’m in the hallway and as I walk by and they are staring. I don’t really say anything…but like I have some people that come up to me and ask me questions… You don’t need to stare at me…I’m pretty sure you just saw another Muslim person walk by…you don’t need to stare...I’m not a terrorist…so I don’t need the glares.

Nahla is concerned that if she says something she will be judged and “verbally abused”, especially with what is going on in the news today with ISIS and the Charlie Hebdo attacks. Nahla wanted to assert her herself more and express her Islamic identity by wearing an abaya (long Islamic dress) to school one day. However, her parents were worried for her safety because
she rode on the public school transportation and they did not want her to face any verbal or physical hostility from peers.

Adam added that although in the classrooms there was some adult supervision and there were controlled settings, when teachers left the room or during transitions, he was vulnerable to the mocking comments of his peers. Adam was resigned to the fact that he could not be protected all the time. It was with this intuition that he felt unsafe in his school and decided to enroll into a cyber high school setting.

…but outside the teachers and hallways…when teachers leave the room it's really hard to control someone from saying something….or even the bus stop area…where buses to pick you up and they can't really stop anything from inside.

**Escalated Incidents**

During the ninth grade, boys in Adam’s school insinuated that all Muslims had demons in them or were the demons themselves. Either as a prank or out of his beliefs, one boy felt that the elements of evil could only be eradicated if the Bible touched Adam. The boy touched Adam with a Bible, claiming demons would burn if the verses of the Bible touched them. In this instance, Adam immediately sought the help of his counselor. The counselor responded somewhat favorably in an effort to console him after the scornful remarks. However, when the time came to take disciplinary measures, he felt that the administration did not issue a punishment befitting the distasteful actions.

Dawood recounted a similar experience, which was also incited due to his Muslim identity. Students jeered at him as he entered the cafeteria and continued to do so as he sat down for lunch because he was Muslim.
It came out that I was Muslim [in] random conversation…and this guy who I thought was my friend…kept making jokes at me…you know, I would see him and you know, he’d say you know there is the little Muslim kid and there was a time where …I know I was at the cafeteria table…and one of them threw pork at me and they all laughed...

In Islamic traditions, pork is impermissible to consume and students clearly chose this as means to affront Dawood. Dawood mentioned he did not feel comfortable telling school officials or teachers about this situation. He did not want to “rat” them out to teachers. Dawood confirmed that "grassing" peers is a socially unacceptable rule in the high school culture and if he did he would face continued intimidation. When asked if anyone saw the incident he mentioned that teachers normally turned a blind eye to these things and solaced the student who brought the complaint.

In the same vein, Nahla mentioned her high school had a serious problem with racism in previous years. It was at that time the Board of Education came in and gave a series of professional development sessions to address the growing concern from the community and the inequitable results.

My school had a race issue…before…some kids of African descent had lower scores than the white kids would get…before I went there… a couple [of] years before…a county board went to the school and they gave a training to teachers about race issues…and other people’s race and religions… yeah…especially to teachers, because they were a bit racified… after the board came in like everything changed…it got better
Nahla further shared that wearing hijab was not an easy journey for her. She had students that attempted to pull off her hijab and other attempts to evoke her to take it off. Nahla sought her mother as her support and discussed the situation at school with her. Based on her mother’s advice she recovered enough confidence to continue to wear it.

…there were some kids that kept bugging me to take it off…just take it off…and I talked to my mother…and she asked me if I thought it was right…and then I thought to myself…that I’m not pleasing--shouldn’t be pleasing other people--I should be pleasing my Lord…

Nahla describes wearing hijab as a daily challenge for her in public school. She does not desire the added attention that hijab brings and instead yearns to

…just to blend in…I feel like I stand out a lot…because I wear the hijab…I kinda just want to not stand out…just be myself…no stares or anything.

Najah further narrated an event in her high school where overt disrespect in the classroom was directed at a Muslim in the class.

In ninth grade we had just finished our lesson, our teacher finished five minutes earlier and we had free time…and this guy got up and drew two twin towers and then drew a plane going into it…and in the same classroom I was sitting in the back and the way front on the left…I even remember the seat where this Muslim guy was sitting and his name was Muhammad Osama….so the other guy who was drawing the twin towers said eh Osama look here….and our teacher looked at it…and turned around to look at the board…and said you can’t do that and that’s
total disrespect and started yelling at him…and that’s so wrong…and I don’t know I wouldn’t call this bullying but it is disrespect.

Najah admitted that neither the teacher nor herself reported the incident to administration. When asked why she, she felt that this incident, like others, would not be looked at as a severe occurrence.

School Infrastructure

**Feeling Marginalized by School Officials.** Zaynab expressed that overcoming peer comments and isolation was hard but it was important to have a no-nonsense attitude in order to overcome them. However, Nahla felt that it was doubly onerous when the adults in an institution had a limited response to the marginalization of peers. What exacerbates the situation is antagonistic responses from teachers, in addition to the students’ remarks.

Adam described how his mother called his school frequently in hopes of a reply from the administration to the bullying he faced in school. School counselors spoke to the students who used contemptuous comments and as a result the browbeating dissipated for a short while. However, Adam describes that if one student stopped, it seemed that another two rose to the occasion to bully him. When Adam was asked what actions school officials took he responded,

Several times, I had gone to the principal and counselors and stuff to try and help me out…but if you had told one person to stop then another person would start out and it wouldn’t stop and it was just a constant by a bunch of different people…well, they tried to get things done…they said they would talk to the students…but they couldn’t get anything done about it…I think they were trying to do what they could without spending too much time…several times, I had
gone to the principal and counselors and stuff to try and help me out…but if you had told one person to stop then another person would start out and it wouldn’t stop and it was just a constant by a bunch of different people.

Adam and his family resorted to his leaving the high school and embracing a less belligerent environment for him. Adam found it difficult to negotiate his Muslim identity with his peers, yet what made it unbearable for him was the lack of response from school officials. With a painful memory Adam expressed,

I felt like no one was there for me. I felt like no one was actively was trying to help me…I remember seeing a few people stand up. But no one actually did anything to stand up…I felt alone in the school environment. Teachers would say they were there and they would help me…but I felt that no one was there to really help me.

Nahla referenced an incident with her teacher in world history class when her teacher referred to Muslims as ‘Moslems’ and it irked her. The teacher was explaining the two branches of Islam. He explained that there were Sunnis and then proceeded to explain the second branch by using a derogatory term. He explained how the second group could be referred to ‘shit’ with an e at the end of the word. At this point, Nahla felt she could not correct the teacher because the entire class dissolved into laughter, which made Nahla curl down in her chair.

…it was a world history class…and my teacher was talking about…I don’t know what it was…and he was saying Muslims as Moslems and he was referring to the two groups that Islam has …the Shiite and the Sunni….and I think it was the Shias he pronounced it like the Shites…and he pronounced it like the S word with an
e… I don’t want to say it [Shit-e]… he was making fun of Islam… and the other kids were saying this was like the bad word and the whole class then was saying this… I wished I had said something, but I didn’t which made me feel worse afterwards.

Aisha observed that different treatment is not always in the words of teachers; rather, it is sometimes embodied in their body language and gestures. Aisha is certain some of her teachers do not respect Muslims and their ideologies color class discussions. Aisha feels that this passive and indirect approach shows that some teachers do not respect her as an individual in the class or the faith that she practices.

Well sometimes I feel like they are … not specifically me… but in general towards Muslims … like some teachers don’t respect Muslims and their morals and stuff and sometimes you can understand when that’s happening… For example, in class before… when they’d … [talk about] that African American thing and stuff like that… in class they make it obvious that it is not directed toward one person… and I know it’s not… and the way they bring it up and make it so obvious that it’s not about that one person specifically, but when they bring up ISIS they don’t say that… they don’t make it obvious [in the same way as other races] that it’s not about Muslims or [a Muslim] person in the class… It doesn’t have to be said… sometimes it’s the impression that no one cares…
Feelings supported by school officials. Indeed, students claimed that the above occurrences are more the norm in their high school. However participants such as Zaynab, Dawood, Nahla and Jabeen did state that there were teachers who genuinely evinced concern and provided accommodations for them if and when needed. Jabeen mentioned a specific instance where her English teacher assigned a novel to study in class and in this novel there was a Muslim character. She asked Jabeen if there was anything that Jabeen needed or wanted to have mentioned as a result of the unit they were doing. Jabeen confided in her teacher and requested that religions and people should not be stereotyped and grouped based on a specific categories.

My English class now we are reading a book called Persepolis…which is about a girl who grew up in [the] Islamic revolution in the 1970s and my English teacher pulled me out of class and asked me if I was ok with reading the book and if there was anything that I needed to say to say it…and I basically said that just make sure you address the fact of stereotypes and things along those lines and we are all just people and it’s not we can be identified as one thing…and she actually did it…she went over stereotypes….and she went over it really well.

Jabeen was impressed that her teacher planned and designed a lesson that was “taught well and with relevant detail” regarding stereotypes. She was appreciative of the effort and felt more comfortable as they began that unit of study. Moreover, she was included in the class and asked to contribute as a member of that class.

Similarly, Najah was grateful for her research teacher who sponsored the MSA in their school.

…my research teacher is actually our MSA sponsor and the co-founder of it a couple years ago and he is extremely supportive of Muslims. He has about 15
students in total form all of his classes and he tells them that of course separately
that if we have a test or the class essay and the last couple periods we are
fasting…and I’m not going to force you to take it…come in earlier in the day or
whatever suits you and he is very supportive of us fasting and Muslims in
general….I remember at the end of class he said we were talking about 9/11 and
other historical events and the last topic we covered was 9/11 …he said…I just
remembered because there are some people who do something their actions don’t
represent their family unless they say it is…and their actions don’t represent the
entire group. I knew right away that he was referencing to Muslims…even though
it may have been Muslims that caused 9/11 it does not represent the entire religion.

Zaynab mentioned that her school had a strong awareness of Muslim student needs with
regard to prayers, uniforms in PE and lunch services. It is understood in her high school that a
location was allocated in the media room for prayers from the onset of every year. Furthermore,
she explained that the PE teacher no longer questions the use of pants and long sleeves for her or
other Muslim girls. Jabeen and Nahla referenced that their counselors were extraordinarily
attentive and understanding when they went to them for counseling after an incident. Jabeen
stated,

My counselor… is very respecting to other religions…and she is Jewish…and to
me that is like it’s …safer going to my counselor more than anyone else…

Aisha, who attends a high school in a neighboring county, states that she also has a Muslim
Student Association, yet Muslims in her school still need to request accommodations and
facilities.
**Indifferent Support.** Adam’s school administration and faculty repeatedly disappointed him. He would complain to the principal and his mother would call on a regular basis to remedy the teasing and bullying he experienced. He narrates,

…Occasionally things would become sort of hostile in terms of how people would look at me or how people would make these comments about me as I would walk by me…I have been swore at a few times as well like every few months to every few weeks…depending on who it was….it just seems that people were dedicated to trying to make my day worse it seemed.

As a result, Adam shouldered the indifferent implementation of school policies and felt that the school did not take actions to prevent like incidents in the future.

…they did get the person who had touched me with the Bible and they had him apologize personally…but a lot of the measures they took are not useful. I’m not the only person who was affected by the people around me…I would see physically other people affected as well.

Consequently, these half-hearted efforts on part of the school left Adam feeling despondent. Adam described his feelings of alienation from school culture, not only by his peers, but also the adults in the school.

I felt like no one was there for me. I felt like no one was actively trying to help me…but no one actually did anything to stand up…I felt alone in the school environment. Teachers would say they were there and they would help me…but I felt that no one was there to really help me. I think it was all the negativity around me…at times, I just didn’t feel like being there…or even existing…
Adam’s loss of confidence in the system left him and his family with limited options to stay in school. He perceived his safety to be compromised and as a result left high school to avoid being in situations of disheartenment and abuse.

**School Policy Implementation.** Aisha explained that her concerns were not be heard by school officials simply because there were not enough students with similar views or students who were courageous to stand up for their rights. Similarly, Dawood concluded school polices to be “transparent’, meaning that they are fluid, without any authentic implementation. These policies and rules give parents false hope that when their child comes to school they are safe and secure. Conversely, enforcement of these rules does not really happen in the spirit they were created.

It’s a transparent rule…it’s only there so that parents have the feeling oh my kid's safe and secure and not corrupted in the school where in reality little enforcement … there is a policy if you miss five times [of class] you lose credit for the course but in reality I know a lot of kids who don’t show up five times and if you come for a teacher meeting that you just get slapped on the hand and that’s it…

Adam, Dawood, Jabeen, and Aisha concur that Muslims in their high schools do not get treated as equitably in matters as students of other faiths. Jabeen expresses how feeling heard is not the problem. The lack of action after the complaint is the problem. Jabeen remembers when she went to her principal multiple times and felt confident that she was received and he empathized with her. However, his lack of action to remedy the injustice beyond listening was a source of extreme disappointment.

He didn’t talk to the boys….he didn’t do anything…he just kind of comforted me in a way when I went out of the meeting…I was just like I could have just went
without him saying any of that…I mean what he said to me was just kind of useless because I already knew what he was telling me.

Jabeen, Adam and Dawood mentioned that the infrastructure is in place in schools where students have counselors and staff to listen and counsel students. However, little is done to implement consequences.

In Adam’s situation, he and his mother repeatedly went to administration to resolve the verbal abuse faced by Adam on a daily basis. Apologies were made, yet no further actions were taken, which enabled the harassment to continue. Additionally, Jabeen described a similar situation where she faced condemning remarks from older boys in her high school about her identity and the principal merely resorted to comforting Jabeen and acknowledging that an injustice occurred. She was dismayed that no actions were taken with the boys. When Jabeen probed about what actions were taken, she was again counseled.

It was more words than anything…he didn’t really do anything about it …he said… but I don’t know how to better educate our students with going outside the curriculum…and I was like it is within our curriculum each year you learn something about Islam…why can’t we put that into the curriculum just a little bit…or enforce the teachers to say certain things…
Lack of Authentic Knowledge Regarding Muslims

**Peers.** Jabeen is cautious about how she represents her identity to others. She understands that her faith has certain boundaries when it comes to intermingling with the opposite gender and her dress code while she is at school. Jabeen finds adhering to these guidelines in public school a daily challenge due to the lack of knowledge about Muslim practices by her peers. She cited an example where she was on the bus and seated next to a boy who insisted on sitting so close that he was touching her. She immediately moved over to allow for more space but in the normal culture of the school he simply wanted to get closer and be friends.

The first field trip I went on in high school, I had to sit next to a boy and I was totally not liking that…he had his leg up on mine…and I was trying to scoot over and when I would scoot over he would scoot over…and I asked him can you not touch me…and he was like is it a religious thing… I said yeah….he was like oh…and he acted like religion…it just flew over his head….I was just like stop touching me…I guess now with certain people, I just have to be a little bit more aggressive when I say it…..because I speak softly and I don’t come off as a really mean person…but it’s just some things you should take a little bit more seriously…if I say don’t do something then don’t do it.

The manner in which students are inquisitive also matters. Najah mentioned that it is easy to detect if there is genuine curiosity or if the person asking is contemptuous.

Zaynab said the hardest part of her being Muslim in public school is correcting the lack of understanding or misunderstandings of Islam:
…a lot of issues today is that many people have this mindset… I guess it's like when they learn some things [from] the media they believe it. And then when they ask me about it I’m not sure how to explain that it’s wrong…so when they hear bad about Islam…but it's not really true…they ask me about it I’m not sure how to explain it…or tell them like that’s not really what Islam is about.

Aisha elaborated her feelings concerning non-Muslim students who cannot identify with her so they choose to avoid or ignore her beliefs. Additionally, the perspective that the media offers is a counter-reality so it makes it difficult to present her point of view. Nahla desired to express her Muslim identity more in public schools and wanted to wear a jilbab (a traditional long dress-like garment). However, her parents were worried about how this would be perceived by others in school and recommended that she wear “normal” school clothing. Her parents feared ignorance would manifest in various discriminatory actions against Nahla both at school and on the public transportation had she worn the jilbab.

Well, I mean, …Muslims are bad people and that the stuff they are doing aren’t good things…and stuff like that…it’s just a name that a lot of people have and what they think what Muslims are like…like the extremists… and sometimes they just ask a lot of questions about it…so sometimes that is difficult to answer…and just because they don’t really understand [and] because they don’t have to go through that…they just have different morals…

On a similar note, Aisha and Nahla both described having to answer questions as annoying because the questions are asked of them contemptuously. Aisha reduced these actions to a lack of
understanding on the part of non-Muslim students, while Nahla communicated that it was to evoke a reaction from her.

She described her experience of being questioned and feeling responsible for defending her Islamic stance with her peers.

Sometimes they ask me why do you wear it? [I answer] Oh, it’s part of my religion and it’s a way of practicing my religion and worshiping God…other questions like… do you take it off at home? So I’m like yeah, we are supposed to be modest around people who are not family, family meaning my main family can see me but not other people…it’s annoying at times. And my reactions are like once you get used to it it’s actually comfortable…you should try it….So there was time where I wanted to wear a jilbab to school and it wasn’t exactly school stopping me but it was my parents…they were like people are going to disrespect you and not like to wear full jilbab to school and stuff…because school is more like a place where you wear school clothing…

Jabeen explains how hard it is for her peers to differentiate being Muslim and Arab and how Muslims are innately related to terrorism in their minds. Although Jabeen is African American, her classmates confuse her with being Arab or Pakistani due to her hijab. Students are surprised when she shares that she is an African American. Common knowledge of the diversity of ethnicities within Islam is lacking among high school students, as conveyed by the comment below:

…for example today…they were like…they thought I was Middle Eastern this entire time…and this boy turns around and asks me do you like black people…and
I was like yes….and he asked me why do you like them…so I responded that I am African American…and he was like oh really are you mixed with something….like Afghani, or Middle Eastern…or mixed with terrorist…and this other girl next me said why would you say that….and that doesn’t even make any sense…I guess it was said in a joking way…but it was disrespectful…. because the first thing they see is me wearing hijab and they don’t see anything else…like they are so scared of me and that makes me disrespected that they don’t take me as a person first.

**Faculty.** Najah, Jabeen, and Dawood describe some of the faculty as understanding of Muslim needs; however, all of the participants felt that this understanding is not inherent on their part as educators. Various educators in all of the participants’ high schools looked to the students for a clearer grasp of Muslim needs with regard to prayer, dress, and even curriculum.

Her teacher asked Najah if she was forced to wear the hijab and how she could offer her assistance to talk to her parents about it if needed. Her teacher assumed that the weather was hot and she was being forced by her family to cover. Najah explained that wearing of the hijab was her choice and there was no need by the teacher to talk to her father.

I don’t think I have to apologize for being Muslim…for example I wear a headscarf…I don’t have to apologize to others that I wear a headscarf…that I am guess not like them…because headscarf is technically my own decision…I went to al Huda school and it was part of the uniform…I would have worn it if it was or if it was an option to…it was my own decision and I don’t have to apologize for my own decision…and one of my teachers asked me is your dad forcing you…and interestingly enough it was before parent-teacher conferences…and said that I
could talk to him...during that week we had above 100 degree weather...and maybe she was talking from the weather’s perspective.

Nahla discussed how she felt when her teacher confused her with another Muslim girl wearing hijab in the class. She felt that her teacher did not take the time to understand that she was of Bangladeshi cultural heritage and the other girl was of Somali cultural roots. It was so discernible that classmates commented on the lack of racial understanding on the part of the teacher.

In my forensics class...there is this one Somali girl with darker skin than mine...and our teacher mixes us up...and the kids laugh at the teacher and say that’s kinda racist that the teacher mixes you up because you that that scarf on your head.

The general consensus amongst the participants was that teachers do not have enough knowledge regarding Islam and what is needed to support Muslim students in their classes. The prayer, fasting and dress code requirements are imperative to observing Muslim families and students. All of the participants involved in this study expressed how non-Muslim teachers and administrators often underestimate the significance of these elements.

**Coping Strategies.** Given the current social climate in schools and the condemning ethos of high school culture, Muslim students have had to develop coping strategies to overcome their crippled spirits. Coping strategies included isolation, assimilation, integration and acculturation. Adam’s coping strategies enabled him to isolate himself completely with his peers by using an inverse method. He reciprocated the jeering comments back to the students making them. His peers continued to marginalize Adam so that they could protect their own feelings. Adam describes his
emotions as indifferent and realizes now that was not the best coping mechanism to the problem at hand.

I’d stop caring what they said to me…and I’d occasionally mock them…and if I thought what they said was stupid, I’d mock them…and they would get frustrated at me…It wasn’t really a smart idea on my part…for example, when someone that I know made funny of me in the past or said something incorrect…I would in turn make fun of them by calling the stupid or something of the sorts…it wasn’t a good time for me to be that way … people thought I was a jerk because I would treat everyone the same after I stopped caring about what they thought. So, in turn…basically my fault as well for what everyone thought of me…I’d become a really stubborn person. I also have generalized the entire pubic into one viewpoint where …I could have been rude to some people that I wish I would apologize to people now. But I don’t have a chance to do that because I can’t find the people that I have hurt ….that don’t deserve it.. well, I guess had been rude to other people because I didn’t want to be hurt again…so I tried to shut off most [of] my communication where I didn’t want to talk to anyone and I didn’t want them talking to me.

Nahla described herself as segregating from the high school social norms and peers altogether. She separates her daily interactions and surrounds herself with like-minded peers when in school. She is a firm believer that in school you can find your own group of friends and it is important to keep this group close by. She dismissed those who make no effort to understand her identity. Even though she is adversely affected by their glares and stares, she finds solace with the select group of friends and clubs she involves herself with.
I feel like I don’t let things get to me…maybe because me as a hijabi…it’s harder to let things get to you because…obviously it’s going to happen a lot if you do let it get to you…Its going to harm you if you do let it get to you.

Nahla voices that it is tough to overcome the temptations of high school cultural norms. However, in order to preserve her Muslim identity she must constantly remind herself of her religious obligations. One way she has been successful in doing so is to remove these persuasions and not get involved with activities that implicitly or explicitly question her faith.

I see everyone drinking and partying…and all that stuff…and me being Muslim I obviously don’t do that…so…when I see that stuff, I get kinda of jealous…but then…I realize I am Muslim and I don’t need to do stuff like that.

Zaynab also manages her experiences in high school by segregating herself from the larger social circles. Similarly to Nahla she surrounded herself with peers who understood her and those who subscribed to her ethics and morals.

Well, I wear hijab because I want to represent Islam as well…and show people how I feel strong wearing it…I feel confident and it’s a way of me respecting my religion and I defend my religion as well.

Zaynab chose to be a part of a “No-Labels” diversity club so that she can have her voice and opinion heard in a safe environment. She described herself as a confident Muslim girl who does not mind sharing her views with those who are willing to listen.

I’m also in a club, [the] No Label Diversity club…what it is you come in there is a specific topic or issue that everyone talks about …and you can say anything and
anything that you feel is right or anything that you want to express and you can just say it and everyone discusses it…and usually when something related to Islam comes up…I’m not embarrassed to talk about it because I have actually talked about different issues that related to Islam and how I think it's not directly related and how some people see it…as something that represents Islam in a bad way…when it comes to talking about…I’m not embarrassed to talk about it. I know some people would obviously disagree with it but that’s the whole point of it…some people will be some agreements and some disagreements with it.

Aisha described her experiences as being assimilated with her peers in high school. She has both non-Muslim friends and a limited number of Muslim friends in high school. She understands parents' expectations of her role as a Muslim girl. However, she finds it hard to resist the offers from her friends to be involved with activities that would go against those expectations.

Aisha is dichotomized with choices to attend pool parties, wear shorts in school or to maintain her religious values and her parents’ expectations. She has been trying to wear hijab but has found herself unprepared to do so. She declared the changes from middle school to high school were difficult, and hijab would only complicate her relationships further. She understands clearly that wearing hijab now would most like result in her losing her friends and would strain her ability to acquire new friends.

I don’t think I would be picked on…it just would be harder to make friends…to be myself in front of other people…because I don’t know them…and because like going to high school …it was barely anyone from my middle school…so it was almost all new people…I made all new friends and things like that…and if I wore
hijab it would take longer to make friends…but it's just if I did wear it would just take longer and I would be more self-conscious that everyone is secretly judging me and that idea…I think I just wasn’t ready, because I didn’t really prepare myself...because last year, I wore half sleeves and things …and I think wearing hijab would be such a big change…and I wasn’t really ready for that…and I didn’t prepare myself enough in middle school to start. I’m trying to do that now… hopefully I can start wearing it in college.

Dawood started off high school wanting to assimilate and experimented by getting involved with dating and drugs. However, after attempting to fit in, Dawood realized he was still an outcast simply because of he was a Muslim. After realizing his religious beliefs contradicted his actions, he was quick to get back on track and resume his obligations toward his faith. Dawood attributed his inner strength as a Muslim to rectifying these mistakes and said he would not have learned the value of his faith had it not been for those experiences.

I got a girlfriend in ninth grade for two months…it was such a pity relationship and I hadn’t never a relationship since then…tenth grade, I met friends that I shouldn’t have…that I essentially became a pot head…I pulled myself out of that…when I went to Indonesia the summer after tenth grade and I realized there is so much more to life and how far I was away from Islam….so I did do stuff but in the end I grew into a better person because of it.

Najah and Jabeen described themselves as willing and able to acculturate into their high school environments. Both have strong convictions toward their religiosity and feel that the school environment is something they have to undergo as a rite of passage but do not necessarily
have to accede with it. Najah and Jabeen had a strong foundation in Islamic schooling prior to high school. They also had supportive families that helped them to navigate the cultural differences they experienced while in high school. Both girls are active and vocal in their high school Muslim Student Associations and try to make the high school experience more conducive to their religious norms by educating staff and students around them.

**Muslim student Voices**

**Advice to Administrators and Teachers.** Adam endured his high school culture for one year and left as a result of overwhelming bullying and abuse. There was limited support from both teachers and administrators, which made it doubly hard to endure the scornful remarks of his peers. He advises that administrators should have tolerance and should actively teach tolerance to jettison Muslim xenophobia.

...I feel that there needs to be some sort of...way to teach everyone tolerance. Any race or group of people should [not] feel offended for who they are as a person. Maybe if there was a way to teach or push racial tolerance instead of leaving everything as is because currently the system doesn’t work….people are still [being] harassed on a daily basis. If there was a way to teach more people to be more tolerant…then that would be the way to go and everything can go from there.

Aisha and Zaynab both insist that administrators and faculty should be better educated on the importance of Muslim rituals that are time sensitive and require some adaptations to high school social norms. The daily prayer is something that is obligatory for Muslims and sometimes it is not observed with the utmost importance by Muslim students who are bound by the school’s schedule. Aisha posits that knowledge of Islamic culture should be common amongst the
teaching staff. This is part of catering to the multicultural classroom and should be a teacher expectation.

I think they should make it clear that…it’s known that Islam requires prayer five times a day…I think they should make it known that there is place for Muslim kids to go to pray…and sometimes…there are after-school events and I don’t get home in time to pray and I would have to make up Dhur and Asr at the same time…and so I think they should make it where there is a place to go to pray and not everyone should just have to reach out to the teachers…they should reach out to the students and offer….I think if the teachers at my school reached out to our students and made it clear that it’s not something that should be a big deal to ask…that it should be available to students…it is a school that is meant for all religions and for everyone to go to…so that should be available.

Zaynab not only describes the issues of a prayer venue but also expounds on the fact that teachers do not have enough knowledge to accommodate students with religious needs. Teachers often avoid the subject or inappropriately set rules with the schedule so that students are not able to meet their religious obligations.

I guess…one issue that goes on in my school is the prayer time…and because of Daylight Savings Time Dhur comes in early and a lot of students have class at that time and by the time school ends they miss the Dhur time and the teachers don’t give them that ability to get out and pray…that should be fixed.

Conversely, Jabeen spoke of the classroom and the focus of the curriculum more so than the infrastructure of high school. She alluded to the fact that teachers veer away from controversial
topics and classroom instruction does not include the diversity of students in the classroom. She requested teachers to

Teach in a more sensitive way when it comes to Islam and when it comes to Muslim students…now that there are Muslims in your school and Islam is becoming predominant in society. They should teach Islam with more respect and give the same amount of teaching time as Christianity, Hinduism, or Buddhism…

Nahla suggested for administrators and teachers to have a teacher-training program that includes diversity training. She imagined that would educate staff so they would have more sensitivity and empathy toward their Muslim students in class.

I feel like having a little incentive program….showing what a Muslim goes through in a day and that those people are a huge part of what we feel…and what pressure we are under…to understand what we are going through…I feel like it would be a short film about following a Muslim girl around and doing a little narration of what she’s going through…and just describing what she’s going through….just having short little clips…

Dawood and Najah were of the opinion that administrators do not understand the Muslim student mindset. As a result, the culture of the high school is geared toward the social norms of the school environment because a particular group creates it. Dawood argues that events such as school dances, games, pep rallies, and such are not why Muslim students attend school. Therefore, it would be beneficial if school administrators could create alternative events that do not center on the popular culture and begin to focus on the evident diversity represented in school. Dawood articulates,
We don’t have the typical teenage American mindset. We don’t have the same American mindset of how high school is supposed to be like. We don’t have the same idea or the experiences as in the fellow peers…as in we [don’t] go to high school for the experiences….and we are basically there to get what we can and get out…we are not there for the dances or the parties or any of that…like for the Muslim community we are different because we like to stand by our ground rules and stand strong by them.

Dawood further observed that schools are more interested in just pushing students out of the system versus educating them for life. He mentioned how at the beginning of the year, school officials reported the statistics of learning and academic progress according to the demographics in the school. His sentiments were resoundingly strong that the school programs must be created to be inclusive and that emphasis should be on developing the child holistically. Furthermore, if a gap existed then there must be some changes to the teaching and learning of the minorities.

I think the school environment should be changed. I believe in more ground rules…I believe in stricter ground rules… The school is really lenient with tardiness…and in the end it’s not going to be your grades that affect your future…it’s going to be your tardiness to work and everything…so the school could be stricter on that…I do feel that they tend to certain demographics of students because you get more support…such as if you put more money into sports because the students who are active in sport many of them have rich families…and the school has support in sports more than the arts program …in some matters the school does tend to some demographics more because they get more benefits out
of it….I just feel as if the school…they focus us on grades rather than help us to focus on building us as a person…or face reality…in reality your grades don’t really matter; it’s your ambition. It almost feels as if the school just wants you to pass and just get out of there…it’s like at the beginning of the year they show you demographics of each race….the Latinos' and the African Americans' test scores are the lowest and the Whites and the Asians are the highest…I don’t know how that is supposed to make the students feel… what can we learn from that…I feel as if the school treats us more like a number rather than a person…they want us to get good test scores because they want us to get good numbers in front of the county and media…I’m not sure that the school actually cares for my future or if I do well on paper…and they just want it to help their overall score…

**Advice to Incoming Freshman**

Learning from their own experiences, participants gave vivid advice to students who would be next year’s incoming freshman class. In hindsight, Adam reflected and stated his remorse at being aggressive as a result of hurtful acts by his peers. He advised the rising ninth grade Muslims to find close friends they can share with and confide in. These friends should not judge them so that they can be confident and comfortable being a Muslim in the public school environment.

Aisha advised the upcoming 9th grade class to be active in the MSA and not be afraid to make new friends. She reflects on her own hesitations with hijab and described when a hijab-wearing Muslim girl joined her school this year and how she welcomed her to school by relating to her as a fellow Muslim. Aisha stated,
I would tell them to be active in their MSA and not to be afraid to make new friends…even…there is a hijabi in my grade and I talked to her…I went out to talk to her and asked her to join the MSA and reached out to her and I knew that if I wore hijab I would feel self-conscious and things…because it was the first day of school and I wanted her to know she had friends and stuff…because wearing hijab doesn’t make you not have friends and it should[n’t] make it harder to have friends.

Similarly, Nahla explains how it is important to stay focused and not let the small things distract one from schooling.

I would say don’t let the small things bother you…you don’t have time for that…just be the better person you want to be…and if you let the small things get in the way…it’s unnecessary…be mature.

Zaynab had more pointed advice and claimed that students should not let anyone scare them from being who they are. She is convinced that identity can be preserved as long as one surrounded by supportive friends who are not judgmental.
Chapter 5

Muslim adolescents today traverse a fine line while negotiating their identity as they attend American public schools. The paths they assume require many self-pronouncements to understand themselves within the context of their binary environments. Hijab, the explicit symbol of Islam, differentiates Muslim girls’ appearance and makes them conspicuous in their high schools. Muslim girls contend with their peers’ or teachers’ preconceived notions of what their hijab and religion signify. Muslim identity representation is lacking in high schools, a context in which Muslim students partake equally. This absence often causes students to live through feelings of being disconnected from school citizenship. Complex layers of negotiating identity contrive an innate ability for students to persist and remain focused on the original purpose of school, their academic achievement.

Muslim Americans need to be seen as part of America. Students in high school need to feel that they are part of the school community and that their interests are represented. Muslim adolescents have been marginalized in school, either via curriculum, instruction, school culture, inconsistent implementation of polices, or the general infrastructure that is imposed upon them. The post-9/11 era has created a climate of xenophobia in America by various media outlets. Immediately after terrorist incidents, hate crimes rocketed by 1600% in 2001. Muslims developed an indefinable awkwardness when trying to comprehend the attack on their religion.

No longer do the news reporters refer to the perpetrators as a Saudi man or a Turkish assailant. In the current environment, religious affiliations are attached to these offenders and the Muslim community at large has had to offer apologies to the global community because of them. Muslims in general have had to explain that Islam does not condone these violent acts and that a small group of offenders do not represent the “moderate” Muslims.
Even now, media images are replete with the Islamic identification of these offenders. An increasing number of Muslims are becoming weary of answering for the deeds of others and are now standing up and stating they should not be punished for the crime of another. In the recent ISIS and Charlie Hebdo-Paris attacks, Muslim organizations have condemned the act to show solidarity against terrorism. Nevertheless, groups around the nation are now demanding that Islamic groups apologize for these horrific crimes and calling on moderate Muslims to be more vocal against these crimes.

**Statement of Problem**

Media has led the general population to put “Muslim” and “American” as diametrically opposing terms. When three Muslim Americans were killed in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, the crime was not termed a “terrorist attack”. The sister of Deah Barakat, one of the victims, emphatically claimed that the criminal had terrorized her family and community. She further insisted that if this had been a Muslim malefactor that the Muslim community would be in a position where they felt an apology was necessary.

Misconceptions regarding Muslims and Islam have been highlighted and distorted due to various mass media efforts and have been extended into the classrooms. Mainstream Americans accepted these distortions as their general understanding of Islam. As a result, hate crimes and defamatory comments have seeped into the heart of many, brewing seeds of animosity toward an entire faith. Public figures at all levels have made demonizing comments to eradicate Islam from America. Muslim Americans are experiencing an increased sense of fear as the hate rhetoric is institutionalized.
It is vital that Muslim Americans have platform to correct these misunderstandings and spread awareness regarding Islamic beliefs. Schools in particular encourage an environment of citizenship. Schools pride themselves on developing active and contributing members of society. However, what happens when schools began to propagate the hate message directly or indirectly? Muslim Americans attend school for a quality education, sometimes at the expense of their religious identity.

Marginalizing experiences while in school serve as distractions to the ultimate goal of academic success. The field of scholarship and schools as institutions need to listen to the unspoken voices of Muslim youth and learn what their experiences tell. In this growing age of diversity, schools need to have an inclusive infrastructure and pedagogy, and a supportive environment to help reduce achievement gaps for minorities. Additionally, a heightened awareness about Islam and Muslim practices should be both implicit and explicit within schools. This will not only lessen the ignorance, but will enable educators to contribute in developing critical, discerning, and caring individuals. Ultimately, it is critical for school societies to promote and embrace American Muslims as fellow Americans.

**Purpose of Study**

Students are naturally affected by the social conditioning propagated by the social climate. The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of Muslim American students in public high school given the Islamophobia that is perpetuated. This study sought to answer: What is the experience of Muslim adolescents in American public schools? How do they articulate their Muslim identity as public school students? How do they understand their faith identity in the context of their public school experience? How does the public school affect their Muslim identity?
The IPA phenomenology conducted in this study sought to uncover the stories of Muslim Americans and how they experience high school in light of their identity. Additionally, this study sought understanding of how environment affects Muslim identity and how students negotiate who they are because of a dichotomy of expectations between home and school. This study examined the experiences of seven Muslim American adolescents. The goal was to enlighten stakeholders of these experiences and offer suggestions on how to better support multicultural and inclusive classrooms for strong identity development. It is expected that strong identity development will naturally lead to strong academic achievement (Kaplan & Flum, 2012).

No similar studies have been conducted on this age group of Muslim students. This research sought to explore factors that impact Muslim identity formation and how these students negotiate identity within their everyday environments. With this research, the author hoped to fill a gap in scholarly research regarding the mainstream high school experiences of Muslim students.

**Identity Under Siege**

Students spend a large portion of their waking hours in schools and therefore, the foci on schooling and knowledge development has taken a parallel road to that of identity development. Strong identity development takes place in nurturing contexts. Schools serve as an important setting to enable students to further understand themselves within the context of their greater community, a skill deemed important in 21\textsuperscript{st} century learning (Rich & Schachter, 2012). Muslims interviewed in this study negotiate between their Muslim identity and the identity demanded by the hegemonic high school culture. This negotiation process involves complex layers and variables and happens in a different way for all students.
Participants reported that they felt more like “themselves” when at home or when involved in MIST in comparison to their school environments. Students felt the external pressures to assimilate and conform along with the internal struggles to maintain their Islamic beliefs while in school. This sometimes-painful journey isolated students from their school environment and placed undue pressure to defend their beliefs, where MIST did not pressure them in this manner. As exemplified in this research, students chose various accesses based on the solace they felt in the given contexts. No one experience epitomizes the American Muslim identity, as it varies from individual to individual. The development of the American Muslim identity is a lifelong learning process.

Rich and Schachter (2012) state that there are three things that contribute significantly to identity formation: teachers who care about students as people, teachers serving as role models, and schools with an extensive program to deal with students holistically and not just academically. Students will be better equipped to deal with situations that challenge their identity if their environment supports these three components (Kaplan & Flum, 2012). Muslim teens in this study felt the divided sentiments of teachers when Muslims were labeled during class. Additionally, teachers who initiated the negative comments often subconsciously alienated their Muslim students from class discussions or indirectly gave a platform for others to condemn their religious affiliations.

Results of this research demonstrate that participants adhered to their identity in varying degrees given their environments and previous Islamic educational backgrounds. Students who had prior Islamic schooling or supportive home environments were overtly confident with their Muslim identity while in high school. They took part in their MSA and mobilized efforts to contribute to the Muslim student experience at school. When these students were faced with
circumstances that challenged their identity they felt no hesitation in seeking the advice of school officials.

In contrast, there were participants who intrinsically felt strong about their faith, yet wanted their Muslim identity to be liminal in school in order to be more readily accepted into the hegemonic high school culture. Aisha expressed that she would have a difficult time retaining friends or making new friends had she worn the hijab. Najah had difficulty negotiating her hijab because it heightened the attention she received in school. This imposed attention caused her to take measures to defend and exemplify Islam—a position she did not necessarily want to be in.

A significant finding from this research is that all participants identified with their salient Muslim identity first and then associated with their American identity. If a third culture identity was evident, students did not respond ascribing to the cultural identity. The picture artifacts represent their allegiance to their faith first, coinciding with their American values. Participants identified with their “Americaness” because of where they lived, the school they attended, and the language they spoke.

Participants all understood the expectations from family and community to uphold their Islamic values as they attended school. Participants demanded a positive identity as it related to their faith and dually demanded their positionality as Americans. Their initiative to take part in the MIST competition defined their allegiance to their primary identity. All participants professed their appreciation for MIST, an organization that helps provide a bridge for students to be “themselves” when participating. All participants remarked that MIST helped them to feel safe to share their views and feelings in a meaningful manner without having to second-guess or think about how their Islamic identity would be represented. At MIST Muslim teens did not feel
downgraded or excluded because the event was all about “us”.

In high schools, participants felt hesitation and a sense of silencing when it came to sharing their experiences or thoughts on most matters in high school. Participants’ comfort levels were considerably lower due to the gap in values experienced when attending public school. In their mainstream high schools, students felt reservations about participating responsively because it became “us” versus “them”. Nonetheless, Muslim students had confidence that they could live side by side with their peers as a collective whole despite the gaping cultural differences. However, going to high school meant living as out-group Muslims; students felt apprehensive about joining in the popular culture of their high school because that would require compromise on religious beliefs and values.

Socialization of Muslim Youth

The definition of socialization indicates that individuals acquire their identity through learning social norms, values, beliefs and skills derived from their social contexts. In the same vein, Rashid (1988) asserts that Muslims learn social norms through the Quran and how to implement these learned norms through the Sunnah (the actions of Prophet Muhammad). It is doubtful that any Muslim would question the source of socialization to be from the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. As Muslim students begin to apply their understanding of socialization according to Islamic values and principles to a secular environment, many complex issues emerge.

Several anticipated results emerged in this study related to the socialization process Muslim students experience. Western ideology and Muslim ideology take on dichotomous meanings as Muslims socialize in public schools. Bridging this cultural mismatch requires
thought and tact on the part of these participants and their families.

Muslim students in this study described their difficulty at school as including involuntary intermingling, group work, social activities, and dress requirements. Their personal ideologies conflicted with the Euro-centric mindset of their schools. For example, Jabeen mentioned how she was seated next to the opposite gender on a school bus while on a field trip. By Islamic standards, such close encounters and mixing with the opposite sex present many moral problems. Despite Jabeen trying to educate the young man next to her about proximity, he persisted in violating her space and asking intrusive questions.

A few participants described the self-inflicted pressure to conform in order to be accepted. They adopted the social structures of dating, clothing, and language in high school so they could be readily accepted as part of the normal school culture or the in-group. In an effort to take on this new identity, they suppressed their religious beliefs to conform and not stand out while at school. Participants felt that they would lessen the cultural gaps if they accepted the high school culture as their own. Despite these efforts the normal culture continued to alienate these Muslim students because of their religious affiliations. This newfound consciousness enabled the Muslim youth in this study to assess that they were not accepted into the normal culture and they then reverted back to the norms of their Muslim identity. Feelings of dismay were common among the participants and as a result they conceded, at the expense of their religious identity. Still, their peers did not accept them. Peers continued to prevent the participants from being a part of the social structures of school, which caused one of the Muslim students to learn from this and grow into a more faithfully practicing Muslim as a result.

The second scenario in this study is that of a few Muslim teens who had decided to fully
acculturate with the high school environment and seize the benefit of the education while leaving the social structures that were diametrically opposed to their belief system. These Muslim teens contributed greatly to raising awareness of Islam understanding of Islamic beliefs among peers and faculty at their schools. The teens admitted they attended school to receive an education but were not there for any of the social activities the school promotes because they did not align with their beliefs. Their strong disposition and home support provided these teens a well-developed identity to face the daily challenges that school presents.

The third scenario in this study involves one Muslim teen who expressed that dominant groups in school made him feel like an outcast through their relentless victimization. It was for this reason that he decided to isolate himself from the school environment when he found no consolation in teachers, administration or peers. Adam left school because he could not tolerate the confrontational atmosphere on a daily basis without support.

Finally, some of the participating Muslim youth expressed that others in their school practice the philosophy, “if you can’t beat them, join them.” This is an example where Muslims in schools contribute to the social stigma and reject any association with their own group. Jabeen cited an example of a Muslim student in her class who would make comments to her in front of others, “Come on! Let’s bomb everyone” or used terms like “Allahuakbar” in a derogatory fashion to make the class laugh. Jabeen did not know why this Muslim student insisted on making fun of Muslims, especially since he was one.

The diversity of beliefs Muslims enjoy makes it difficult for them to be accepted as American in terms of the in-group definition of what it means to be American. Muslims in this study see their definition of American as very distinctive. Mainstream socialization norms
pressure societies to understand Muslims as simply Arab and immediately associate them with terrorism. Therefore, an encompassing understanding of Muslims has yet to be embodied in American social structures. With that said, it is a misconception that all Arabs are Muslim or all Muslims are Arab. It is a further misconception that all Muslims have ties to extremist activity and are not loyal Americans. Muslims in this study were all of non-Arab backgrounds and were still prone to the typical profiling while in school.

**Lack of School Infrastructure**

In order for these Muslim students to be included within the social environment the school’s infrastructure must be purposeful and inclusive. A nurturing environment for students consists of teachers who are caring and serve as role models to students. The setting should include meaningful studies where students have an opportunity for positive social interactions in order for them to build confidence in their identity (Rich & Schachter, 2012). The emotional, academic and physical wellbeing of students contribute to increasing academic achievement and a poised identity.

In this study there were teachers in each of the high schools who displayed a kindhearted attitude and assisted Muslim students as needed by providing a space to pray, accommodating due dates, or providing a different choice for an assignment that may be more culturally relevant. In particular cases, teachers helped by sponsoring the MSA in the high school. However, the majority of teachers did not proactively engage with Muslim students and did not acknowledge any modifications that may have been needed due to cultural sensitivities.

In a few occurrences, teachers actually initiated controversial and marginalizing discussions that discounted the Muslim students in their classroom. Teachers who vocalize their
own beliefs and animosities toward Muslim students detrimentally affect the culture of the classroom and school as a whole. Students indicated that they felt uncomfortable and apathetic about going to administration to criticize the actions of these teachers. In essence, this left students silenced, with no opportunity to rectify the wrong they experienced in the classroom.

In addition to limited recourse, there are several structural limitations that these Muslim students faced while in school. School lunch menus did not provide any options to cater to halal food for observing students nor was a vegetarian option presented in the absence of a halal option. Events, facilities, and the code of conduct all catered to the mainstream culture, making it more difficult to devise solutions to work around the daily ablutions, prayer, and scheduling issues.

**Muslim Identity in Curricula**

Teachers have the agency to teach beyond the curriculum by expressing their own beliefs that may be marginally related to the written curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to use pedagogy that would serve the diversity present in the classroom by being more inclusive. Some teachers relied on the expertise of their Muslim students to correct their understandings as they taught. In this investigation it was reported by all participants that Islam and contributions of Muslims were inadequately represented in order to meet specific state requirements. Noboa (2012) confirmed that most state standards are light in content, make random effort to include every culture, focus on western European culture, dilute with social studies context, and organized by themes vs. chronology.

Students are often given incomplete or distorted facts regarding Islam or Muslim contributions in history. Muslim students being raised in the west have the western perspective
of how history transpired. Furthermore, the curriculum does not give an accurate account of all the civilizations and how they contributed to today’s social order.

Many Muslim contributions to Math, Science, and Literature are often overlooked or omitted, thereby not giving a true depiction of Muslims and how their actions contributed to the existing body of knowledge. Many public schools superficially recognize international mindedness to mean food and cultural festivals as a means to teach diversity. However, imparting depth of knowledge, constructing new knowledge, and sharing of multiple perspectives is what is needed according to the Muslim teens in this study. They want to be afforded the opportunity to make connections to the current social order and see how Muslims contributed to culture and society. They expressed how Islam was only taught with the spirit of learning the basic facts of the faith. Muslim participants want to see how their presence influences citizenship not only in schools but in the greater American society.

As a result of superficial coverage of standards, students remain ignorant of and alienated to their relevance in the global community. With the proper inclusion of Muslim civilizations, their contributions, and their impact on the world, American public schools will enable students to understand the deep connections between different cultures (Vasquez Heilig, Brown & Brown, 2012). Muslim teens in this study conveyed that basic facts regarding Islam and historical events were inaccurate. Similarly, there was no reference of how Muslims contributed to social, economic and political systems in any of the classes.

The lack of acknowledgements of these biases and suppositions oppress people of color according to Banks (2003). Students in this study felt teachers gave limited attention to their culture and religious identification. In one narrative, one teacher sought the assistance of her
student to correct the information regarding Islam. However, the majority of the teachers simply taught the content as given to them. In an extreme case, two Muslim youth narrated that their teachers actually chose to discuss Islam and Muslims in a derogatory fashion, thereby validating popular institutionalized stereotypes of Islam as portrayed by television, movies, and mass media. Undoubtedly, this silenced the Muslim students in their classrooms.

**Relegation of Muslim students**

Teachers and administrators are in a position of privilege and power in front of their students. Banks (2003) postulated that the makeup of teaching staff is majority female and Euro-centric. Only 13% of the teaching population consists of ethnic minorities (Banks, 2003). Therefore, it is critical for teachers to understand their multi-cultural classrooms as they teach and develop opportunities for students to create their own new knowledge.

Steeler and Stillman (2005) confirmed from their research that the authors of curriculum standards have already constructed the general analysis for teachers and students. The remaining task at hand is simply to understand this analysis as opposed to constructing new understandings. Authors of state standards are part of the dominant Euro-centric culture group and have shared their perspective within the curriculum based on their understandings. Moreover, state-prescribed texts clearly refer to ethnic minority groups as “they” rather than as part of “us”, especially when learning about their social order in American society.

Participants expressed how textbooks generally have a superficial representation of Muslims and their contributions. Nonetheless students expressed a high interest in and contentment with references to their faith, regardless of how minimal. Therefore, when Muslim students heard their teachers refer to different faiths as “they” or “them”, they felt a general sense
of being “othered”.

Muslim teens in this study indicated they did not perceive the environment created in classrooms as safe enough for them to actively contribute their voice in discussions. When the climate of the classroom intensified, Muslim teens regulated the escalation by discontinuing engagement or simply by not expressing their ideas. Participants felt that the teacher needed to have facilitated the discussion more effectively or should have chosen topics that provided a more equitable platform for them to include their expressions and opinions.

In some cases, students shared that teachers often overlooked them as part of the classroom when speaking of Muslims in association with terrorist acts. In these particular cases, the teachers did not make an effort take into account the feelings of their Muslim students in class when discussing sensitive topics. For example, Jabeen stated that her teacher was speaking about Muslim terrorist groups and repeatedly stated this term with reference to a biography of Malalah Yusuf. However, Jabeen intrinsically struggled with the teacher associating Islam with terrorism and did not appreciate the conclusion that terrorist groups were only associated with her religion.

**Lack of Awareness**

Sensational representations of Islam in the media have flooded the mainstream culture with Islamophobic rhetoric (Kaya, 2007). Muslim teens in this study concur that it is difficult to battle the stereotypical images the media represents about Islam and Muslims. Teens voice how their religion has been hijacked and connected to horrendous acts while other religions do not face the same handling. In addition, there is a general lack of knowledge regarding Islamic practices and the various ethnicities under the umbrella of Islam.
Lack of knowledge regarding the diversity of Muslims living in the US further alienates Muslims from the school social structure. Instead, Muslims are categorized as a homogenous group despite racial differences, national differences, and complexities within various traditions (Kaya, 2007). Jabeen stated that she is African American and is often referred to as Middle Eastern or Asian because of her hijab. Many are surprised that Muslims can be anywhere on the spectrum of color and from various parts of the globe. A current understanding that all Arabs are Muslim or vice versa suggest that ignorance is prevalent in society. In fact, none of the participants in this study are of Arab cultural heritage.

Teachers lack knowledge about Muslim practices that would allow them to make accommodations in classwork, class expectations, or schedule. Students have had to request special accommodations due to the conflicting schedules and policies of the school. These accommodations are seen as diverging from the norm, rather than part and parcel of the norm itself. Aisha expressed a concern that accommodations for prayer are considered a privilege rather than a right of the Muslim student. The Muslim teens often have to request time to pray and be late for classes because of the fluctuating prayer time.

Students further articulated that several times they miss their prayers because teachers or administrators are not approachable to request these modifications. The predetermined schedule is a hindrance to these needs because it is perceived as providing an accommodation related to religious beliefs. Administrators do not have a complete enough understanding of the gravity of prayers in light of Islamic principles to be able to honor the requests.

Participants claim that neither the student body nor the academic faculty have basic knowledge of Islamic practices. Many ignorant questions from peers related to hijab were posed
to Muslim teens. Questions such as “do you have to wear it when you’re in the shower” or “do you have to wear it to sleep” are asked to spite the participants. Participants felt that questions related to their dress and Islamic beliefs were brought up in a supercilious manner.

One participant articulated that helping peers better understand Islam was understandable, given that they may not have been exposed to Muslims before. Participants expressed that they had to educate the adults regarding Muslim practices while in school, and they perceived it as inexcusable for a teacher not to have some basic knowledge of the religion. For example, a teacher asked Najah if she was forced to wear the hijab and because it was hot she could talk to her father at parent-teacher conferences if she wanted. Najah insisted that she did not have to be rescued from her family in order to practice Islam.

Administrators and teachers alike had to be cultured on basic information regarding gender relations, prayer needs, Eid holidays, hijab and correct information in the curriculum regarding Muslim beliefs. Schools create and schedule events that promote the intermingling of sexes and cultivate a social norm based on Euro-centric needs. However, Muslim teens in the study sternly voiced that they cannot participate due to the nature of these events. They participated in MIST because the event operated within the confines of their religious beliefs and they were therefore able to join without feeling like outcasts. However, for most school events, study participants could not take part because it conflicted with their beliefs. Dawood voiced clearly that he attended school only for the education and wanted school officials to know that these events did not cater to his needs as a student.

Islam is an American Religion

Kaya (2007) concluded that Islam is an American religion, as the number of Muslim
Americans is increasing. Participating Muslim teens identified with being both Muslim and American. They have like-minded interests of sports, gaming, literature, and competitions. All participants expressed in the pictorial artifacts their allegiance to both their religion and their nation. Muslim social, cultural and political influences are increasing in America, so that it is no longer a “foreign” tradition (Kaya, 2007).

The dissonance felt by Muslim Americans in this research shows that they are deeply disturbed and that they are not innately accepted into American norms. American pop culture is resoundingly known for “America, the land of the free” and the right to be free from religious persecution. Therefore, it is even more perplexing to see Muslims being outcasts for their beliefs when this is the very foundation America was built upon.

**Implications for Schools**

**Leadership.** The majority of the third culture Muslim students are born and raised in America. They act and think very differently than their parents. Educational leaders must incorporate Muslim Americans within the context of “us” and abandon the concept of the “other”. Educational administrators need to appreciate the internal and external conflicts Muslim students face while they attend schools. These detrimental effects of “othering” leave youth emotionally and psychologically taxed as they pursue further endeavors (Niyozo & Pluim, 2009). These added layers of complexity affect their performance in schools.

In order to close the achievement gaps in US public schools, multicultural education needs to be fully embodied within the infrastructure of schools. Leaders need to proactively account for the needs of Muslim students. A system to closely monitor student engagement and inclusion strategies needs to be implemented. Administrators themselves need to be caring and
considerate to the social pressures youth endure while at school. Some things to consider are providing professional development to update teachers’ knowledge, an adjusted schedule for Muslim students, and dedicated space so that they can carry out their religious obligations. These provisions do not entail promoting faith in school, nor do they break any of the educational laws of separation of church and state. Rather, these stipulations fall under reasonable accommodations with resources for the Muslims in the school systems.

Schools must reach and understand their students’ demographics. Consulting Muslim staff members and devising ways to invite Muslim parents would be a starting point for many educators to bridge the academics gaps. It is essential that the dissonance is eliminated between home and school. This will ensure students have access to ample opportunities so that they can develop their personalities in a safe and nurturing environment, without feeling like they are compromising their beliefs. School strategies should be revised to reach out Muslim parents so that they feel part of the school system.

**Teachers and Staff.** Teachers’ induction programs or pre-service programs train teachers to deliver the academic content standards and emphasize the critical need to implement them with fidelity. Steeler and Stillman (2005) stated that there was no mention of “culturally relevant”, “multicultural”, or “justice” in these training programs or documents. They further asserted that university programs ensure that they teach what is in the standards thereby decreasing the possibility of deviating from the prescribed pedagogy and instruction (Steeler & Stillman, 2005). Banks (2003) states that knowledge people create is heavily influenced by their own experiences and elucidations within their position in social structures of society. Teachers may not identify the biased perspectives and assumptions made by authors of textbooks because of their own position (Banks, 2003).
In addition to teacher position, teachers should build healthy relationships with their students and attempt to gain a better understanding of their students’ needs. A purposeful shift in mindset is required when teaching in a multicultural classroom. An inclusive approach, establishing essential agreements of citizenship and creating a sense of belonging and security are all things that will facilitate mutual respect. Teachers are preparing students for post-secondary education and the workforce. The soft curriculum as it relates to tolerance, understanding, and embracing diversity needs to begin in the classroom and be cultivated by the leader of the class.

Non-teaching staff, such as counselors and librarians, can also contribute toward bringing about awareness with the remainder of faculty. Counselors are often sought out by pressured teens as they undergo acculturative stress and sometimes isolation. As counselors assist and listen to students, they can generalize and identify how teachers can further assist these students in achieving success. Just as students with special needs are given an individualized education plan (IEP), students facing intense situations with regard to marginalization can be apportioned resources in a similar fashion.

**Educational Practice.** Schools adhere to the hegemonic calendar, have events that appease the Euro-centric mindset and insist that everyone follow the same dates regardless of their race, religion or beliefs. It is unjust to provide these privileges to some while not to others. All students must be treated equally and be given equal opportunity. With this understanding, schools need to be preemptive and anticipate what adjustments their Muslim constituents would need and plan on problem-solving within the system boundaries as a temporary solution to a larger systemic problem. Focus groups, parents and students can contribute to these discussions and be involved members of the school community. The first steps in these endeavors are to
model being open-minded and to have a sense of mutual respect for one another.

Schools should uphold their behavioral guidelines and apply them unilaterally given situations involving discrimination, marginalization, or Islamophobic acts. As seen in this study, administrators have policies that are not executed with fidelity given the repeated acts of discrimination Muslim children have endured while in school. This led to students feeling unsafe in their own schools. One participant requested programs to raise heightened awareness about Islam and Muslim practices for students and teachers. He equated this awareness campaign to lectures that were provided for drinking and driving to raise awareness as a preventative measure.

**Findings Related to Literature**

Fatima (2011) contends that faith for Muslims serves as a “shared axis”. In Islam, the Ummah (pan-Muslim community) is held together by the rope of God. Instead of races and nations seeking to separate from one another, it complements the community as a whole. Therefore, the feeling of being divided among the smaller school community is a distinctive concept that Muslim teens find difficult to negotiate.

How Muslim youth negotiate their identity as they participate in their school context positions them to either refrain from or foster their engagement in learning (Faircloth, 2012). Therefore, students who isolate themselves or those who are silenced while in school see their ability to harness their cultural capital needed for academic achievement adversely affected (Faircloth, 2012). Kunst et al. (2012) postulated that religious identification can assist with the acculturative stress and social isolation placed upon people.

Faircloth (2012) further asserted if teachers support students to create a third space in
which they can amalgamate their personal perspectives and beliefs with the demands of school, then schools would be able to tap into the cultural knowledge funds that contribute significantly to student learning. The creation of this hybrid identity aids in disrupting the negative effects that marginalization causes. Fatima (2011) contended that Muslims create a “two-ness” to their identity: Muslims and how others see them as Muslims. Muslim students in the present study seemed to feel more accepted when in an environment that did not challenge their beliefs. Furthermore, balancing identity becomes especially problematic when one is part of the “out group” (Elashi, Mills, & Grant, 2010).

Berry (2005) posited that acculturation involves the following two phenomena: individuals want to adhere to their own culture and heritage yet exhibit a preference toward having contact with the larger society along with other ethno-cultural groups. Some Muslim students in this study have found a delicate balance in acculturation with their high school culture and have learned to shrug off the ignorant responses they have faced. However, other teens in this study have not been so confident and have resigned themselves to assimilating with their high school culture.

Hodge (2005) expressed in the table below the contrast between Islamic and Western worldviews which makes it doubly arduous to find commonality so as to build relationships. Therefore, it is very feasible that students either fall into separation or self-marginalization, as seen in the results of this study. Acculturation in its truest sense involves cultural diffusion or a merger of the two cultures’ claims (Rudmin, 2009). However, Muslim students have defined their involvement in high school culture as not a merger but a co-existence of differences.
Table 2: Islam compared to Western Secular values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>Western Secular Liberalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Individualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>Separateness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Self-Determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community actualization</td>
<td>Self Actualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group achievement and success</td>
<td>Personal Achievement and Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community reliance</td>
<td>Self Reliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for community rights</td>
<td>Respect for individual rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self control</td>
<td>Self-expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity to Group Oppression</td>
<td>Sensitivity to Individual Oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity rooted in culture and God</td>
<td>Identity rooted in sexuality and work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complementary gender roles</td>
<td>Egalitarian gender roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-life</td>
<td>Pro-Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality expressed in marriage</td>
<td>Sexuality expressed based on individual choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit communication that</td>
<td>Explicit communication that clearly expresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>safeguards others’ opinion</td>
<td>individual opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality and morality derived from the Sharia</td>
<td>Spirituality and morality individually constructed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual/Eternal orientation</td>
<td>Material orientation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Berry (2005) argued that not all individuals undergo the acculturation process in the same
way. He further asserted that individuals fall somewhere along the spectrum as it relates to their desire to identify with their culture and identity and the relationship that is sought with people in the environment. Therefore, minorities often fall somewhere on the spectrum of separation, marginalization, integration, and assimilation (Berry, 2005). This was evidenced through some of the implications of this study.

Differences in thought and practice warrant schools to provide equal opportunity and access to education (Stoll, 2011). Ballinger (2011) states,

To promote cross-cultural understanding, culturally competent practitioners must understand various religious belief systems and to help students to understand and embrace the similarities and differences in thought, word, and deed among religious cultures, just as we do regarding race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and ability.

First the school climate is one of the chief areas needing infrastructural transformations to develop an inclusive environment. Within the school climate, students need to be given options for physical activities during the month of fasting and accommodations for prayer need to be pre-arranged (Ballinger, 2011). Furthermore, Ballinger (2011) stated that educators will grow in their craft and profession if they recognize their own personal prejudices and myths that are perpetuated by their own ignorance of a culture. Stoll (2011) maintained that prejudice exists, but it should not define teaching.

Cole and Ahmadi (2010) postulated that significant effects are made on GPA (grade point average) when interactions in academic-related activities are structured in classrooms. Therefore, it is essential that educators carefully plan their lessons to include the diversity in their
classrooms to benefit the whole. Olneck (2000) posited that interactions between students and schools are either positively or negatively affected by the exchanges made. However, he further asserted that these exchanges are favorable for the dominant class in the school because they are deemed universal and neutral (Olneck, 2000).

School personnel also ascribe to the greater phenomena of what the social climate is rendering. If the social climate is of fear due to Islamophobia, then schools inherently become a microcosm of the greater society. The immense fear in society today creates a domino effect to retaliate and protect the nation from an evil from within (Das et al., 2009). In the same vein, Muslim students fear for their safety with the number of hate crimes on the rise. As a result they seclude themselves or dissociate themselves with their Muslim identity to maintain a sense of security among their social contexts.

Schools in particular are responsible for cultivating and civilizing youth to a better and more refined understanding of the world around them. If they do not have accurate knowledge to disseminate, then what are our institutions promoting? Many school officials lack genuine understanding of what Islam and Muslim students represent, according to the students in this study. Ibrahim and Dykeman (2011) contend that many health professionals, counseling, and other specialists have limited knowledge of Muslim religious needs.

Significance

The importance of student experiences, emotions, and accounts give layers of complex understanding that other forms of studies and research fail to provide. Several research studies have shown valuable findings with the quantities of data and the quantitative approaches used with regard to Muslims. In addition, several research studies have focused on the Muslims' post-
secondary schooling. However, there have been limited to no qualitative studies conducted on how the experiences lend to Muslim teens and their identity.

Knowing and understanding their plight is significant to all stakeholders. Parents, school administrators, teachers, peers and community members, both at home and at school, play a significant role in molding and shaping the thoughts and individuality of youth. Muslim youth face internal struggles and must constantly negotiate who they are depending on the context they are in. These decisions, conscious or subconscious, require a stamina and inner strength. As various stakeholders it is important that we hear the voices that silently call on us to provide a sense of equality in the pursuit of knowledge. If no actions emanate from their calls then at the very least humanity demands from readers a sense of empathy.

Limitations

Caution must be exercised when generalizing the results of this study to all Muslim adolescents in public schools. The same caution should be exercised when discussing the experiences of Muslims. Muslim students may be first, second, or third generation and have differences in race, ethnicity and gender. Muslims in America are quite diverse and therefore need to be accounted for future studies. For example, this study represented no Arab Muslim Americans. Experiences may vary depending on the ethnicity or race of the Muslims involved.

This study was also conducted within a specified geographic location, and results may vary depending on the geographic context. Muslim experiences vary depending on the concentration of Muslim populations in particular states, cities and regions. Even within this study, the experiences of high school students differed depending on the Muslim student population of the school they attended. Therefore, students may experience favorable conditions
in schools based on established precedents and the school being accustomed to having Muslim students.

MIST, which one of the participants referred to as a bridge between high school and their faith identities, provides a platform for these students to experience confidence in various content areas while in a safe environment. MIST allows for all Muslims to participate in its competitions and does not gauge their identities to be salient or specific to a particular practice. Therefore, the salience of the participants’ identity cannot be called into question. This study determined the participants’ salience of their Muslim identity because they participated in MIST. More selective criterion questioning is expected to further target the identity salience within the participants.

Positionality

The author of this study was raised in America and attended American public schools. She also identifies herself as being Muslim and American and strives to maintain a salient Muslim identity. Although she did not wear hijab in her high school for fear of being isolated, her parents held her to high Islamic standards. Today, she holds the same expectations for her four children. In order to protect their identity development they have been either homeschooled or attended Islamic schools. While realizing this may be at the expense of academic achievement, the author deemed their identity to be a delicate matter that required nurturing from an early age.

With the effort of maintaining this identity for her children, the author traveled to the Middle East and enrolled her children in schools obtain the best of both academics and a sound Muslim identity. Her eldest son is entering college with a foundation of Islamic practices and a solid American identity. She has worked in America as the Assistant Principal and Principal of
two Islamic schools, striving to maintain this development for the Muslim youth who attended. Given her personal and professional background, the author is positioned to understand the spectrum of Muslim youth in America and the challenges they face as they journey through adolescent years.

Furthermore, the author is positioned to return to the States and take on leadership opportunities to help further develop Muslim identities in a safe and cultivating environment. It is with this intent that bridges of understanding are offered to public school administrators with accommodations that would help facilitate maintaining salient Muslim identity while in school. Additionally, the author is positioned to lead awareness programs and sessions with parents and youth who attend public high school to raise awareness levels with current legislation, possible scenarios of hate crimes and racial bullying. Students and parents need to be well informed to understand how to minimize the marginalizing experience.

**Areas for future research**

The phenomenology of Muslim youth in high school provides a rich discussion regarding inclusive school environments and the gap that exists between the students’ identity and that of the school. A possible area to build further on this research is to compare the experiences of Muslim students as they attend Islamic schools. It would be interesting to see researchers examine the gap between culture and an Islamic school setting. A comparative study would underscore the cultural mismatch theory on Muslim students’ academic attainment in Islamic schools compared to their Muslim counterparts who attend public schools.

Another area to consider for future research is to examine how culture in Muslim Americans plays a part in identity formation. Muslims are not a monolithic group. Therefore,
culture serves as a backdrop to identity and can be added as a phenomenon to examine high school experiences. It would also be fruitful for scholarly work to delve into bridging the achievement gap for Muslim youth in public schools. It is also recommended that researchers measure how identity leads to self-efficacy in Muslim students.

Conclusion

Muslims have always been a part of America, prior to Christopher Columbus sailing the ocean blue. Muslims have been evidenced to be Native Americans and living in an active community prior to the 1600s. The notion that Muslims have recently immigrated to America is a false representation. Muslims have been a part of America since its inception. Ironically, the very reason America was created was to be the “land of the free and the home of the brave”. So Muslims being asked to go back to where they came from is a concept that requires much thought.

Every faith or organization has individuals who have distorted or carried the message away from the authentic teachings of that faith or institution. These deviant groups or individuals do not represent the parent group, nor should the parent group have to take responsibility for their actions. Many faiths have been able to successfully remove the labels of religion from such heinous acts and simply individualize them.

While other faiths have been able to emancipate themselves from religious labeling, Muslims have not been so successful, especially in the media. The price for the heightened xenophobia is paid by the Muslim youth who attend public school. At the tender age of adolescence, Muslim students are worrying about making and keeping viable relationships, defending their way of life (Islam), and ensuring that they protect their emotions from being
harmed by the culture they submerge in daily. With all the internal turmoil they undergo on an emotional front, academics, achievement and educational progress seem to take an indiscernible position in their lives.

This difficult negotiation inside them takes an enormous toll on their social well-being. Also, within the hegemonic culture some perceive themselves as sanctioned and the remaining as destitute as it relates to power. Confronting open and subliminal hostility from peers on a daily basis can be quite taxing. However, encountering adults who are exhibiting similar actions is disheartening. Fatima (2011) affirmed that we are all liminal of the greater society, failing to see how we are connected to one another, thereby failing to see how we complete the whole of society. However, pathologizing Islam and its followers strips Muslims of self-confidence and facilitates the view that they are separate from the social norm.

Many researchers (Abubakr, 2014; Maira, 2004; Ibrahim & Dykeman, 2011; Mir, 2011) have proposed various actions to educational policy makers, administrators, instructional and non-instructional faculty, counselors, and legislative bodies concerning the importance of affording Muslim students equal access to systems and support in schools. This research offers the authentic voices of Muslim students who live in one of the most diverse metropolitan parts of the country. Their voices need to be heard and it is hoped that this study provides a platform so that they may request the change that needs to be implemented. Ballinger (2011) insisted that educators need to go beyond tolerance and develop an understanding that leads to their advocacy for the pupils they serve.
Glossary of Terms

1. **Duhur**: Dhuhr prayers are the afternoon prayers.

2. **Halal**: Denoting or relating to meat prepared as prescribed by Muslim law—"halal butchers" religiously acceptable according to Muslim law.

3. **Haraam**: Forbidden or proscribed by Islamic law.

4. **Hijabi**: A woman or girl who wears the Islamic head-covering respectfully, called Hijab. This is the Arabic word for headscarf but isn't limited to that. It also means "cover" or "protection" against evil things in the surrounding world.

5. **ICNA**: Islamic Circle of North America, formally chartered in 1971 but active since 1968, is an Islamic North American grassroots umbrella organization.

6. **Iftar**: Iftar is the breaking of the fast.

7. **Iman**: Iman is full, deep belief or faith.

8. **Insha Allah**: Inshallah means with the will of Allah.

9. **ISNA**: The Islamic Society of North America, based in Plainfield, Indiana, USA, is a Muslim umbrella group. It has been described in the media as the largest Muslim organization in North America.

10. **Isra wa Miraj**: The Isra and Miraj, are the two parts of a Night Journey or Shab-e-Me’raj that, according to Islamic tradition, the prophet of Islam, Muhammad took during a single night around the year 621. It has been described as both a physical and spiritual journey.

11. **Jummah**: Jum'ah is Friday.

12. **Kufi**: A kufi or kufi cap is a brimless, short, and rounded cap worn by men in many populations in North Africa, East Africa, Western Africa and Asia.

13. **Masha Allah**: "Mashallah" or "Mash'Allah" is an Arabic phrase used to show appreciation for a person or happening.

14. **MIST**: The Muslim Inter-Scholastic Tournament (MIST) consists of annual Regional Tournaments for high school students in the United States and Canada that take place in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, DC, Philadelphia, New York City, Florida, Houston, Southern California, Richmond, and Toronto.

15. **MSA**: The Muslim Students Association, or Muslim Student Union, of the U.S. and Canada, also known as MSA National, is a religious organization dedicated to...
establishing and maintaining Islamic societies on college campuses in Canada and the United States.

16. Muhammad sallahu alayhi wasalaam: Muhammad (S.A.W.) is the Last of the Messengers of Allah to mankind. S.A.W. stands for Sallal-lahu ‘alayhi wa-alihi wa-sallam in Arabic, and means Blessings and peace of God be with him and his household. It is a prayer which is said after the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.).

17. Nasheed: An Islamic song/poetry

18. Quran: Qur'an is the Holy Book, the Living Miracle, revealed from Allah as a guidance to mankind

19. Ramadan: Ramadan is the ninth and the holiest month of the Islamic calendar. It is the month of fasting from sunrise to sunset.

20. Salaams: Salam is a salutation. It is also the last recitation at the end of prayers.

21. Shahadah: Shahadah is declaration of faith.

22. Sunnah: Sunnat or Mustahab means recommendable, desirable. The acts whose neglect is not punished, but whose performance is rewarded, e.g., the call for prayers (adhan).


25. Thobe: A thawb or thobe, dishdasha, kandura, or jalabiyyah in Libya, is an ankle-length garment, usually with long sleeves, similar to a robe. It is commonly worn in Iraq and Arab countries bordering the Persian Gulf.

26. Zabiha meat: The process of slaughtering a halal animal according to the Islamic method. The following should be observed: The name of God (Allah) is to be pronounced as a reminder that we do not have the right to take the animal's life except by the permission of God to meet our need for food.

27. 5 pillars of Islam: Pillars of Islam. noun. 1. the five bases of the Islamic faith: shahada (confession of faith), salat (prayer), zakat (almsgiving), sawm (fasting, especially during the month of Ramadan), and hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca).
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