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Contextual Factors Impacting the Educational Experiences and Salient Identity of Muslim American Students

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Sheryl Steinberg Abukar

Committee in charge:

California State University, San Marcos

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University of California, San Diego

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2014

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

California State University, San Marcos

DEDICATION

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

This study represents a labor of love, care, and concern for all youth. A widely held Muslim belief, based on a saying of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings be upon him) is that after a person dies, his or her deeds come to an end except for three things; a virtuous descendant who prays for the deceased person, knowledge which is beneficial, and a perpetual charity. My hope and prayer is to leave a legacy encompassing all three of these things, insha'Allah (God willing).

EPIGRAPH

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds
Most Gracious, Most Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgment
You alone we worship and Your aid we seek
Guide us on the straight path,
The path of those whom You have favored
Not that of those You are angry with nor have gone astray.

- Al Qur'an (Chap. 1: Verses 1 – 7)

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I was extremely fortunate to have such a supportive and insightful Dissertation Committee and I am especially thankful for all of the direction my Dissertation Chair provided throughout this research study. For the numerous hours spent meeting at coffee shops and for her reading draft after draft of my dissertation, I am truly grateful.

I have experienced the importance and power of collaboration during this dissertation journey with my amazing Cohort 7 - Study Buddies and am grateful for the days, weeks, months, and years we have spent together pursuing our individual and common goals.

Finally, my heartfelt gratitude and admiration goes to the Muslim Youth who shared their stories, struggles, and strategies so that others can benefit from their experiences and insights. I hope and pray that their voices will insha'Allah [God willing] be a source of inspiration for future research and the important work that remains to be done.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Contextual Factors Impacting the Educational Experiences and Salient Identity of Muslim American Students

by

Sheryl Steinberg Abukar

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2014

California State University, San Marcos, 2014

Professor Annette Daoud, Chair

In a post 9/11world, many policy makers, educational leaders, teachers, and parents are concerned about how to best address the unique needs of Muslim American students. Recognizing that different school options are available, it is important to know how school environments, peer pressure, and attitudes of the dominant society impact their overall educational experience and integration into American society. Given the diversity within the Muslim community itself, research is needed that explores how the identity of Muslim American students is contextually related to gender, race, ethnicity,

socio-economic status, degree of religiosity, and/or school environments. This study examined Muslim American students' acculturation and identity development within North American educational institutions from such a transformative-emancipatory perspective. The purpose is to show if relationships exist between external contextual factors, acculturation strategies, and the development of their religious identity. Interviews were conducted with 13 alumnae of a full-time K-8 Islamic school in southern California to examine the effect of various school environments on the development of a salient religious identity and their integration into American society. The voices and perspectives of this group of "exemplar Muslim youth" (18 – 25 years old) were elicited to enlighten and transform efforts toward expanding cultural proficiency and inclusive educational institutions.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Viewed by many as mysteriously veiled and oppressed, violent and revolutionary, or enemies of Western ideals, research shows that Muslims of America are well aware that they are often feared, despised, or simply misunderstood (Kaya, 2007; Said, 1997). They are struggling to define themselves and to write their own narrative as God fearing, law abiding citizens, who contribute positively to any society in which they live. Muslim American youth, from kindergarten through higher education, also struggle with defining and maintaining their identity in a pluralistic society that encompasses myriad values, beliefs, and cultures, within a dominant set of racial, religious, and societal norms. Albeit, there are many studies that focus on ethnic, racial, gender, or religious identity in adolescents, however, few have looked at all of these factors as they interact in complex ways and pertain to the development of identity through the educational experiences of Muslim American students in a post 9/11 world (Sirin & Balsano, 2007). The findings from this research will inform policy makers, administrators, teachers, and parents about the problems and concerns that Muslim students encounter in American educational institutions. It provides thought provoking material for any who want to support all students in a fair and equitable manner, thereby facilitating the goal of achieving a more socially just American society.

Muslim American students comprise a wide range of youth from diverse ethnic, racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. One of the biggest and most commonly held misconceptions is that Muslims and Arabs are synonymous. In actuality, the term ‘Muslim’ is used to identify those who believe in the religion of Islam regardless of their race, ethnicity, or nationality. It is estimated that worldwide

there are 1.57 billion Muslims residing in countries that span the globe. Only about 20% of the total Muslim population lives in Arabic speaking countries and furthermore, the four countries having the largest Muslim populations - Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh – are not Arab nations (Pew, 2009).

The first Muslim Americans were brought to the U.S. as slaves during the colonial period. Subsequently, immigrants from developing Muslim countries began to migrate to the United States in the mid-twentieth century to attend colleges and universities. After the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act in 1965, country-of-origin quotas and restrictions were repealed thereby opening the door to a wide variety of immigrants, including Muslims, on a quest for a better life (Austin, 1997).

It is difficult to know precisely how many Muslims are living in the United States because the U.S. Census Bureau does not include questions about religious affiliation on their surveys. Estimates vary from between 2.5 million and 7 million with the later figure being most widely accepted by Muslim scholars (Council on Islamic American Relations, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2007; Robinson, 2010). From 1990 to 2001, the Muslim population in the U.S. increased by 108% (Kosmin, Mayar, & Keysar, 2001). This increase can be attributed to continuous immigration, high birth rates, and conversions to Islam (Sirin, & Fine, 2008).

Although they are considered one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. population, Muslims are not a homogenous group of people. One of the many differentiating factors is related to their citizenship status. Identifiers such as *immigrant, permanent resident, refugee, sojourner, citizen, and 1st, 2nd, or 3rd generation,* are part

of the Muslim Americans' identity that signal the means by which they came to America, how long they have been here, or the length of time they plan to stay. As is true with any other religious group, Muslims also vary in their degree of *religiosity*, or piety. All Muslims unanimously agree on the principles of Islam derived from the monotheistic belief in God, in Muhammad as the final messenger of God, and in the Qur'an as the final revelation from God (Haddad & Lummis, 1987). However, there are differences in tendencies related to their thinking, discourse, and actions. On the one extreme are "cultural Muslims" whose traditions and concerns are mainly ethnic in nature and for whom Islam plays a minimal role. On the other extreme are "radicals" whose concerns and ideology are political in nature and may fall outside the realm of acceptable Islamic principles and practices. In between the two extremes there are subtle nuances that reflect different approaches to how the Qur'anic text should be understood, interpreted, and applied (Ramadan, 2004). These differences greatly impact the manner in which they interface with their families and society at large. According to Warner (1997), the fact that few empirical studies about recent immigration and ethnicity address [the issue of] religion represents a "huge scholarly blind spot" (p. 218).

In addition to their belief in the tenets of Islam, another commonality among Muslim youth is being the direct or indirect target of *Islamophobia*, an irrational prejudice against, hatred or fear of Islam or Muslims. "Prejudice against their religion is a reality that all Muslim Americans must deal with in one way or another" (Smith, 1999, p. 176). Studies show that even young children and adolescents feel that their Islamic belief systems are ignored, invalidated, or sometimes challenged (Zine, 2006; Peek, 2011). Particularly in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks

against the Twin Towers in New York city, (also referred to as 9/11 - a catastrophic event which Peek (2011, pg. 7) characterized as "the dawning of moral exclusion for Muslim Americans") many Muslim American youth feel marginalized, demonized, profiled, bullied, and 'othered' (Ghaffari, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2011).

The challenge of preserving an Islamic identity in America is complicated by an even greater problem. Muslim American students must struggle on a daily basis to maintain a healthy sense of their identity in an environment that holds predominantly negative perceptions of them as a group (Mir, 2009; Peek, 2011; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Surveys indicate that approaching the 10th anniversary of 9/11, 40% of the general public believed there was a fair amount or great deal of support for extremism among Muslim Americans. There are increasing fears of homegrown extremism and increasing controversies surrounding the building of *mosques* (places of worship for Muslims). Consequently, an increasing number of Muslim Americans (53%) report that it is more difficult being a Muslim in the U.S. since the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001. About 56% of Muslims under the age of 30 reported that in the past year they were either treated or viewed with suspicion, called offensive names, singled out by airport security or by police officers, or were physically attacked or threatened. Furthermore, 55% of the overall Muslim American population and 63% of native-born Muslims say that media coverage of Islam and Muslims is unfair (Pew Research Center, 2011). Although the participants in these studies were over the age of 18, the findings carry important leadership implications for educators. It remains to be seen how these perceptions affect the self-esteem and self-efficacy of Muslim students in American schools.

Along with these externally imposed identity conflicts, Muslim students in North America face internal struggles with their religious identity because of incongruities in the values, customs, and beliefs instilled at home and those of the general public and their peers at school. One of the many areas in which the values and identity of young Muslims are challenged involves differences in norms regarding gender relations (Haddad & Lummais, 1987; Merry, 2007). Muslim children are often taught from early ages that unnecessary intermingling with the opposite gender, dating, pre-marital sex, and homosexuality are un-Islamic, shameful, and taboo, whereas American society in the 21st century often condones and even encourages such behaviors. Muslim youth must learn to reconcile the conflicting points of view they encounter when surfing the web, watching television or movies, and during classroom and informal discussions in school.

Current research shows that the majority of Muslims do, in fact, want to assimilate into American culture (Pew Research Center, 2011). However, one of the greatest concerns of many Muslim parents and community members is that their children will assimilate to the extent that they will lose their knowledge and practice of the Islamic religion. For them, preserving the Islamic identity of Muslim American youth has been and continues to be a priority (Haddad, Senzai, & Smith, 2009). School policies that make it difficult for students to adhere to religious requirements such as daily prayers, fasting, dietary restrictions, and standards of dress, enhance the problem (Merry, 2007). Parents and concerned community members have attempted to facilitate the development of Muslim students' religious identity, by establishing mosques, community centers, schools, and social networks (Haddad & Lummis, 1987; Merry,

2007; Sirin & Fine, 2008). However, preserving the Islamic identity of many Muslim youth in America remains a challenge.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of school environments on Muslim American youth. It will explore the effect of external contextual factors on their academic achievement and identity. It will also examine the internal processes and different acculturation strategies that they employ to navigate through the complex social and educational systems of secondary and post-secondary school.

Using an appreciative inquiry (AI) lens, this research aims to give voice to the perspectives of a specific sample of Muslim youth. It will explore what factors helped those students who have successfully navigated through educational institutions while maintaining a salient Muslim identity. The study will also use Positive Organization Scholarship (POS) to examine ways that an Islamic School in southern California supported and promoted their integration into more pluralistic school environments and prepared these students to be college and career ready. The transformative goal is to inform stakeholders in private, public, and charter schools of new approaches to supporting multiculturalism and cultural proficiency. This involves helping Muslim students maintain their cultural heritage in contextually relevant ways that promote both academic and identity achievement. No studies have been conducted that explore (both) factors impacting the process of acculturation and identity preservation in Muslim American students from an appreciative inquiry and positive organizational scholarship perspective. This study proposes to fill that gap in the research.

Research Questions

Answers to the following research questions may shed light on broader concerns about the relationship between school environments and the development or maintenance of students' cultural heritage and identity.

- What factors hinder, support, or enhance the development of Muslim students' identity and sense of self-esteem?
- What is the relationship between Muslim students' 1) religiosity, 2) academic achievement, 3) and their process of adaptation to the dominant culture?
- How do school environments impact the formation of a salient religious identity in Muslim American adolescents?
- What changes are needed to facilitate the maintenance of Muslim American students identity and successful integration into American society?

Theoretical Frameworks

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) maintains that human beings have an inherent need for self-esteem and, research findings suggest that students' attitudes and reactions to threatening, negative information about their identity group, may indeed be related to their self-esteem (Phinney, 1993). Muslim youth encounter and must cope with several types of discrimination that threaten the development of their identity. This includes micro-aggressions manifested in biases and prejudices that are leveled against them specifically because of their combined racial, religious, and gender affiliations (Sue, 2010). Muslims are often portrayed in the media and at school as being terrorists, backward, oppressive of women, and/or oppressed by men. Derogatory remarks, insults, physical assaults, and religious discrimination from peers, teachers, and administrators

are all direct forms of oppression that Muslim students encounter in school. They are often marginalized or bullied and receive little support from those in positions of authority at school (Van Driel, 2004). The combination of these negative external factors, coupled with internal conflicts resulting from peer pressure, the need to fit in, and negative self-identification may lead to students to reject their Muslim identity altogether, to assimilate into mainstream society, or to develop a split or hybrid identity (Erickson 1968; Samuel 2005; Tautum 2003).

Ethnic identity is also a multidimensional construct that relates to how an individual perceives self in relation to others. It is a fluid category that changes with time, age, development, across generations, and in different contexts (Phinney, 2003). "Identity-building in cultural and social spaces is not a one-time process, but involves a continual negotiation and renegotiation between children and schools" (Nassir, 2004, p. 155). Changes in attitudes, behaviors, and values that occur as a result of acculturation are better predictors of an individual's ethnic identity than previously used criterion such as generation or language preference. Therefore, this study will examine to what extent changes in the ethnic and religious identity of Muslim students are related to changes that occur in the process of acculturation and socialization. It will also study the effect that school environment plays on both constructs.

Methodology

"In times of transition, exclusive attention to the larger structural forces that impact individuals' lives cannot grasp the depth of their experiences. The ways in which they [and we] respond to the persuasive influence of these forces should be [closely] examined" (Oikonomidoy, 2010, p. 18). Therefore, a positive inquiry approach was

used to examine the relationship between school environments and the maintenance of Muslim students' heritage identity. The participants in this study include 13 Muslim American youth between the ages of 18 – 25 years old, who are alumnae of a K - 8 Islamic school in Southern California. They are exemplar Muslim youth, having achieved academic success as well as a salient Islamic identity. Individual interviews were conducted to gather in-depth, thick descriptions about internal and external factors and processes that influenced their educational experiences in various school environments.

Significance of the Study

In the U.S., 'school choice' is an option that grants parents the freedom to decide which type of educational environment is best suited for their child. However, not much is known about the impact of the various schooling options on the psycho-social, spiritual, and academic success of American Muslim students. This study is significant because it fills a void in the literature about factors impacting the extent to which Muslim students believe they have the freedom and ability to exercise their heritage religious identity. The transformational goal is to inform educational policy makers, administrators, teachers, and parents about the problems and concerns that Muslim students encounter in American educational institutions. It provides thought provoking material for any who are interested in cultural proficiency and creating inclusive school environments that support all students in a fair and equitable manner.

Limitations and Positionality

The proposed study does have limitations that must be acknowledged. The sample population is small which makes it difficult to generalize the findings to all

Muslim students. The researcher's background and positionality was an asset to the study in terms of recruiting participants and understanding both American popular culture and Islamic cultural heritages. Despite the limitations, gaining a deeper understanding of the high school experience from the perspectives and narratives of Muslim American students can assist school leaders and teachers in becoming more culturally competent. It can assist them in leading change efforts that promote inclusive schools that are positive experiences for all students, despite their cultural background or religious beliefs. This is important because having pride and confidence in one's heritage contributes to self esteem, self-efficacy, and enhances the academic performance of learners (Shah, 2009).

Organization of the Dissertation

In this introduction, the problem of Muslim American youth maintaining their Islamic identity was addressed. An overview of the purpose and significance of the study, as well as the general methods that will be used was presented. The following literature review examines previous research related to the educational environments and experiences of Muslim American students in light of factors that define, support or inhibit the development of their identity and sense of self-efficacy. It addresses within-group variation as it relates to their process of acculturating into a pluralistic American society. It explores external factors impacting their identity, such as racial discrimination, religious biases, and gendered stereotyping. Furthermore, it pinpoints some of the internal struggles and the different coping strategies that they employ in various educational settings. The methods section outlines the research design of the study, the participants, and the instruments to be used. The results section of the study

highlights impactful factors and processes that emerged from the findings. In conclusion, the final section of the dissertation is an overview of the study that highlights the major finds as well as implications for leadership.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

What factors and processes hinder, support, or enhance the development of Muslim Students' identity? What is the relationship between the degree of their religious faith and religious praxis, their academic achievement, and their process of adaptation to the dominant culture? In what ways do schools socialize youth and thereby impact the formation of a salient religious identity in Muslim American adolescents? The following literature review will focus on studies that have addressed these questions from the perspective of relevant identity, acculturation, and socialization theories. This overview will be considered as it relates to the impact of various school environments on Muslim American students.

Theoretical Frameworks

Identity development

Several studies explore how Muslim students of various ethnic backgrounds have attempted to proactively construct their identities in reaction to experiences of religious discrimination (Abbas, 2002; Ajrouch, 2007; Chaudhury & Miller, 2008; Oikonomidoy, 2007; Schlein and Chan; 2010). Many students struggle to balance their affiliation to their families' heritage culture with their need to have a sense of belonging in school (Merry, 2007). The desire to fit in and be accepted by their peers often requires conforming to standards that conflict with their own (Schlein and Chan, 2010). Macro-aggressions experienced from teachers and peers combined with the influences of popular culture are the underlying explanation of why Muslim adolescents identified their schools as locations that inhibited the formation of their religious identity (Ajrouch, 2007; Chaudhury & Miller, 2008; Schlein and Chan, 2010).

Peek (2005) proposes a three-stage identity formation model that is based on three comprehensive assumptions; “that identity is acquired through a social and developmental process; that the length of time taken to proceed through the stages differs from person to person; and that this model applies to a particular group of individuals in a specific social and historical context and is not meant to serve as a universal model for all Muslim Americans during all time periods” (p. 223). The three stages include “religion as ascribed identity, religion as chosen identity, and religion as declared identity” (p. 215).

Religion as an ascribed identity. This stage refers to the period during which children emulate the culture in which they are raised. Critical reflection on what it means to be Muslim is lacking because they take their religious identity, along with other aspects of their heritage culture, for granted. However, children at this age do sometimes have difficulties with, or question why, they are not allowed to engage in certain activities or behaviors considered to be un-Islamic. Although very young children typically do not reflect much upon their identities or culture, as they begin to get older they experience “significant pressure to fit in…, which results in various identity management strategies” (Peek, 2005, p. 226).

Religion as chosen identity. According to Peek (2005), this refers to the stage when youth become aware of their values, goals, and beliefs. In many cultures, this period often coincides with the onset of puberty and is accompanied by certain rituals and rites that facilitate reflection on the adolescent’s identity and behavior. In Islamic culture, puberty heralds the time when Muslim youngsters become accountable to God for upholding religious obligations such as praying and fasting, as well as for their

behaviors towards others. In America however, Muslim adolescents "begin to contemplate more important life questions and their religious backgrounds, and hence re-examine that aspect of their identities" (p. 227) much later than the onset of puberty. One Muslim student from Peek's study explained:

> Even though on the exterior I was practicing since I was young, it doesn't mean necessarily that I was spiritually, I don't know, thinking about God, into the faith. It doesn't really happen until you've become an adult, until you learn about the world. You never really get to live on your own, to get a chance to think about what you want for yourself and what kind of person you are until you get to college. In high school, you always have people telling you what to think (p. 227).

According to Peek's (2005) findings, entering college is a significant milestone at this stage of identity formation and earmarks a period of self-reflection and identity transition. Muslim American students often find themselves handling confrontations and uncomfortable personal interactions with others by not responding; they want to positively represent Islam and Muslims and don't want to reinforce negative stereotypes. However, some students report that when people are staring or giving them "looks," they assertively introduce themselves and ask if everything is all right, or offer to answer questions.

Sept. 11th was a catalyst for many Muslims being designated as "Other" however at the same time it caused a sense of group solidarity and resulted in some students declaring their Muslim identity and faith in Islam more strongly than ever. "According to Smith's (1998) theory of subcultural identity formation, as long as the perception of a threat remains, personal identities and group solidarity will likely continue to be strong" (Peek, 2005, p. 237). Peek suggests that Rumbaut's (2001; 1996) concept of "reactive ethnicity" applies to the students in her study who may have

experienced an “identity of crisis” that formed in response to the perceived threats to them personally and as members of a subcultural group. “Religious boundaries and meaning are constructed both from within and without, in response to internal conflicts and choices and external pressures and rewards that drive identity formation” (Peek, 2005, p. 236).

However, certain questions remain. What factors explain a more long term declared religious identity and practice? How do students that were too young to understand or experience 9/11 feel about their Muslim identity? Do students attending Islamic schools post 9-11experience the identity stages of development as those in Peek’s study? Do they achieve an Islamic identity upon graduation and if so, what factors support or hinder it remaining their salient identity?

Religion as an achieved identity. This concept is one that is little discussed in the literature (Hammond, 1988; Warner, 1993). However, Peek (2005) addressed it and concludes that for the Muslims that she studied, Islam had become their salient identity, overcoming any other ascribed or achieved identities that are contrary to it. Although most schools are concerned about students’ academic achievement, rarely, if ever, is consideration given to issues of identity achievement. This study seeks to explore internal and external factors that contribute to identity formation, achievement, and retention among Muslim American students in Southern California.

Hybrid Identities / Hyphenated Selves

A theoretical construct called “Hyphenated-Selves” developed from a call for empirical investigations to answer pertinent research questions about Muslim American young men and women (Sirin & Balsano, 2007). They wondered, “What happens to the

identity formation and psychological well-being of young people whose social group is prominently associated with terrorism? What are the social and psychological ramifications, when their strong bases of religious (e.g., Muslim) and national (e.g., American, Norwegian) identifications suddenly come into conflict? What are the developmental implications of growing up at a time when most of what you see about your social group is negative" (Sirin and Balsano, 2007, p. 109)? Sirin and Fine (2008) postulate that Muslim American youth experience "hyphenated" selves, referring to the multiple cultural, ethnic, and psychological identities. These hyphenated identities are "at once joined, and separated, by history, the present socio-political climate, geography, biography, longings and loss" (Fine, 1994). Research findings to date indicate a gender difference in the process of acculturation and negotiating multiple identities that surfaced through qualitative methods but not in the quantitative survey methods. Consequently, additional mixed methods research is needed to examine differences in the experiences of Muslim young men and women.

Identity Salience

Particularly useful in this study is the concept of identity salience, which recognizes contributing factors and processes that make one identity--in this case, being Muslim--of greater, even paramount, importance in the hierarchy of multiple identities that comprise a sense of self. According to Stryker (1980), discrete identities may be thought of as ordered in a salience hierarchy. As individuals become more committed to a given role, that role will assume higher identity salience. Moreover, the higher the identity in the salience hierarchy, the more likely that the identity will be enacted in any given situation or in many situations. In essence, this probability of invoking a

particular identity, whether intentionally or not, defines identity salience and thus commitment to that identity. Although social identities and salience hierarchies tend to be stable, individuals sometimes alter or take on new social identities, shed old ones, or rearrange their identities' relative salience (Vryan et al., 2003, p. 381).

What are the salient attributes of an individual once the religious identity becomes paramount? How is the individual distinguishable? What characteristics and impact does such an identity have upon self-efficacy, academic success, and civic responsibility? Peek's (2005) study raised these questions and "provides qualitative data that illustrates the processes, decisions, and social factors involved in developing a highly salient religious identity" (p. 236). Although religion is not usually considered in sociological studies of identity, Peek's research addressed questions about "why individuals and communities highlight and develop religious identity".

Socialization Theory

Rashid (1988) views socialization as the process of maintaining the child's identity from infancy into adulthood and, from an Islamic perspective, considers socialization to be successful when "a Muslim adult, both submissive to the will of Allah, and knowledgeable of why Allah's will must be submitted to, emerges from childhood" (p. 209). This of course, does not preclude the Muslim individual from being integrated into modern society, but rather it views integration as being an insufficient goal of the socialization process. If the overarching goal is the development and preservation of a Muslim identity, it is also important to consider the influences of worldviews on children and examine socialization strategies that will thwart or facilitate an Islamic worldview. This is especially important given that the development of

today's youth primarily occurs in the environmental context of schools, colleges, and universities.

Such considerations are supported by Wade and Toms' (1985) conceptual framework, "Black Child Socialization," that asserts children undergo a cultural conditioning process through which they acquire "certain modes, sequences and styles of behavior. Muslim children, as members of a non-dominant minority group, are in a "triple quandary" in that 1) they are confronted daily with the material success of the dominant culture that emulates "Western values and behaviors"; 2) they receive both overt and covert messages through the media, schools, and peers that Islam is "either un-American, fanatical, too restrictive, oppressive of women, anti-intellectual, unscientific, boring, or some combination of all of these" (p. 214). These messages in turn impact Muslim children's internalized beliefs, values, and attitudes about their Islamic identity; 3) parental childrearing practices vary depending on the race, ethnicity, educational background, and socio-economic status Muslim parents. Additionally, many "often fail to see the subtle threats to their children's Islamic identity" or, in the case of Muslims who have recently converted to Islam, are trying to learn the Islamic worldview themselves while simultaneously trying to raise Muslim children (Rashid, 1988, p. 214).

Acculturation Theory

Cross-cultural research suggests that culture is a powerful shaper of behavior. A "complex pattern of change and continuity" occurs as individuals who have identified their behavior in one cultural context, then move into another cultural context (Berry, 1997, p. 6). *Acculturation*, a process of cultural change and adaptation, occurs when

individuals from different cultures come into contact with one another. Individuals do vary in the process of adaptation based on a combination of factors; the strategies used, the level of difficulty, and the outcome of psychological acculturation (Berry, 1997; Merry, 2007; Seth & Montgomery, 2002).

Berry (2003) lays out a theoretical framework for conceptualizing acculturation from both individual and group perspectives. According to this framework, cultural and psychological factors impact the acculturation process and influence which strategies individuals and groups employ as a means of adapting to cultural change. The acculturation strategies framework is contingent upon two main issues, namely "dealing with orientations toward cultural maintenance, and intercultural contact" (p. 28).

These strategies are categorized by two dimensions and are bidirectional. Individual preferences about their own 'group' and other's 'group' can be measured by assessing their positive and negative attitudes and behaviors towards both and allows them to be positioned in an "acculturation space". Berry's bidirectional framework is based upon two assumptions. The first is that individuals vary in the extent to which their identity is based on values, beliefs, and behaviors tied to their heritage cultural. The second is that individuals can have "multiple cultural identities", each possessing different strengths (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). The framework also allows for the possibility that both individual and group factors may impact acculturation strategies and the resulting outcomes (adaptations). There are several studies providing evidence about the importance of group factors upon acculturation strategies (Williams & Berry, 1991; Kim & Berry, 1986; Moise & Bourhis, 1997). "What is emerging from all of these studies is that acculturation strategies are not adopted at random. The various

preferences are part of a network of relationships with measurable features of one's group and the group's situation in relation to other groups. It is thus possible to claim that the acculturation strategies are an outcome of contextual factors rather than just a correlate because, individuals have little influence over many of these group-level factors" (Berry, 2003, p. 30). This assertion is also supported by social network theory. Contagion/diffusion studies show that not only are individuals who share similarities more likely to interact, but also that their increased interactions tend to influence one another's beliefs and attitudes, making them more similar (Asch, 1955; Erickson, 1988).

Acculturation strategies. When individuals, such as Muslim Americans, belong to a non-dominant group, different strategies are used in their orientations towards their own heritage cultural group and other groups. Individuals that employ an integration strategy choose to maintain their heritage cultural while interacting with members of other cultures, although they also seek to be a vital part of the larger society in which they live. On the other hand, an assimilation strategy is used by individuals that prefer to forgo their own cultural in favor of interacting with individuals from other culture. Conversely, separation is the strategy used by individuals who prefer to adhere to their heritage culture and who have no desire to interact with individuals or groups from other cultures. Finally, marginalizatio*n* is the strategy adopted by individuals that do not interact with either individuals from their heritage culture or with individuals from other cultures. It is believed that this strategy may be the result of failed attempts to assimilate, resulting in feelings of alienation from both cultures (Berry, 2003). It is important to keep in mind that an underlying assumption of this framework is that individuals have the freedom to choose which strategy they wish to adopt.

Consequently, it is only possible for an individual or group to attain integration, for example, if he or she has the freedom to do so within the context of an open and welcoming environment. “Integration can only be freely chosen and successfully pursued by non-dominant groups when the dominant society has an open and inclusive orientation toward cultural diversity” (Berry, 1991).

Regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, citizenship or socio-economic status, all Muslim American youth individually and collectively are members of a non-dominant group that must undergo the process of acculturation into mainstream America. Podikunju (2008) explored acculturation trends among American Muslim high school youth by using the Muslim Youth Acculturation Rating Questionnaire, an instrument the author developed to measure the extent to which they experienced acculturation issues. Her findings indicated that irrespective of individual backgrounds, “Muslim youth face an distinct acculturation process because of their “allegiance” to both traditional cultural values and religious beliefs and the social influences of their American peers” (p. 68).

Research shows that many Muslims do, in fact, want to assimilate into American culture (Pew Research Center, 2011). Often however, one of the greatest concerns of Muslim parents and community members is that their children will assimilate to the extent that they will lose their knowledge and practice of the Islamic religion. For them, preserving the Islamic identity of Muslim American youth has been and continues to be a priority (Haddad, Senzai, & Smith, 2009). School policies that make it difficult for students to adhere to religious requirements such as daily prayers, fasting, dietary restrictions, and standards of dress, enhance the problem (Merry, 2011). Parents and

concerned community members have attempted to facilitate the development of Muslim students' religious identity, by establishing mosques, community centers, schools, and social networks (Haddad & Lummis, 1987; Merry, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2008). However, preserving the Islamic identity of many Muslim youth in America remains a challenge.

Intellectually, psychologically, socially, and spiritually, some students struggle to establish a sense of direction and belonging, both as Americans and as Muslims (Sirin & Fine 2008). It requires reconciling conflicting viewpoints about socio-political issues such as the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, American involvement in Pakistan and Iran, the Arab/Israeli dispute, and the proclaimed War on Terror. Studies find that students are often confronted with and impacted by these issues at school, at extra-curricular or social events, and at home (Sensoy & Stonebanks. 2009). As members of a *subculture*, a group whose values or beliefs are at variance with the main culture, they are constantly exposed to statements of intolerance, bias, and bigotry in class, among peers, on the Internet, in textbooks, and throughout other forms of media (Hernandez, 2011; Peek, 2011; Sirin & Fine, 2008). It remains to be seen what factors help or hinder students to acculturate and negotiate their identities under such circumstances.

Figure 1. Hypothesized Theoretical Model

Impact of Public School Environments on Muslim American Students

The consistent portrayal of Muslims as potential terrorists by mass media "has generated significant insecurity among Muslim students, with uncharted consequences for their learning, inclusion, and commitment to the wider society" (Shah, 2009 p. 528). Muslim American students find that identifying themselves with a religious minority such as Islam, especially after the events of 9/11, presents the challenge of "growing up in the shadow of moral exclusion…Overnight, "they", Muslims, became the designated 'others' who had to be watched, detained, and sometimes deported, in order to save "us" (Sirin & Fine, 2008, pg. 1).

Considered Europe's leading Muslim intellectual and named one of *Time Magazine's* most important innovators for the 21st century, Tariq Ramadan (2004) addresses the importance of the problems discussed and offers an integrationist strategy for addressing them. Ramadan posits that rather than being totally isolated in artificial private school environments, students need to have the opportunity to mix with others and view themselves as part of the society in which they live. According to Ramadan, there is no better way to learn to negotiate relationships and situations while maintaining one's values than to work side by side with diverse people in different settings. He stresses the importance of Muslims reframing their position in American society. Although they are a minority group and viewed as a subculture by many, Muslims should not think of themselves as 'others'. To accomplish this, they must learn to develop a sense of self-confidence and of self-efficacy. They must transcend having a "minority consciousness" (p. 107), one that insulates itself from and feels marginalized by society. Muslim students should be helped to recognize that although

they are different, as citizens they have the right and the responsibility to contribute their unique perspectives, values, and beliefs to the fabric of America life. It is the collective job of parents, teachers, and administrators to help students embrace the notion that …"each of us is a part of learning a culture, transmitting a culture, and generating a culture in the multiple facets of our daily lives" (Wink, 2011 p. 62). Students who are successful at this will not need to assimilate; they will be comfortable integrating and contributing to the society in which they live while maintaining their Islamic identity.

Islamic Worldview and Goals of Education

In Islam, the purpose of life is to worship none but God (Allah) without associating any partner with Him, to be His vicegerent (Khailafa) in the world, and to vie with one another in good deeds with the sole intention of seeking God's pleasure. As such, Muslims' primary duty is to obtain the knowledge of how to accomplish these purposes. "Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim." This is a well-known saying attributed to the prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessing be upon him) that is narrated in the collection *Sunan Ibn Mâjah*. Education from this perspective is not only an act of worship; it is a religious requirement incumbent on every Muslim young and old. Are the goals of secular and Islamic education mutually exclusive? Not necessarily. The challenge of Islamic education is to bring together the study and application of religious and secular knowledge in a manner that gives meaning to life and brings people closer to God and to the worship of Him alone. In America however, the goal of secular education is to completely separate the secular and the sacred; its primary emphasis is on training youth to be productive workers and democratic citizens.

Although this goal may be embedded in the outcomes of an Islamic education, it is merely a means to a greater end; that is educating hearts and minds to know and worship The Creator (Douglass, 2004; Haddad, 1991).

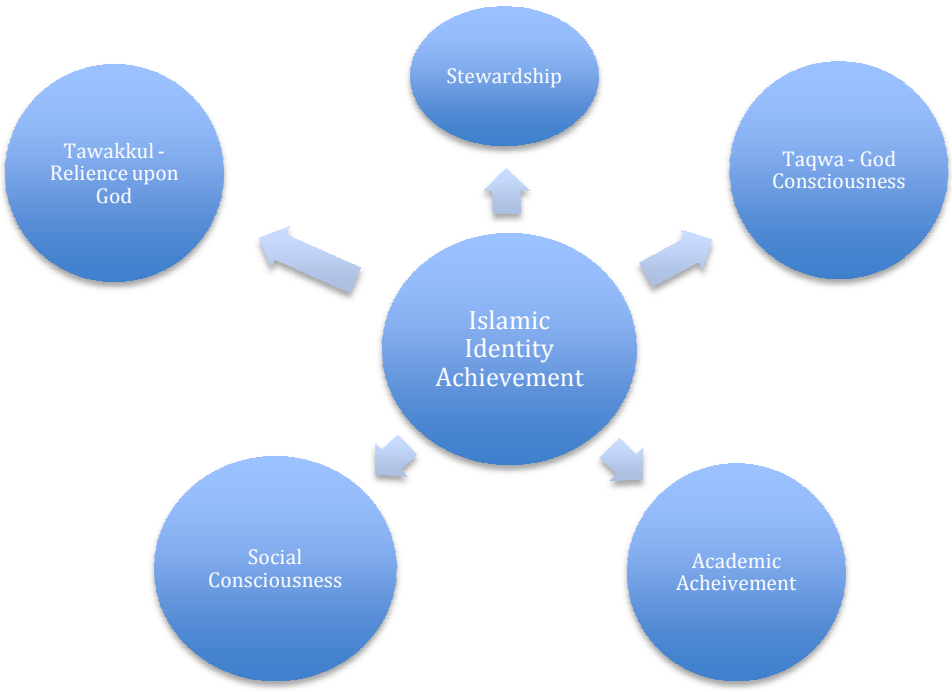

Figure 2. Goals of Islamic Education

Alternative School Environments and Educational Options

In response to negative experiences in mainstream schools and also to help adolescents develop and maintain their cultural and religious identity, Muslim communities and families are seeking supplemental and/or alternative educational options (Kelly, 1999; Merry, 2007). The following is certainly not intended to be an exhaustive review of such options, however it provides a general overview of typical choices available to parents of Muslim American students.

Weekend Islamic schools

In many Muslim communities, youth attend weekend schools that are designed to provide youth with knowledge of Qur'an, Arabic, and Islamic Studies. In addition, these schools serve the purpose of providing youth with opportunities to socialize with other Muslim students and families. Both of these objectives are intended to support enculturation and the religious upbringing of Muslim students attending public schools. Weekend schools typically take place in the local community's Islamic center or mosque. Classes are typically held between 2 – 4 hours on Saturday and/or Sunday. However, there are problems with this alternative: 1) It still separates and compartmentalizes religious and secular sciences, and 2) it separates religion from real life problems and issues. Furthermore, students attending these schools often exhibit hybrid identities, behaving one way at home and in the mosques and another at school with non-Muslim friends.

Homeschool / independent study

Another option that some Muslim families choose is that of independent study or "home schooling". This can take on many different forms depending on the state and city in which a family resides. Options may range from individual families who choose *Beyond Schooling* (Yusuf, 2001), to those who and purchase their own curriculum from private school vendors, to families that are enrolled in public or private independent study programs that provide the curriculum as well as supervising teachers that are state certified.

Specialized charter schools

Basford (2008) describes the experiences of East African Muslim immigrant and refugee youth who explored issues of identity in both public and culturally specialized charter schools. Students reported that while attending mainstream schools, they felt invisible, unwelcome, marginalized, and discriminated against in many cases. However, they described the experience of attending the charter school as empowering and inclusive. This specialized charter school is one of only a few in America that has a population of over 90% Muslim students. Although religion cannot be taught directly, the school culture is highly influenced by Islamic beliefs and practices, similar to the influence of Christianity in American public schools.

Full-time Islamic schools

"Popular culture is the way of life in which and by which most people in any society live…It is the everyday world around us: the mass media, entertainments, and diversions. It is our heroes, icons, rituals, everyday actions, psychology, and religion – our total life picture. It is the way of living we inherit, practice and modify as we please, and how we do it" (Browne, 2001). Muslim parents believe that the purpose of an Islamic School is to help insulate students from losing their Islamic identity through assimilation into American popular culture (Merry, 2007). The question that remains unanswered is: To what extent does attending an Islamic School insulate students against losing their heritage culture and Islamic identity, as a result of assimilating into American popular culture? Although approximately 235 Islamic schools have been established in the U.S. (Keyworth, 2009), the combined psychosocial, religious, and academic needs of the majority of Muslim American youth are not being met. One

reason is due to the relatively small number of students that can be accommodated by so few Islamic schools. The schools' capability to expand is limited in most cases by small facilities, meager budgets, and low tuition rates. Even though tuition is modest, many families - especially ones that have large numbers of children - cannot afford to pay for private schooling.

An additional concern of some parents is that Islamic schools may indoctrinate students and that their children will be segregated or "ghettoized", thereby depriving them of the opportunity to engage with society at large. Still other parents are concerned that the quality of education may be lower than that in public schools (Haddad, Senzai, and Smith, 2009; Merry, 2007, Zine, 2007). Teachers are not usually required to have state certified teaching credentials although many, if not most, do have bachelors or masters degrees. Furthermore, in some Islamic schools differentiated instruction to meet the needs of gifted and talented students or those needing extra support is sorely lacking (Al Lawati, 2007).

A positive deviant Islamic school. One particular Islamic school, quite unlike those of concern previously mentioned, is located in a suburban-residential area of a southern California city and has maintained its location on that site since the first day it was established 20 years ago. Currently it serves 112 families with a total student population of 172, which includes 98 boys and 74 girls. Even in these uncertain economic times, enrollment has increased to an all-time high and there is a waiting list for families wishing to enroll their children.

There are a few unique aspects of this school. For one, is that it is the only full time Islamic school in a large geographic area. The closest full-time Islamic school is

over 150 miles away. The school ensures that its students have access to a strong, core instructional program that is engaging, rigorous, and culturally relevant while at the same time provides Muslim children with an opportunity to learn and practice Islamic principles in a supportive and nurturing environment. For this reason, community, staff, and parental support for the school are all particularly strong. Community members that don't have students attending the school support it financially and/or with goods and services. Parental involvement in school activities, parent-teacher conferences, and fund-raising events are also strong. The low teacher-student ratio, the focus on a personalized approach to learning, and the high degree of parental involvement all result in high student achievement.

Moreover, the school has a dedicated teaching staff that considers teaching Muslim students as part of their religious duty, not just a job. This is indicated by the fact that several of the teachers have been with the school for 10 - 15 years or more, in spite of their qualifications to work in a more highly paid job. The school has a strong focus on teaching moral values and the positives of American society while developing students' social consciousness and awareness of its' negative aspects. For the purposes of this study, alumnae from this positive deviant organization provided an insider's perspective about the effects of the school environment on their acculturation into the larger society, on their academic achievement, and on their Islamic identity.

Summary

As Balsano & Sirin (2007, p. 182) so aptly put it, "

> Six years post 9-11 we are past the point of reaching consensus on whether religion, as a crucial component of Muslim youth's micro- and macro-systems, is in some way moderating youth's experiences of and

response to their environment. Rather, there is now a need to focus on assessing the extent to which the youth's religious practices, actual and self-perceived beliefs and behaviors, as well as various family and community resources, might serve as assets in the youth's healthy, positive development in the post 9-11 world.

Chapter 3: Study Design and Methods

Introduction

A worldview, or paradigm refers to the way in which people view the world. In the case of researchers, worldviews provide a foundation from which decisions about research design, methods, and methodology are made (Creswell, 2008). An Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach was used to elicit factors that contributed to their exemplary identity achievement. As a model of inquiry, it attempts to elicit the positive aspects of a given situation or phenomena. It allows individuals to reflect upon best practices and to affirm strengths, successes, assets, and potentials. This is accomplished by developing an inquiry around the phenomenon, issues, challenges or changes that energize the members of a group or organization. This approach has proven to be an effective means of focusing on the strengths of social systems as opposed to dwelling on the deficiencies (Bushe, 2013).

There are several advantages to using an appreciative inquiry approach when conducting interviews in a narrative study. It can help individuals recognize what has positively impacted them and worked well in a given environment as well as what they imagine could be done better. This can be a transformational and emancipatory experience, particularly when questions are asked in a manner that encourages envisioning an improved future for individuals, groups, communities, or organizations. The researcher chose this approach for several reasons. For one, it fills a gap in the literature surrounding American Muslim students that has up until now been presented from a deficiency model and problem solving perspective. Moreover, it provides an

opportunity for American Muslim youth to re-write their own narrative contrary to the images that are presented in mainstream media. Furthermore, it inspires them to imagine ideal educational environments thereby informing current educators whose aim it is to build more positive and inclusive schools that work for all students.

Research Design

This study is an exploratory, narrative inquiry involving qualitative data collection, analysis, and inference (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). It was designed to give a voice to the experiences and perspectives of American Muslim youth. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to gather narrative descriptions about their educational experiences and the development of their Islamic identity. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded. Data analysis involved identifying themes in the opinions, attitudes, and perspectives of the participants as well as in the meaning that they make of their educational experiences (Seidman, 2006).

Qualitative data collection and analysis

The initial phrase of the study involved identifying and recruiting participants and interviewing them using semi-structured questions (See Appendix 1). The second phase of the study entailed transcribing the audio taped interviews and coding the qualitative data gathered. HyperResearch, a qualitative data analysis software program, was used to code and iteratively examine the data in order to identify themes.

Participants

13 participants from diverse contextual backgrounds were selected through a purposeful, extreme case, sampling procedure (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Former teachers, administrators, and community or youth group leaders recommended individuals whom they consider to be Exemplar Muslim Youth that have achieved a salient Islamic identity. Additional participants were identified as Exemplar Muslim Youth through snowball sampling procedures. The final sample of participants was selected via convenience sampling; it included those recommended youth who were willing and able to participate in a one-hour interview.

All of the participants in this study were alumnae of an Islamic school in Southern California that, in Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) terms, may be considered a positive deviant from other Islamic schools. This educational institution was established to provide Muslim families living in the area with an educational alternative to public schooling. The primary goal of the school is to support the intellectual, social, spiritual, and physical development of its students in a nurturing, learning environment. High expectations are held for student behavior and academic achievement in all of the core and religious curricula. Students attending the school represent diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds (see figure 6, however all receive instruction in English as well as in the Arabic language, from kindergarten through eighth grade.

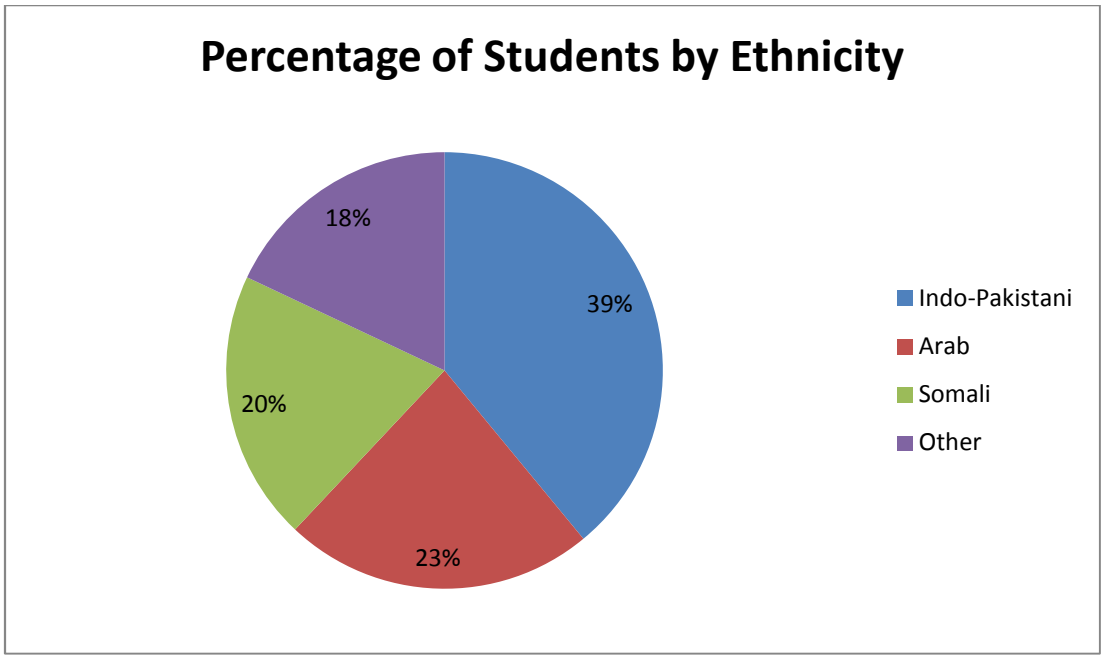

Figure 3. Students' ethnicities in the Positive Deviant Islamic School.

Although the majority of students come from homes in which a language other than English is spoken, they are all at least first generation Muslim Americans and there is an expectation that all students will excel in English and in Arabic. Students quickly learn both languages without specific English language learner pullout programs. While graduates are able to receive Foreign Language credit in high school for the Arabic courses they take in 7th and 8th grades, the primary goal of Arabic language instruction is so that students will be able to read and understand the text of their religious scripture, the Qur'an, in it's original language.

Several alumnae have matriculated to public high schools in affluent neighborhoods, while others went to specialized charter schools, or chose independent study. Data collected from the alumnae of this school explore the contextual factors that have impacted their academic and identity achievement.

Interview Protocol

An hour long, semi-structured interview was conducted individually with each participant during Phase I of the study which lasted from May, 2013 through February, 2014. Interviews were conducted in locations throughout Southern California or via Skype. Locations were mutually agreed upon that did not pose any risks and that ensured the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

Qualitative Research Questions

The interview protocol and questions used in this study were designed to elicit answers to these overarching questions: How do participants identify themselves? To what do students attribute the achievement of their current identity? How do school environments, social networks, and family support impact strategies that Muslim American students use for adapting to the dominant cultural? What resources were available to Muslim students that helped them develop and maintain a salient Islamic identity? Although interview protocols and questions related to the development of identity among Muslim youth exist in the literature (Alghourani, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008), none apply the Appreciative Inquiry approach. For the purposes of this study, the researcher developed a set of interview questions that were used to gain background information about the participants and facilitate an inquiry into the experiences, issues, challenges and supports that impact Muslim American students. Although some additional questions were asked during the interviews to obtain clarification, a specific set of questions was used to elicit the opinions and perspectives of participants (see Appendix A).

Summary

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between acculturation and religiosity (religious and cultural values, beliefs, and practices) among exemplar Muslim youth, as well as other contextual factors impacting their academic and identity achievement. The contextual factors considered included school environments, social networks, and parental support. Using an appreciative inquiry approach, the researcher interviewed 13 Muslim males and females from widely diverse backgrounds that all were alumnae of a private Islamic school. The semi-structured questions were designed to elicit those positive supports that helped them develop and maintain a salient Islamic identity, in the context of obstacles that they also faced in trying to do so. Through this process, the participants also were given the opportunity to offer recommendations to parents, teachers, and community leaders as well as to other Muslim youth.

Chapter 4: Results

Research Questions

The major research questions to be addressed in this study are exploratory in nature:

- What factors constrain, support, or enhance the development of Muslim students' identity and sense of self-worth?
- How do school environments, social networks, and familial resources impact the formation and maintenance of a salient Islamic identity in Muslim American students?

A theoretical construct called "Hyphenated-Selves" developed from a call for empirical investigations to answer pertinent research questions about Muslim American young men and women (Sirin & Balsano, 2007). They wondered, "What happens to the identity formation and psychological well-being of young people whose social group is prominently associated with terrorism? What are the social and psychological ramifications, when their strong basis of religious (e.g., Muslim) and national (e.g., American) identifications suddenly come into conflict? What are the developmental implications of growing up at a time when most of what you see about your social group is negative" (Sirin and Balsano, 2007, p. 109)? Sirin and Fine (2008) postulated that Muslim American youth experience "hyphenated" selves, referring to their multiple cultural, ethnic, and psychological identities.

The theoretical framework for examining these pertinent research questions is based on Peek's (2005) three-stage identity formation model that encompasses contextual, psychosocial, and developmental factors related to religious identity

development. Also, particularly useful in this study is the concept of identity salience which recognizes contributing factors and processes that make one identity--in this case, being Muslim--of greater, even paramount, importance in the hierarchy of multiple identities that comprise a sense of self (Stryker, 1980).

Profile of Participants

The participant population included 13 Muslim adults, 18-25 years old, who previously attended primary, secondary, and post-secondary school in the U.S. Although they are representative of different races, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds, the participants are all alumnae of a K – 8 full-time Islamic school located in Southern California, which has been in operation for the past twenty-one years. They represent a variety of perspectives and experiences within different secondary and post-secondary educational environments in California. All of the participants were identified and recommended by former teachers and/or community leaders as being practicing Muslims who implement the fundamentals of the Islamic faith in their daily life. The familial backgrounds also vary considerably among the participants. While some live with both parents, others live in single parent households. All have at least one parent who immigrated to America and most report that their parents have retained a strong affiliation to their country of origin and its culture, regardless of the number of years they have lived in the United States.

Educational Background of Participants

The length of time participants attended an Islamic school prior to matriculating to public school ranged from two to nine years. Of the thirteen interviewees, four attended from Kindergarten – 8th grade, eight attended between three - seven years, and

one attended for only two years. Moreover, all except one participant attended an Islamic school during at least one year during their middle school years. The number of years spent in Islamic school does not seem to be related to self-identification. Of the seven students who attended the longest (5 – 9 years), four identified themselves with a Hybrid identity and three with a salient Muslim identity. However, the length of time and/or grade levels spent in an Islamic school does appear to impact social networks and acculturation strategies that participants adopted in high school. The length of time participants spent in Islamic School is presented below in Figure 4.1.Figure 4.1: Length of Time Spent in Islamic School

After attending an Islamic school, all of the participants matriculated to public educational institutions. Eight enrolled in traditional middle school and/or high schools, two attended a Charter School that was for all intents and purposes similar to traditional public schools, and five of the participants attended independent study programs at some point during their high school education.

Self Identification

When asked how they identify themselves, the participants' responses varied. Although all acknowledged being Muslim, there were differences in the extent to which they also identified with being American and/or their parents' cultural background. Six identified themselves singularly as being Muslim while seven expressed a Hybrid identity (see Table 4.1).

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Background and Self-Identification

#	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Birthplace	Parents' Origin	# of Years in Islamic School	High School Type	Post-Secondary	Self-Identification
1	Ishaq	M	24	America	Somali/ American	3 (K-1st, 3rd)	Independent Study / Traditional Charter	College	MUSLIM
2	Muhammad	M	24	Algeria	Arab/ American	6 (K -3rd, 5th - 6th)*	Traditional**	(B.A.)	MUSLIM
3	Hassan	M	24	Tunisia	Arab	9 (K – 8th)	Traditional	(M.A.)	MUSLIM
4	Alia	F	22	America	Afghani	3 (6th – 8th)	Traditional Charter	(B.A.)	Afghan Muslim San Diegan
5	Amir	M	19	Saudi Arabia	Arab	9 (K – 8th)	Traditional	(B.A.)	Muslim American
6	Nuha	F	25	America	Pakistani	3 (K, 5th – 6th)	Traditional Charter	(M.A)	MUSLIM Woman/ American/ Indo Pakistani
7	Sayyid	M	19	America	Afghani	9 (K – 8th)	Traditional	Univ.	Muslim American
8	Rashid	M	21	America	Afghani	9 (K – 8th)**	Traditional	College	American Muslim
9	Abbas	M	25	Somalia	Somali	2 (7th – 8th)	Traditional	(M.A.)	MUSLIM
10	Noorah	F	18	America	Somali	4 (5th – 8th)	Indep. Study / Traditional	Univ.	Somali Muslim American
11	Ibtisam	F	21	America	Arab/ American	7 (2nd – 8th)*	Indep. Study	College	American Muslim
12	Daoud	M	25	South Africa	Arab/ South African	5 (4th - 8th)	Indep. Study	B.S.	MUSLIM (South African /American)
13	Ayesha	F	25	America	Bangladesh	7 (K – 6)	Indep. Study	Univ. (Doctorate)	Muslim American (Bengali)

*Attended more than one Islamic school

**Also attended youth programs or weekend schools

Hybrid Identity. Individuals in this category acknowledged their religious identity as well as one or more additional identities. Out of the thirteen participants, seven fell within this category; two identify themselves as American Muslim, two as Muslim American, one as a Somali Muslim American, one as a Muslim American with Bengali origin, and one as a Afghani Muslim San Diegan. Of these seven, six were born in the United States and one immigrated at a very young age. Three are males and four are females.

Noorah, like other Somalis, struggles with the different racial and ethnic aspects of her identity. Although she was born in America, she is also proud of her Somalian heritage and described herself as follows:

> I normally say [I'm] Somali, Muslim American. When people ask me at work … because I'm a cashier and I talk to a lot of the customers… they ask me what I am, I'd tell them, 'I'm Muslim, that's my religion and I'm from Somalia originally' and when they ask, 'Originally?' I say, 'Yeah, I was born here in America. I'm an Americanized Somalian and I'm a Muslim' so, that's what I basically tell people…I do also identify myself as African-American because if somebody didn't know me, didn't know about being Somalian - which a lot of people don't know - they would just assume that I'm African-American… It's easy to say, African-American but a lot of people have different views on it…
>
> A lot of Somalians have different sides too. A lot of people would just say, 'Oh, I look for the "other" [on forms] and I put Somali because I'm Somali,' but in all honesty, [in] this country they look at the skin tone, they don't really look at specific origins. And then a lot of Somalians say that saying that you're African-American means that you came onto this land but you don't know where your roots are.
>
> I was like, 'It doesn't really have to mean it'. For me, a lot of the times if I see the "other" and if I see the African-American I put "other" and then I also put African-American, but most of the time, it's just African-American, honestly, because it has a lot of … it says African-American/Black/African. I'm like, 'I for sure can fit in there, so why not'?

Salient Religious Identity. Individuals in this category define themselves, primarily, on the basis of their religious affiliation. Out of the thirteen participants, six of them identified themselves solely as being Muslim. Three of these six immigrated to America prior to entering kindergarten, one immigrated at the age of ten, and two of the six were born in the United States. Five of the six who identified themselves singularly as ‘’Muslim were males; only one female, who has obtained the highest academic degree of all females in the study, expressed a salient Muslim Identity. Although they acknowledge their cultural background or that of their parents, they do not primarily identify themselves in terms of race, ethnicity, or nationality. Muhammad, a 24-year old male who graduated from UCSD, explained, “Well, now for the past few years, the main thing that I identify myself is as a Muslim, first and foremost, entirely.”

The findings suggest that place of birth may have some impact on Muslim youth’s self-identification preferences. Of the eight participants born in America, six define themselves in terms indicative of a Hybrid Identity. On the other hand, of the five participants that were not born in America, four identify themselves singularly as being Muslim. However, there may be other factors that impact the expressed identity of Muslim youth in America.

Stages of Identity Development

Studies indicate that identity is not static but rather changes over time due to both internal and external causes (Peek, 2005). Indeed, several of the participants confirmed that they had experienced different stages in their identity development. The developmental stages they described correspond to Peek’s proposed stages of ascribed identity, chosen identity, declared identity, and salient identity.

Ascribed Identity

In this stage of development, children absorb and seek to emulate the cultural identity of their parents, siblings, relatives, and influential individuals in their environment. Sayyid, who now identifies himself as a Muslim American, reflected back on his early childhood years:

> Yeah, in the beginning as I said, our family resembled that of an Afghan household so at that time I just thought of myself as a Muslim Afghan boy. But as you listen to people and you get raised in America and you hear lectures about Muslim identity, then you're able to define what your identity is. But, even though I couldn't define it, whole life I was still confident in what my identity was …I didn't know why but I still felt proud of who I was.

On the other hand, Abbas who now identifies himself solely as a Muslim, described his attitude toward that identity as a child. "Back then it was, 'Okay, whatever,' you know?" However, things changed for him in middle school when he developed a love and zeal for learning about Islam and later on in high school where "what it means to be a Muslim was completely flipped."

Chosen Identity

At a certain point in their life, most people make a conscious choice about their identity. Alia discussed the transition she made from her ascribed identity to a chosen one during middle school.

> I think it was just perfect timing for me to go to Islamic school during those middle school years where you know I had been wearing a Hijab since 3rd grade but I didn't really know why and there was no reason that I did it behind it. But then coming here [to the Islamic school] and you know the reasoning behind wearing a Hijab and I think kind of in my family too Islam was kind of that Afghan aspect where it was just kind of traditional and it was cultural. Where then you know coming here and seeing that whole academic side to it where you could be learning this on your own. You don't need [someone else...you can] open

> up a Qur'an and read on it yourself. So that encouragement [I received] of where it wasn't necessarily just a cultural thing but it was something that I was personally supposed to develop and it wasn't just an identity but it was kind of an internal aspect of my life that I can develop and grow on [helped me].
>
> And so I think for [me, attending] Islamic school that was really important because when I went to high school it wasn't just, it is a part of me being Afghan, I was born into this… by that point it was a choice and it was something that I was building on daily that I had been building on since Islamic school. So when people asked me questions or when they questioned it, or I could see if anyone was negative towards it in any respect it didn't bother me because at this point it was a belief that I held personally and so it was easier to carry. It was easier to defend and I didn't even have to defend it. It was just something I had chosen at this point and I didn't need to delve into other people's perception.

Although Rashid declared, "I'm an American Muslim, that's probably the only way I can describe myself right now", he also discussed his identity as a process of development:

> I realized I really started developing my way of thinking in high school, whereas in eighth grade it was already set for me. Like, it just makes sense that you do it [practice Islam] this way because everything is there for you and [just] makes sense. But in high school, you start seeing why it makes sense... like, why you should do it. Because you see the ills of what happens if you don't do it, and you see the benefits of what happens if you do, do it.

He pinpointed high school as being the place and time when his identity as a Muslim evolved to becoming an actual choice because as he put it, "…high school is where you put your faith to the test…".

Declared Identity

The first pillar of Islam is in effect a declaration of faith and belief in the oneness of God. Muslims affirm 17 times daily in the course of their daily prayers, "I

bear witness that there is no deity except Allah[1]…" At this stage of identity development, the internal affirmation of one's belief is combined with an outward expression of one's declared identity as a Muslim. Such expressions could be in the form of verbal affirmations of being Muslim, of dressing in a particular manner that is identified as being Islamic, and by engaging in Islamic rituals and practices (such as prayer, fasting in the month of Ramadan, etc.).

Dress. According to Islamic teachings, females and males reaching the age of puberty are expected to follow specific guidelines when it comes to parts of the body that are to be covered whenever they are around persons to whom they are potentially marriageable. Although between Muslims there are differences in the interpretation of what is considered appropriate dress, there is a consensus among Islamic scholars about what these guidelines include for males and females[2].

Some suggest that Islamic attire worn by Muslims reflects a political statement. However, the participants interviewed in this study felt that manners of dress are a religious obligation and are worn as an outward expression that declares their identity.

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[1] Allah is the Arabic word for God

[2] "O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters and the believing women that they should draw over themselves their jilbab (outer garments) (when in public); this will be more conducive to their being recognized (as decent women) and not harassed. But God is indeed oft-forgiving, most merciful" (Qur'an 33:59).

"Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: and God is well acquainted with all that they do.

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their zeenah (charms, or beauty and ornaments) except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their khimar (veils) over their bosoms and not display their zeenah (ornaments) except to their husbands, their fathers ...and that they should not strike their feet so as to draw attention to their hidden zeenah (Qur'an: 24:31-32).

When asked how did others know that they were Muslim, several of the participants mentioned their outward appearance as being an indicator as well as a declaration of their chosen identity. Indeed, Ishaq acknowledged that, “I like to express that I’m Muslim so when I go out I try to wear anything that will identify me as a Muslim…”. All of the females in this study dress modestly when in public or around non-Mahram males, by wearing apparel that covers everything except the face and hands. Similarly, seven of the eight males choose to wear short pants, grow a beard, and/or wear a kufi (head cap) in accordance with the “sunnah” of Prophet Muhammad, (Peace and Blessings Be Upon Him).

Dawa. In addition to their outward appearance, several of the participants talked about their responsibility to convey a positive image and to teach others, both Muslim and non-Muslim, about Islam. Noorah explained how their outward appearances often put Muslims in the position of being representatives of the Islamic faith:

> [When people]…see a scarf on your head or a kufi on your head, they’ll say, ‘Okay, I have a question about Islam. I’ll ask them since they’re Muslim they should maybe know the answer’. As long as you’re not a child, they’ll ask you a question. If you do have a good answer for it, they’ll be satisfied. If they’re really interested in your answer, they’ll be more interested to learn more, ask more. As long as you’re educated and you’re out in the real world, being educated by Islam, it’s very beneficial.

Other participants, also talked about the importance of conveying the truth about Islam through their conduct and character. When asked how others react to his expressed identity Daoud explained, “They'll wait to see how I act because I mean of course now with the media and everything portraying a certain image we have to counteract that and

show what the truth is. So by doing so it's mainly through character and conduct because that's how they see who you truly are".

Some studies (Peek, 2005) suggest that transitioning from a chosen to a declared identity occurred in response to a crisis, such as the catastrophic events surrounding September 11, 2001. Indeed this was the case for Abbas, a 25-year old male who described the 9-11 crisis as being a catalyst leading to the development of his declared Muslim identity.

> I graduated 8th grade the summer of 2001, June - we had a period of two months off and then September, the second week of school, on a Tuesday, September 11 occurs. Had I not been exposed to Islam, had I not gone to Islamic school, had I not gotten the proper Islamic education, had I not known what Islam truly stands for and is about, and could sit there and articulate what Islam is, I would have been completely amongst people that I know that never had went to Islamic school, but they hid their Islam.

According to Abbas, many Muslim students – especially those who had never attended an Islamic school - hid their Muslim identity rather than declaring it, in fear of what was going on after 9-11. On the contrary, he explained, "my Islamic school education offered me the opportunity *not* to hide my Islam and actually stand up for it…and really shape the image of Islam different from that which was projected on the TV screen." He reflected back on how this catastrophic event impacted him during his freshman year in high school and changed what it meant to be a Muslim for him. He described how it had put Muslims "on the hot spot" and caused him to study Islam from a defensive standpoint as he wondered, "Why are these different allegations [being made] about my religion"?

Abbas vividly recalled:

…Ms. Thompson, a 9th grade teacher at _____; as soon as 9-11 happened, the morning of it, she brings a TV in and there's about 15 of us in our classroom, freshman English class. We're sitting there watching everything unfold…I sat there and, Alhamdulillah, I knew what Islam meant. I knew what the meaning was; it means to submit to Allah [God], and hopefully through that you will achieve peace. I knew the ayats [verses from the Qur'an I had learned] in Islamic school…when Allah says in the Quran, '…The one who takes the life of a person, it is as if he takes the life of all humanity. The one who saves a life is like the one who saves the lives of all humanity.' I decided, 'This is what the Quran says. I don't care what Fox of CNN or these people are saying; this what Islam says.' I sat there and I was able to articulate all of this to them. My teacher was dumbfounded by this. She was like, 'Oh, okay, well this seems to be a subgroup of Muslims, not all Muslims'.

As soon as 9-11 happened, for a month of so there was a barrage of like, 'All Muslims are terrorists'. It started to obviously die down after a while, 'Okay, it was some groups, radical Muslims and extremists'. All these terms that came out, but it was like 'Muslim extremists, Muslims, Muslims, Muslims,' the whole time.

…Where I was, I couldn't afford, because of the significantly small population [of Muslims] that we had, I couldn't afford to be ignorant about Islam; that was not an opportunity for me, because no matter where I went it was brought up to me. If I could get away with it by looking black or being a jock, or being a refugee, as soon as you say my name, 'Oh, okay,' then it would come out. No matter what I did, I couldn't run away from it…I was in a situation where I had to be like a young daa'iy [missionary], correcting teachers, raising my hand, 'No, that's not true', in every political science or history class that we were going through, or every economics class. Before class would start, 15 or 20 minutes or whatever, I'd put myself in that situation. Then, it made me conscious and aware also, for a period of time that, 'I have to watch my actions'…

It wasn't until 9-11 that I came to appreciate that I was a Muslim because it wasn't…it was sort of like a hidden identity; you can't see someone's religion. The sisters [Muslim women], yeah, it's apparent on them because they wear the scarf, but for the men it's not that apparent. My background then became a source of dignity as being a Muslim and being comfortable being a Muslim after 9-11, after seeking knowledge

> and actually knowing what Islam is…Once we learned about this, we were like, 'Wow, we've contributed a lot to society'.

Abbas further explained that the realization of his religious heritage, Islamic identity, and feelings of dignity, began to occur at the Islamic school. Previously, he had attended a weekend school where "we just memorized the Quran and so we didn't know what it meant. We knew how to read and write Arabic, but we couldn't comprehend it."

Undoubtedly, "… the tragedy of September 11th , 2001 had the inadvertent effect of causing many Muslims to learn more about Islam, which over time strengthened their religious identities" (Peek, 2005, p. 231). Like Abbas, the participants in this study felt the importance of learning more about Islam and accurately representing it in their words and their actions. However for most of them, many of whom entered high school several years after the Sept. 11th, 2001 tragedy, declaring their Muslim identity occurred more in the context of the questions, struggles, and issues of belonging that they experienced in the school environment rather than as a direct response to the 9-11 crisis.

Salient Islamic identity

All of the participants in this study demonstrated evidence of having developed a Salient Islamic identity, which involves more than merely declaring or expressing that one is Muslim. It involves prioritizing that identity by implementing the articles of faith and the pillars of Islam in daily life - even when it may conflict with societal norms or popular cultural. Furthermore, they exhibited evidence of having a salient Islamic identity regardless of their expressed self-identification. Several of the participants revealed the saliency of their Islamic identity when discussing their sense of Taqwa

[God consciousness] and Tawaqqul [trust in and reliance upon God] in all of their affairs.

Noorah, an 18-year old female, alluded to the concept of Taqwa when describing the difference between her self assessment of being “a fairly strong Muslim” and the “strong, strong” Muslim she aspires to become. She reflected, “I think a strong, strong Muslim is somebody who’s honestly always right on prayer time, right on everything and isn’t afraid to…face Allah with everything they have done in life…knowing that insha’Allah, [God willing] with the Lord’s mercy that they can go into Jannah [Heaven]”.

Daoud discussed Taqwa in terms of it being a support against temptations. He reflected, “My consciousness of the fact that I would be disobeying the One who sent down rules on this Earth to be followed correctly - I would say that's probably one of my biggest supports in keeping my identity strong...My conscious belief of there being One who's always watching over me saying that is right, this is wrong.”

Deen. Although some may define Islam as a religion, for those having a salient Islamic identity, it is more than a religion; it is their Deen. The concept of Deen denotes a comprehensive intellectual, spiritual, and socio-political way of life. Rashid, who identifies himself as a Muslim American, describes how Islam has become for him a complete way of life:

> The best piece of advice I could give myself is that you should always think of your religion as your top priority. This comes before work. This comes before school. If there's something that is directly going against your religion, whether it's work or school, you have to choose religion because that's basically what it is to be a Muslim. It's not simply a religion; it's a way of life. So, if you forsake that part of your life for

> something else, then you're unstable, then you start doing things that are questionable or you shouldn't be doing.

Rashid's portrayal of Islam as a 'Deen' is characteristic of all the participants in this study. It impacts their intrapersonal choices, acculturation strategies, and social interactions.

Daoud, a 25-year old male who also graduated from UCSD and identifies himself as Muslim first and foremost, describes how his social network has changed as a result of his Salient Islamic identity:

> Now my social network it kind of has broadened because of my understanding… I kind of gage who to be with, hang out with, by learning about them first and having them learn about me. If there is that sense of respect and mutuality then actually hanging out outside of work or school is permissible for me. Once again having that mind set that what is wrong is wrong and I'm not willing to comprise anything in my faith for doing something that's wrong. I would once again explain to people this is what I do, this is how I do it, and respect it. I respect you for who you are but, what's wrong is wrong. With that said it has broadened to not only having like being with Muslim people all the time because now I feel that my faith is strongly implemented in my daily actions and that if someone sees something good in it they might adopt it too.

Ishaq, a 24 year old who also identifies himself exclusively as a Muslim, reflected upon his social network throughout the development of his identity. In high school, his Chosen Identity was mainly based on an affiliation with peers of his same ethnicity that had similar interests in sports. He described how his social network changed throughout the different stages of his identity development. "My school network was different from different phases I had in my life. So [in] one phase my social network was mainly people who were worried about sports…" He further explained, "There was actually zero Muslims in my social network in high school."

However, as his Islamic identity became more salient, he explained that his choice of friends also changed. “Alhamdulillah, my social network now is one of the biggest blessings…I would say definitely it’s huge blessing Allah gave me because actually all my friends, people who I call my friends who actually I hang out with... are Alhamdulillah people who take Islam very serious and try to follow the Qur’an and the sunnah and these are my friends”.

All participants in the study emphasized the influence of friends as being a critical support or hindrance to the development and maintenance of their Islamic identity. Accordingly, the specific acculturation strategies that they employed changed and developed over time just as the stages of their identity did.

Acculturation Strategies

Assimilation

An assimilation strategy is used by individuals that prefer to forgo their own culture in favor of interacting with individuals from other culture (Berry, 2003). Ishaq explained why he, and many other Muslim students, at one point chose this strategy: “…Human nature is to want to fit in and adapt and you don’t want to be the outcast, you want to fit in. So of course when you try to fit in… you become like a sheep and you go with the flock”.

Integration

Individuals that use an integration strategy choose to maintain their heritage cultural while interacting with members of other cultures, although they also seek to be a vital part of the larger society in which they live (Berry, 2003). Nuha described how she utilized this strategy during her high school and college years:

> So, for my first two years at _____ High School, I had two really good friends. Yeah, I had a wider circle of friends, but I wasn't really close with them…I mainly spent most of my time with two really good friends, and they were both really academically inclined. One of them was Muslim, though she wasn't really practicing and her family wasn't really practicing. Another one was Chinese, and she was a devout Christian.
>
> Both of them were really serious about their academics, and they were also really involved in extracurricular activities, and so we all sort of got involved in these extracurricular activities. We were involved in Academic League, and we were involved in the Key Club, and we did a lot of volunteering; I also volunteered at a hospital and I did 400 or 500 hours at a hospital.
>
> But, yeah, I think having those two really good friends there, and having a lot of the same interests, and being in good company was really helpful for me both academically and even … I would say even spiritually because they never really … I mean, they accepted me as who I was. They never tried to coerce me, or they never saw Islam as something bad. They appreciated the fact that I was a follower of … I mean, I'm sure they appreciated the fact that I practiced a religion and that I was serious about Islam.

When asked, Alia affirmed that she was practicing and serious about Islam pretty much all through middle school and high school. Throughout her years in high school and at the university she had a mixture of friends. She said, "A lot of them were Muslim, but some of them weren't. Some of them were agnostic. Some of them were Catholic. A few of them were atheist. But, by far, most of them followed some religion or another". Alia, who already obtained a Master's degree, is married and is currently attending school in a predominantly Muslim country. She still has a mixed group of friends although, she admitted, "I think I'm a lot closer to my Muslim friends than my non-Muslim friends primarily because … well, I mean, we do have religion in common, but also because my Muslim friends are generally the ones living here..."

Separation

Separation is the strategy used by individuals who prefer to adhere to their heritage culture and who avoid, or have no desire to interact with, others (Berry, 2003). Many of the participants in this study described using Separation as a positive means of developing and/or maintaining a salient Islamic identity. As such, most of the participants reported that their social network involved primarily other practicing Muslim students. According to Noorah:

> I feel like … if I did stay in the Islamic school longer I could probably identify myself as a strong, strong Muslim. I think being around non-Muslims a lot, I'm not saying you lose your faith but, if you had a strong group of Muslims around you, you get stronger and you remind yourself of your religion every minute and you remind yourself that you're being watched all the time…by Allah of course. Yeah, I don't know. I mean I would say it's kind of tough if you're always on the out and you don't really have a strong Muslim base around you.

Marginalization

Marginalization is the strategy adopted by individuals that do not interact with either individuals from their heritage culture or with individuals from other cultures (Berry, 2003). None of the participants in this study adopted this strategy.

Psycho-Social Impact of Identity

For several of the participants in the study, the psychological impact of their heritage background involved a mixture of emotions that often developed in stages like their identity and acculturation strategies. All participants were asked if their background and identity was a source of a dignity, confusion, discomfort, or something else. Nine out of 13 participants described their heritage identity as being a source of pride, dignity, or honor. However, out of these nine, three participants also described it

as being a source of confusion. One described her background/identity solely as being a source of confusion, one solely as being a source of comfort, and two verbalized that it was a blessing for which they felt grateful.

Identity as a source of pride or dignity

Nine of 13 participants described their heritage background as being a source of honor, pride, or dignity. Hassan expressed these sentiments:

> Alhamdulillah, I'm very comfortable with myself and who I've become. It's all because of my background. It's all because of my upbringing. Both my family and the schooling that I've done has a lot to do with religion. Religion molds a person into something better if you are to follow it the correct way. Alhamdulillah. I mean, of course, it's dignity, respect, humility. Alhamdulillah. I mean, it's a mixture of a lot of things in my family. They've always been pushing me for education and school. Not only religious, they're pushing for many values, which at the time when I was young, I didn't really appreciate it. Now that I'm older and in the position that I am, Alhamdulillah, I do really appreciate all their efforts. I mean, it's an honor, Alhamdulillah, for me. It's a background of dignity.

Alia explained that her identity in terms of being Muslim and Afghani was something that was always talked about at home. She said, "…You know my parents always told me this isn't something you should be embarrassed of; you should be proud of [it] and so that is definitely how I carried myself throughout school". Amir also felt this way about his background and emphatically described as a source of "…definitely, dignity. I've never been ashamed of anything of my background or heritage or religion or anything. I'm never ashamed to talk about it with other people either. So definitely …[dignity]."

For some of the participants, the feeling of pride is not a personal one but rather a pride in Islam. Noorah explained,

> I think it's amazing when they're just astounded by what you are. Having a mix of backgrounds in you, telling somebody, I'm Somali Muslim American, they're just like, 'Whoa! What is that? Explain it, break it down.' I think that's where the dignity comes from, telling people what you are and giving proof to being Muslim, proof behind Islam, and telling them about the struggles back home and even being in the Muslim countries now in Syria and in other countries and telling others that it's a struggle and that's what life is, it's a struggle and it's a test.
>
> Some people believe it, some people don't. They don't understand it but…some people once you tell them, life is a struggle and you're being tested, this is what life is and life ends and there's a hereafter… Allah decides what to do with you with his mercy considering what you've done in the past; it's you either go to hell or you go to heaven. Telling people that, a lot of people they understand it and they think it's amazing; they think it's beautiful. I think that's where the dignity comes from behind everything.

Hassan emphasized that, "religion molds a person into something better if you are to follow it the correct way". Consequently for him, it's a background of "dignity, respect, and humility" for which he praises God, "… it's an honor, Alhamdulillah, for me." Although Sayyid also describes his background as a source of dignity, he recalls the earlier stages of his identity development when, "even though I couldn't define it, my whole life I was still confident in what my identity was and so that's why I don't think it was a source of confusion or discomfort. I guess I fall more in the line of dignity – 'unknowing dignity' cause I didn't know why - but I still felt proud of who I was.

Identity as a source of confusion

Along with having feelings of pride about their background, four of the participants also discussed it as being a source of confusion for them during different stages of their identity development. Take Alia, for example:

> I think it's sort of a mixture of many different things. I mean, there is confusion. There is a bit of confusion, especially, I mean, when you're

> younger, and you're in middle school and high school, and you're still trying to formulate your identity … I mean, I'm still … It's not like my identity is set in stone right now. But, I think I'm a lot more clear of the person that I am now than I was back then. So, growing up, there was this aspect of confusion, but I also think there was this aspect of pride and dignity and … not pride in an arrogant way, but just you're proud of your Muslim heritage. You're proud of your … You're proud to be an American. You're proud to be Indian and Pakistani. You take the good from your own culture, and you leave the not-so-good. So, yeah, I mean, I think it's … growing up, [and]… even now, it's sort of like a mixture of different feelings.

For Abbas, the confusion stemmed from more deeply rooted instances of stereotyping, profiling, and injustice.

> Yeah, we were confused in terms of "Are you American, are you not American?" I remember PE that day, on 9-11, this guy comes up to me, he's a Filipino kid, he's like, 'Hey, are you with them or us?' This is after Bush's…speech [when he said]. 'Are you with them or us?' I said, 'Who's us and them?' He said, 'You know, those Muslims.' I said, 'I'm Muslim.' He said, 'You're with them?' I was like, 'I'm not with people who kill people. I'm sitting here and you're alive, obviously, right? I'm not killing you.' He's like, 'Yeah.' I was like, 'So then, what do you mean "us" and "them"?' It was in PE class and everybody's sitting there looking around like, 'That makes 100% sense.' 'I'm sitting here. I'm not killing anybody, so what is this "us and them" thing you're talking about? Just because a group of people want to go do something, you want to label them on me? I don't know who they are. They don't know who I am.' He was like, 'Okay, that makes sense. I just wanted to know'.
>
> I was confused…at one point I even told them I was a little confused, because we're told we're Americans. When we travel in the airports, I've never been stopped until I traveled with my wife, and every time we travel, 'To the left', you know? Secondary checking. I remember we came back from Dubai and we went to D.C. and as soon as we checked our bags back in they said, 'To the left for secondary screening,' and the whole section right there for secondary screening of their bags was nothing but Muslims.
>
> I'm confused if we're truly American or not, because my passport shows I'm American, you know? All identification, my whole education, if you look at my biography of my life, it says that I'm American. All my institutions from kindergarten until being a professor now, everything

> I've ever done is in America, so am I fully American? Am I fully a part of this American system or the American "dream" or not? Do you have to be this Caucasian of European descent person to have this "American lifestyle," to be considered fully American?
>
> I think when we're labeled as Somali-American or Muslim-American, I think even that label to me brings some confusion. Because unless you're going to label people Catholic-Americans, and Christian-Americans, or you're going to label them as British-Americans, or Anglo-Saxon-descent Americans, or Irish-Americans, then we shouldn't use that justification either. If it's going to be American, I think everybody…unless you're Native-American …[laughs] I think everybody else should have something before they're "American." That's just my personal take on that.
>
> That did bring a lot of confusion growing up. Even until today, it brings a lot of confusion. I don't know what my children are going to be. What are they going to be? Are they going to Somali-American? Me and my wife don't speak Somali that much right now, so are they going to be Somali-American? They're born here, they don't know Somalia, so what are they going to be? It's always confusing.

Identity as a source of discomfort

In addition to being a factor related to identity confusion, racialization was also one of the underlying causes of Abbas' identity being a source of discomfort post 9-11. He explained,

> …first and foremost when you look at me you see an individual that's black, so everything that comes with … all the negative associations with a young black male are shouted to me. If you dig deeper, you look at my name, then you find out that I'm Muslim, so that's another notch of ignorance that can be perpetuated from a certain stereotype attributed to the Muslim people. Then, on top of that, if you look into my history, you'll know that I'm a refugee and an immigrant and coming from a family that didn't have much coming here, and lost everything due to war, then being a refugee immigrant Muslim young black male African in a post-911 context is very [emphasis] discomforting. Living that in the most vulnerable stages of my life, during puberty and during high school was very [emphasis] discomforting, because you have no sense of belonging.

Identity as a Source of Something Else

Still other participants described their identity as being a source of comfort or a huge blessing in terms of "just dealing with life". Daoud related,

> Identity wise, I think the faith of Islam itself kind of guided me along in making decisions because there are set rules and regulations within the faith that says this is permissible and this is not. Although the environment might be harsh you still have to learn how to cater to those rules and regulations by not violating laws and rules that are out there to…If there was one word I would put it as I would say it's a source of comfort.

Processes Involved in Identity Development

Among the participants interviewed, three processes repeatedly emerged as themes. All mentioned issues of belonging, occurrences of internal and external questioning, and/or struggles they faced in relation to their identity. Although they experienced these themes in different ways and contexts, there were definite commonalities.

Belonging

All of the participants discussed issues of "fitting in", "belonging to a certain group", or "keeping to oneself" in high school as a significant factor in their lives. For some, that group was other Muslim students, while for others it was non-Muslims peers. For those in the latter category, some only felt a sense of belonging with like-minded individuals while others admittedly associated with peers who were attuned to popular American teen culture and lifestyles. During high school, assimilating or even integrating with non-Muslims sometimes led to identity confusion. According to Ishaq, "…trying to fit in with everybody else... didn't go hand in hand with who I was trying to be. I was confused because you're trying to fit in with your friends and your parents

are a lot different than your friends' parents…the human nature is to want to fit in and adapt and you don't want to be the outcast; you want to fit in. So of course when you try to fit in… that's one of the dangers…you become like a sheep and you go with the flock".

Conversely, three of the four female participants who experienced a lack of belonging chose to stay basically to themselves rather than attempting to fit in with their high school peers. After leaving the Islamic School, Noorah attended two different independent study schools before transferring to a public high school in 11th grade. During the interview, she described the impact that it had on her by saying, "There were a couple of Muslims, a couple of Somalians but there were just a handful and in _____ High School there's about 2,400 students. You walk from class to class and then it goes by pretty fast. By the end of the day you just want to go home…"

When asked why, she explained her conflicted feelings:

> You're around other young people your age who aren't Muslim. You want to do the things that they're doing or… become friends with them. You forget to pray or you want to hang out with your friends; you want to go to public school because it's cool or it's better than going to an Islamic school… Considering the struggles in the past and then the changes in public school…and how I didn't really fit in…I always say that I'm an outcast…so I try to keep to myself as much as I can.

On the other hand Amir, like several of the other participants, spent all of his free time during school and on the weekends with his Muslim friends.

> I guess that's another reason why I didn't feel the need to assimilate too much in high school, because while other people felt they had to change themselves to something to get included, to get with some friends or to do things, I never felt the need to change myself to be like other kids, because I didn't need the other kids: we had our own group, we had our friends. I didn't need to belong with anybody else because we already belonged.

Questioning

This theme emerged from two different types of experiences that the participants discussed. One related to internal questions that they had related to their identity, religious obligations, relationships with family and friends, and/or sense of belonging.

Internal questions. All thirteen participants talked about internal questions they grappled with as a Muslim growing up in the United States. Some questions related to their identity and who they were vis-à-vis their ethnic, racial, or national background. Some participants had questions about what being Muslim meant. For Amir, who attended an Islamic school for 9 years and had only Muslim friends in high school, being surrounded with Muslims was a "double-edged sword". He explained:

> …It was probably a good thing I also went to [college]… so close to home... because although… the first two years is when I really started questioning and started coming up with the answers, I was still around, for the most part, the Muslim community, so it did help. I don't know if I had gone to another state or another city, if I would have come up with the same answers. I definitely would have asked the same questions, just because that's just the nature of … again, once you enter college, and you're alone, you start asking those questions. But I don't know if I would have come up with the same answers, and I think the reason why is those good experiences I had in staying with the Muslims in high school and in Islamic school was almost a doubled edged sword. I think the reason is because I took it for granted, all the things I did, and I never really thought about it – it was almost second nature – because of…that it was almost like you just got unleashed into the lion's den at the last second.

> I never questioned myself when I was around my Muslims or when I was in Islamic school... So it's an obstacle in the sense that you never really thought about why you were doing things, and that's why those first couple of years in college, you struggled a little with those questions, because you never really thought about it – it wasn't a gradual process of thinking [to yourself], 'Alright, this is [what it means to be] Muslim, this is why we do these things, this is why you're a Muslim, this is your

> purpose' –those things you never really thought about a lot in Islamic school and in high school.
>
> I never questioned the religion in high school. I never questioned whether I was on the right path in life; I never questioned anything when it came to religion. I never questioned like why can't I go date girls? Why can't I smoke weed? Why can't I be out to party at night? I was never like tested with those things, because they just came – it was almost natural not to do those things.
>
> That's a good thing in the sense that you don't even care about it, but it's also the thing that I was saying, I never really thought about it. I never questioned, 'well why can't I do those things'? You sort of need to question that in the beginning so that you can build even a strong base in life. I feel that's what happened in college.
>
> In college you don't have that one friend with you all the time, you're by yourself, which is why I feel like I started asking myself those questions… There was an MSA in college, and there is one, and I am involved in it, but it's a completely different experience. In high school, although it was a school with like 2,500 students, you see Muslims all the time – in passing period, in your other classes, you see all the Muslims that you know all the time. In college, it's like 30,000 people, you can live like two lives almost – and people do, people will come to MSA, but also live their other life. You're capability of doing it, so that's when you start asking yourself "well why aren't I doing it?"
>
> Like I said, the reason college is different is because you're not constantly around the Muslims. But I realize, there's high schoolers that are going to high school and they're not constantly around Muslims, so for them that might be their lion's den, that might be their period of reflection on why am I doing this? Mine came late, so I was almost like a late bloomer – I was 18/17 when I'm thinking about this these [questions] as opposed to being 14. So that's why I think I came to the right conclusions, but kids nowadays, maybe their high school is their lion's den. Everybody at one point is almost going to be thrown into something, and you've got to come up with answers yourself.

Still other participants in the study questioned and contrasted their own understanding of Islam with the image of Islam and Muslims being portrayed in the media and in their classrooms, particularly post-9/11. For Abbas, Sept. 11th, 2001 was the most significant event of his entire high school experience and it precipitated deep

internal questions. He reflected, “It just changed the dynamics 'til now. What it means to be a Muslim was completely flipped…It put myself in a defensive mechanism, so I would study Islam from a defensive standpoint. Like, ‘Why are these different allegations [being made] about my religion?’ So, it forced me to study [it] more and more and more...”.

Ibtisam also struggled internally with questions related to 9-11 and how to deal with teachers who further perpetuated negative images of Muslims:

> I remember though Sophomore year and the History [teacher] started right off the bat, “Today’s [the anniversary of] September 11th and the Terrorists, the Muslim Terrorists, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah…and in the split second I knew what he what he was going to say and I thought, “Okay, I have two choices here. I can not say anything and just stew about it forever, or I can say something and risk my classmates who finally accepted me being like [saying], “What is she doing? What’s wrong with her?”. So I raised my hand and I said, “You know what, that doesn’t represent all Muslims. I don’t appreciate you saying it like that. They were…not even real Muslims….and I talked it out with him.

External questions. All of the participants also talked about the feeling of being spokesperson for Islam. In fact, for Noorah, “being able to answer any question without doubt” was one of the characteristics of a strong Muslim. Hassan described the context in which many of the questions he faced arose. “I try myself to set a good example of Islam. Most people actually when they see me praying, they're interested in the religion. They say, ‘Oh, who are you bowing down to? Why are you fasting? What's the purpose?’”

Struggling

All of the participants referred to the theme of struggling in one form or another during their high school years. Consistently, they made reference to how “hard” or

"difficult" it is for Muslim students. Although Noorah mentioned the struggles she has faced, she remains optimistic and confident because "…that's what life is, it's a struggle and it's a test." Many of the struggles relate to keeping up with or maintaining religious obligations and acts of worship. She elaborated, "You're struggling in reading Quran everyday or at least for a little bit, or memorizing the Quran if you're not going to a Quran school… or an Islamic school where they do it."

Prayer. The most commonly mentioned struggle for Muslim students in high school related to difficulties surrounding their obligatory prayers. A primary religious requirement for all Muslims who have reached the age of puberty is to pray five times daily. Each prayer is to be completed within a specified time frame that ranges from one to four hours long. At least one of these prayer times falls when students are in school. Herein lies the difficulty that many students faced. Rashid explained:

> When I was at the Islamic school it was sort of easy; I just went with the flow. Once I went to high school, I realized then I started having some difficulties because there was no…I had to find times to pray and I had to [tell] teachers, 'I have to leave your class at this time to go pray.' That was the first time; that was the first struggle. Not everything was handed to you anymore. You had to go out and pursue being Muslim on your own or with a few difficulties in your path.

Gender relations. Several of the participants discussed struggles they experienced while interacting with non-Muslim peers in high school, especially with members of the opposite gender. Muhammad noticed that transitioning from Islamic school to public school, "you're trying to figure out how to fit in with people that were not raised the way you were raised." He goes on to describe how some students from the Islamic School "struggle to figure out what will make you liked by these people around you, how to change yourself." In terms of interactions with the opposite gender,

Muhammad observed that "…they're trying to figure out how to do that because they don't have any experience, whereas other kids have been around the opposite gender since they were small."

Ibtisam, like some of the other participants, struggled with negotiating boundaries when it came to mixed gender relations. For her and other participants, the questions weren't about what to do or not do. Rather, they struggled with how to maintain their values and Islamic etiquettes with peers who have a completely different frame of reference when it comes to what is and isn't acceptable behavior between males and females. She explained:

> I think the biggest thing for me was probably being friends with the boys because it was so common. [They think] like, 'He's my friend, it's not a big deal'. For them it's normal. So [for them] it's like, "Why doesn't she want to be my friend?' kinda thing. That was a big, big thing that I had to get over. It wasn't from a dating aspect; it was just being friends.
>
> For example, if friends see each [other], you know, they hug each other, they shake hands, whatever. So there were times when [a boy] would.. jump me practically and be like, 'Hey Friend!' and I'd be like, 'You know what? I can't do that. I mean if we're in class and you're my partner or sitting next to me, okay maybe I'll talk to you but.. you can't do that.' At first some of them were just like, 'Oh whatever, ha-ha-ha-ha' and over time they started to really learn it and respect it. That was a big thing for me because at first everybody's like 'You're so weird. They're just friends. They're not trying to do anything with you.'

When asked who would say that, Ibtisam replied:

> The other girls…even the guys sometimes. 'Look, I just want to be your friend. I'm not trying to do anything.' And I'd be like, 'I know but it's not something…and sometimes I would get shy [emphasis] to explain it. I know they're not trying to do anything and this is so normal for them. I had to keep just remembering that there's a reason we don't do that stuff… and if they would ask me I would TELL [emphasis] them, 'Well, this is why we don't. Look at all the repercussions and stuff.'

> I would turn to especially …one MAS [Youth group] girl who was three years older than me and …one from the Islamic School. They both caught the most of all of it. And I'm like, 'Oh my God, what am I going to do?' They'd say, "Ibtisam, you just have to remember, what's right and what's wrong, and you have hold [on]… it's who you are and if they don't like it then you don't want to be friends with them anyways…' And they just gave me the support I needed.

Although Ibtisam emphasized that she had support from not only her friends but also from her parents, she mentioned how important it is for Muslim youth to have someone to turn to regarding their questions. "It's hard and we need that support system…if the children can't go to their parents and tell them, 'I did this, what do I do, or this is happening, how do I handle it?' then we need to make those resources available somewhere else."

Employment. Although Ayesha is poised to obtain a professional medical degree, she and several of her friends worry about how their identity may impact their employment options. She confided that her biggest obstacle to maintaining her identity relates to finding a job:

> I think right now just the economy the way that it is, it's very difficult for young people to find jobs, no matter how educated you are, whether you went to school. When you go to an interview and you're wearing a hijab, no matter how qualified you are, if they have somebody that they perceive that fits into the environment better even if they [are less qualified]… it [the hijab] is a superficial thing but it does play a role…it's been difficult to find a job. Sometimes you think.., 'Well, what if I didn't dress the way that I did' or you know, 'What if my name was different? What if I was like a different [ethnicity] … what if I looked different? Would that influence the outcome?' Being like a different ethnicity or things that you can't control but you can't help think about, I think that's been challenging.

Maintaining a Salient Islamic Identity

The major factors that surfaced as impacting the maintenance of participants' Islamic identity involved 1) family, 2) social networks 3) school environments including personnel, and 4) media.

Supports for Maintaining an Islamic Identity

Although the participants individually discussed different factors that served to support the development or maintenance of their Islamic identity, certain factors were emphasized by all of them. The factors are listed in order of importance below, from greatest to least often mentioned.

Positive impact of friends. All of the participants emphasized the importance of surrounding themselves with friends that were a good influence. For example, Hassan described the positive impact that certain friends have had on him:

> I mean, most of my friends, they are by nature Muslim. Obviously, work and whatever it is, leisure, high school, et cetera, non-Islamic school institutions that I've attended in the past, I have been associated with non-Muslims. I have never received any discomfort from any non-Muslims…I mean, just for I guess comfort reasons, I prefer to surround myself with Muslims. Not only any Muslims, there are some Muslims, they're just Muslims by name but not by action.

> I like to surround myself with people that are better than me or attend more events than me, can help me benefit. Alhamdulillah. Can remind me, "Hey, where are you with your prayer?" stuff like that. I mean, Alhamdulillah, it's always been positive. I've never had a conflict with my Muslim identity in society in general. [Now] I surrounded myself with Muslims with strong identities, Muslims that help in society and kind of have leadership positions…All of my friends, Masha'Allah, are very good Muslims. Those are the people I like to surround myself with. They all remind me about religion…We remind each other.

Nuha also reiterated, "I know I keep bringing this up but, it's really important to have good friends and a good support system and people that understand you, and who you

feel like you can be yourself around, and you don't have to put up a front around". In fact, for Sayyid, the most significant aspect of his high school experience was "just being around a lot of Muslims." He stressed:

> That definitely helped me out a lot. If I would have just went to high school and attended classes…in college I guess you can be a ghost; you can go to classes and come back. You don't have to deal with people…[but] in high school, eventually you're going to find a group of people that you identify in some way so you'd have to hang out with somebody at some point and you can't be a ghost. So I think that just having that connection with other Muslims on campus real early was very…it was priceless for me. It was really important that I hung out with those Muslims.
>
> I guess we had confidence in each other so we didn't need to look to other people to gain confidence so it didn't change all that molding that went on for 9 years in Islamic school. We sort of just kept that mold by hanging out with other Muslims. I would say it was a Big resource [emphasis]... A lot of people, when I left the high school, a lot of these Muslim kids that came in from the Islamic School, some of them they didn't hang out with the Muslim kids or they didn't network with the Muslim kids and they saw a LOT [emphasis] of difficulties in high school that I didn't have to go through because I was with a group of people that are Muslim. So, I guess I would encourage anyone who came from Islamic school or any Muslim to network with other Muslims to keep their Muslim identity.

Some of the participants in the study continued to have primarily Muslims in their social network during college or even after graduating. Sayyid explained why:

> My social network now is still primarily Muslims [laughs], that's because nearing the last years of high school and going into college, I started joining Islamic organizations like I joined the MAS Youth Council and they put on events for kids, like basketball tournaments; qiyams [overnight spiritual retreats at the mosque]; they do all kinds of stuff and I joined them so they became another circle of friends for me. I also joined the MSA which was [laughs] primarily Muslims so they also became who I hang out. Even now, [my friends] are members of the MSA or MAS or they just frequently attend one of the masajids. So, my network now is primarily Muslim I would say.

For others however, their social network has expanded. Daoud reflected:

> Now my social network it kind of has broadened because of my understanding that I kind of gage who to be with, hang out with, by learning about them first and having them learn about me. If there is that sense of respect and mutuality then actually hanging out outside of work or school is permissible for me. Once again having that mind set that what is wrong is wrong and I'm not willing to comprise anything in my faith for doing something that's wrong. I would once again explain to people this is what I do, this is how I do it, and respect it. I respect you for who you are but, what's wrong is wrong. With that said it has broadened to not only having like being with Muslim people all the time because now I feel that my faith is strongly implemented in my daily actions and that if someone sees something good in it they might adopt it too."

Positive impact of family. Most of the participants emphasized the impact and influence that their parents or sibling had on the development and maintenance of their identity. Ayesha for example, shared the following:

> My parents always led by the example. They wouldn't just say one thing and do something else. Whatever they told us to do they did it themselves as well and they stuck to their guns like no matter how difficult it was or criticism from social environment, it didn't matter. Whenever they believe in something they just stuck with it and they push through with it. If they had told me to do one thing and they didn't lead by example I wouldn't have been as convinced so it's definitely my parents…that impacted me in a sense that I'm going to [remember] … it's difficult to stick with something because it's really easy to follow the norm and forget who you are but, it's really difficult to stand out. So different decisions that I've had to make, it might be easier to do one thing and it might be difficult to do the harder but, I just remember my purpose in life and that this [life] isn't forever so it's not worth compromising and selling yourself out for something temporary.

Positive impact of youth groups and organizations. Most of the participants talked about the influence of Muslim youth groups or organizations as being an important source of support. Several of the males had at some point attended a weekly Sunday program at one of the local mosques that was run by college-aged youth. The

program was structured to include short lectures, sports activities, food, and mentoring. Muhammad described it as such:

> Yeah, so the Sunday program that I mentioned earlier was a great resource. To be honest with you I would say it maybe went till around tenth grade or so, I was attending that, and that kept me at a certain mind state that I had limits. Growing up as a Muslim, and attending Islamic school is a big cause of this. I would say also parents are a very good cause, you don't necessarily understand things but you know that you have limits and you know there are certain limits [you] can't cross. You might not necessarily understand why but it's ingrained in you. If you start to slowly test those limits, it can get bad pretty fast.
>
> So the Sunday program was a big resource, some beautiful brothers that I have a lot of love in my heart for now, a lot of whom are not here any more, they went their separate ways, some of them are in Malaysia, I think doctors now and half of them are here, half of them are gone and I would say the strongest factors of them, the strongest pillars of the program are not in San Diego any more. When that stopped, when some of these brothers ended up leaving, my life took a turn for the worse in terms of the stuff I was talking about. The dunya [worldly attractions and temptations] coming into the life and [things that are not aligned with or allowed in Islam].

Some of the participants were also involved with the Muslim Student Associations (MSA) and/or Muslim American Society (MAS), two organizations for high school and college youth. Sayyid discussed the role that the MSA had in helping him transition from Islamic school to high school. He recalled:

> We had like very strict [tight school] schedules so the only connection we had to Islam at this point among the other students on campus was we had to be involved with our MSA. All our Islamic students from Islamic school went into our MSA now. So now we had two separate things, which was MSA and then we had school. That was sometimes difficult to coordinate with people. People [other Muslim students] who came from public schools didn't understand the purpose of the MSA or why they should be involved but the people from Islamic school thought it was very necessary to keep their Muslim identity. So a lot of times we had conflict between people not wanting to participate especially since most people who went to schools, [were raised] in public schools and they didn't see a need for an MSA.

For Alia, the Muslim clubs represented an extended family that she could turn to on her college campus:

> As soon as I started college the other Muslim girls would come up to me and welcome me and tell me to come to the Muslim clubs; so that is a family. You have that sense of 'these are people I can turn to if anything happens'. So, I think having more Muslims around and again having Muslims that are practicing, you do get that sense of 'there is a family I can turn to'.

Positive impact of Islamic school environment. All of the participants expressed that one of the benefits of attending an Islamic school was having a time and place to pray. In that environment, prayer during the school day was the norm. Nuha remarked, "It definitely was nice to be in a place where you felt like you could completely express your religious beliefs, and felt comfortable praying." When asked to compare his educational experiences in Islamic School to those in other environments, Hassan said:

> My Islamic school education, I would say, was more thorough and it was more fostering. I saw the teachers not only as teachers but as motherly figures as they tried to mold us into better individuals…In Islamic school, all my resources were in the same place and [my biggest resource] was the school I was going to. All my Islamic knowledge was being taught at the school, Qur'an class was being taught there so everything I needed to know or everything I was learning about my Muslim identity, everything I was learning about Islam, was at that place…actually I had prayer on campus…because it was at the mosque so, everything I needed was just at the mosque there.

Most of the participants discussed the impact that teachers at their Islamic school had upon them. For example, Nuha said, "I did definitely connect with some of the teachers at the Islamic School… Some of the teachers there were really crucial in helping me to sort of form my identity." Ayesha concurred, saying:

> I think the experience that I had in Islamic school was just really like building up my foundation and identity as a Muslim, knowing who you are, what your purpose in life is. It was like a very family-oriented environment. It was like your parents always watching over you somehow, compared to, I guess, a public school experience where you have no supervision from your family. Even when you're in an Islamic school, everybody knows your parents. You can't really do anything shady but in a way people are always looking after you and it's like you're at home in a way.
>
> I think that's a good thing. I didn't always think about it that way when I was going through the experience but looking back at it I think that it definitely molded me to who I am today. Things that I learned in Islamic school like how to pray, how to deal with different issues like what's haram [prohibited], what's halal [permissible], interactions with opposite gender…
>
> I have friends in college that are very confused about things like that. I know my limits and I know what's right and wrong and where the boundaries lie but I feel like a lot of students [who did not attend an Islamic school], especially in this current generation that I've interacted in college - they have very different opinions or different ideologies that don't necessarily mesh with mine.

Positive impact of traditional public school environments. According to Sayyid attending a public high school also had its benefits. He felt it actually facilitated the development of his Islamic identity because he could no longer take his practice of Islam for granted. Sayyid recounted:

> I became more confident in my Muslim identity in high school than I was in Islamic school. Because in Islamic school, I guess, [I was getting] training that I didn't see at that time a need for. So when I went to high school, then it all became applicable. "Why do I need to…why is there a struggle to pray?" because in Islamic school all the classes would stop and I would just go downstairs and pray [with everyone else]. All of a sudden, I go to high school and now there are issues. Now I have to work for something. So I guess high school is what molded my Islamic identity.

Positive impact of independent study. Four of the five participants who attended an independent study program enrolled at a site that housed a sizable Muslim student population and had a Muslim credentialed teacher. Ayesha described it as such:

> It was an independent self-study school so there were girls that were pregnant that might have been kicked out of the house, there was kids who had issues with the law, in and out between schools, juvenile hall, and I just kind of wanted … I didn't know how to interact with them I just stuck to my own comfort zone.
>
> I had a few Muslim friends but those were the ones that I would hang out with… We started out [being] maybe like at least 20 [Muslim students in the program] but then as years progressed, a lot more; I mean at least half the school [were Muslims]. Our particular site had a ton of Muslims. Not all of them practiced but we all knew each other. A lot of us had gone to Islamic school before or…[from] the masjid we all knew each other.

Although there were "a ton of Muslims" at this independent program site, Ayesha and others who attended it were primarily concerned with "getting out". For them it was a way to avoid the "fitna" [negative temptations and distractions] found in traditional school environments and to accelerate their high school experience so that they could graduate early. On the other hand, one of the participants who attended a different type of independent study program felt that it was a beneficial and enjoyable experience, partly due to the caring, family-friendly environment on the small school campus.

Positive impact of influential individuals. Two of the participants in the study specifically referenced Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as being the person who had the most impact on their life. Five of the participants identified one of their parents as being the most influential persons in their life. Still others mentioned that is was a specific teacher from their Islamic school that had a significant influence on the development of their identity.

Obstacles to Maintaining an Islamic Identity

In general, the participants spoke of the differences between the lifestyle of practicing Muslims and those who are not. For example, Muhammad explained that…

> …society I think would be the biggest obstacle for everybody that's trying to practice just because of where we're living. It's just you see haram [things that are prohibited in Islam] wherever you look. You open the TV - there's haram. Most of the youth out there, they're doing haram things. I see the society we live in is the biggest obstacle that a growing Muslim youth would have…because of all the haram you're bombarded with. Sometimes, you kind of feel like you're becoming numb to it all; you kind of start to accept it. I mean, it's kind of overwhelming to tell you the truth, especially in high school. I told you, there's people that do drugs and go out and party and all these things. You get invitations, obviously. When you turn that down, you're kind of looked upon as weird. I would say yes, society and peer pressure. Those are the biggest obstacles for most practicing Muslims in general.

Negative impact of school peers. Several of the participants described the transition from attending an Islamic school to a traditional public school with non-Muslim peers. When asked what was most significant about his high school environment or experience, Hassan explained:

> One of my realizations was how different Islamic life was from a non-Islamic life. I've seen many problems with the youth, non-Muslim youth in my high school that could arise from not following the teachings of Islam. Some of my friends ended up having kids at the age of 17. Not really friends but people I knew. They kind of had to drop out of high school and such. There were drug issues. A couple of students actually committed suicide. I thought high school was a crazy experience. I mean, you're surrounded with all different types of people. Then, there's those people who are education bound. They want to go to [a] university. You're just in the middle of everything. You're seeing so many things. You're kind of wondering, wow, which path do I want to take? Alhamdulillah.
>
> I mean really, it's a big transition if you think about it from an Islamic environment all the way to a non-Islamic environment in a matter of months. It's a really big transition. It was kind of like a shock. I mean as far as like girlfriends and all that stuff. Alhamdulillah. I've been able to

> keep away from it. You know how kids are sometimes. They mock you for that. They think you're gay or something. I just explained to them, I can't. I'm a Muslim.

Alia related how defending her religious way of life was often difficult. She said that her non-Muslim peers "just don't understand being attached to something else".

> It is like [if I say], 'I can't do this because it is against my religion' for some of them that is such a foreign concept. And it's not necessarily defending [it], it is explaining [and just saying that this is something I am attached to]. For them it is just 'who cares if your religion says that'. So, I don't know if defend is the right word, but it is just you are opening them up to a whole other world that they haven't even seen and so there are so many questions for them about the whole idea of being religious. I am wearing a Hijab because it is part of my religion and … even if it is something that you are struggling with personally, you are willing to take on that struggle because it is part of your religion and I think for them it is such a foreign concept.

Negative impact of school facilities. When Nuha left the Islamic school in 6th grade, things changed for her as well. "I didn't really pray in middle school at the public school that I attended because I just … I almost didn't know if I could ask to pray. I didn't even know that was an option." High school however presented a very different challenge. For some participants, the difficulty related to finding a place to pray where they felt comfortable. Nuha added, "In high school, I would just kind of go pray in a secluded area. I think, in high school, I was more familiar with, 'Okay. We do have rights, and we're able to ask for prayer space,' but I never really did that".

When asked to elaborate, she continued:

> So, sometimes, I would … In terms of the praying at school, sometimes I would actually try to go find a secluded place where nobody was in order to pray instead of just praying in front of people. There was that fear of judgment in a way. Actually, I don't know if it was a fear of judgment. I think it was just a fear of doing … Maybe it was judgment. I'm not sure…

> It's funny because in middle school and high school, I didn't care as much what other people thought of me. But, in some ways, it does seem like I did, but I don't feel like I cared that much about what other people thought of me. Because I didn't have a lot of friends to begin with, so for me it was like, 'Well, who cares what other people think of me because I don't have a lot of friends anyways, and the friends that I do have don't really care'. You know?…I think it was just I didn't want to introduce something really foreign and different to people. It wasn't so much worrying about being judged.

Alia, who attended a large, charter school that was more like a traditional public high school, also felt she could go to a teacher and ask for a place to pray. However, she too was hesitant to do so, especially at lunch when the time to pray usually presented itself. She said, "I felt like they [the teachers] were always encouraging and …if I had to pray I would definitely feel comfortable asking my teachers, 'Can I pray in your classroom?'" Nonetheless, she didn't utilize that option often and mentioned that, "in the library I would often find a quieter setting that I could pray". She mused:

> I guess I didn't feel 100% comfortable praying at school. But I did see other students praying. I don't know I just thought, 'How are they [peers] going to perceive me or anything like that?'...Yeah, or like [at] lunch, 'Where do I go?' Especially when there were so many different people that I didn't know. I don't think it was so much [worrying about] my friends because they already knew, but it was where do I go? And am I going to be comfortable praying in that location when I don't know those people? And so I would just wait to come home.

This dilemma caused a spiritual struggle for Alia, and other Muslim students as well, because in Islam missing a prayer at its stated period of time without a valid reason is considered to be a grave sin. Although Rashid did not face this problem, he remarked:

> In Islamic school, they catered more to the religion... whereas in high school you had to ask to be excused and then you would go out for 5-10 minutes to make wudu and pray…I remember some of the Muslim kids in high school felt embarrassed about praying in front of other people

> and I just never understood that. Maybe it's because I was raised in an Islamic school where you pray in front of people all the time. It was easy to just pray on the grass.
>
> [For] the most part it was easy for me finding a place, but for other kids in high school it was tough for them. Sometimes they would even miss prayer just because they didn't want to … If there was no place behind the building even though there always was, or they don't want to walk that far, then they would just skip prayer.

For some, the struggle was more about remembering or prioritizing prayer in the midst of all else going on around them. Noorah confided:

> There is always something going on when it comes to pray. There's always something going on. I mean even now that I'm working there's always something going on when it's time for prayer. Even if I don't mean it, I'll forget. When I'm late, when it quiets down and I'm thinking, "What did I do? Oh I didn't pray. I just missed prayer time." I think socially in high school that's what it was. That was the biggest obstacle, making it in time for prayer.

Another big concern of some participants centered on their ability, or lack thereof, to participate in Jum'ah prayer. This weekly congregational Prayer service is a religious obligation on all males that have reached the age of puberty. They are required to "leave off trafficking" and attend a congregational prayer and sermon every Friday afternoon.[3] Although the time generally allotted for the Friday Jum'ah Prayer is only about 30-45 minutes, for students attending public high schools, it can be a religious requirement that is daunting to meet and fulfill. As Sayyid noted:

> That was another big one; Jumu'ah prayer! We had to do it on campus so we had to come up with our own lectures [sermons] and even sometimes

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[3] O ye who believe! When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday, hasten earnestly to the Remembrance of Allah, and leave off business (and traffic): That is best for you if ye but knew!
And when the Prayer is finished, then may ye disperse through the land, and seek of the Bounty of Allah: and celebrate the Praises of Allah often: that ye may prosper.
— Qur'an, sura 62 (Al-Jumua), āyāt 9-10[2]

> we had to come up with an audience of people because people wouldn't show up to Jumu'ah prayer. So we'd come up to them and be like, 'Yo, it's Jumu'ah today!' and they're like, 'I have, I have…uh, I have to talk to a professor [teacher].' I'm like, 'Yeah, but it's Jumu'ah, you know, you have to, you have be there.' So just even simple things like Jumu'ah or praying on campus became sort of difficult, something you actually had to work to get to…So there was fairly a lot of difficulty trying to behave or trying to not only maintain an Islamic identity in high school but also to just do the five pillars of Islam; just conducting those things at high school was a little bit difficult... you know praying on time.

Negative impact of school teachers. Rashid explained the difficulties he experienced with some of his teachers high school teachers as such:

> High school was a bit tougher because you'd have teachers that don't really understand religion or sometimes they'd even have a bias against religion and they'd be like, "You don't need to go [pray], stay here and study." The few times that did happen I talked to the Dean [principal] and they'd talk to that teacher and then eventually they'd … But, yes I think it was just ignorance in high school. In college it seems like even everybody is educated, at least out of the teachers, everybody's educated on different religious practices, so they're always understanding.

Negative impact of family members. Sometimes family members presented obstacles to the healthy development of the participants' identity. Ibtisam remembered meeting one of her [non-Muslim] family members – her uncle's wife whom he had just married.

> So [it was the] first time meeting her and she said, 'Are you embarrassed of how you look?' and I said, 'What do you mean?!' She said, 'Well you're not typical blue eyed blond hair; you have dark features it's obvious that your Middle Eastern of some sort.' I was kinda surprised that she would ask me that and I said, 'No, I'm not. It's who I am and I'm proud of it.' Yes, I'm American but then I can also look at my [Middle Eastern] culture and be proud of that's who I am…

Several of the participants also talked about other Muslim youth that they knew of whose family members provided significant obstacles to the development of a healthy Islamic identity. In some families for example, girls are expected to maintain

significant household responsibilities in addition to their schoolwork. Caring for parents and siblings is considered as much of a priority as educational accomplishments, which presents challenges for girls who struggle to manage both. Furthermore, there are stricter guidelines about what is considered to be acceptable behavior for girls than for boys leaving many of the former confused about the cultural double standards that exist in some Muslim families and communities.

Negative impact of media. Muhammad elaborated on how the media is really damaging to a Muslim growing up and trying to understand their identity.

> The media honestly is just loaded with a lot of sex and anti-Islamic ideas, glorifying criminals, glorifying rebellious attitudes towards parents, towards people that are in charge. It's glorified and made beautiful and nowadays everybody's watching so much TV, so many movies, everybody loves watching movies and so you see this stuff and it's so beautiful to you, so you start thinking that's what I want to be like. I think the media definitely shapes the way people view life in so many ways, I think a lot of it's planned to be that way [by] people that are making the movies and people that are in charge…

Music. Muhammad continued, **"…**that was one of the things and also once people start listening to music, especially in high school, everybody seems to define themselves based on the music they listen to. The punk rockers and the people that are listening to rap and thinking that they're really cool because of that, people that are dressing based on the music that they listen to, I say music has a huge role in the way people view themselves".

Ishaq also talked about how much music was glamorized in high school and the negative influence it had on young people's identity, especially on inner city youth. The lyrics and music videos often depict life in rough neighborhoods and so, he explained, music has an impact on some Muslim youth:

> …as a kid growing up and you listen to this kind of music and you see that these [neighborhoods] are the places they come from and they glamorize it…you want to be, you want to kind of be like that cause you see that they have some kind of mental edge or toughness. So it makes kids who aren't even really from that environment incline towards that [lifestyle].

Internet. One of the participants also expressed that the Internet can actually be a big obstacle to the development of students' identity. Nuha cautioned against youth spending too much time being "plugged in":

> I think the Internet can be used for good, but I think in most cases it's detrimental to a person's spiritual growth….We sort of forget what's important. We sort of forget, "You know? Oh, we need to read Quran. We need to focus on the things that are most important in our religion." Yeah, reading articles about Islam is great and everything, but there's only so much we can read about Islam. I think when we read too much about it, like articles on Facebook, and we're checking our emails all the time, and we're so consumed by all of these pieces on, "Oh, you know, Muslims around the World and Ramadan." They might not seem … I don't think they're superficial, but I think when you read enough of these articles and see enough of these pictures, then it sort of becomes meaningless and you forget why you're really here and what you're really supposed to be doing, which is worshiping God.
>
> I think it can also create a lot of confusion…Because you're constantly being stimulated, and reading about so many different things and you're like, "Where do I fit in? What do I think about all these different things?" when a lot of them aren't really relevant. One should use your time doing more constructive things instead of thinking about all these … a lot of … Not, I mean, not all of them are trivial things, but a lot of the ideas being thrown around are trivial. I mean, the thing about the Internet is that anyone can share their ideas and that's not always a good thing.

Cultural Competency

Increasing the Cultural Competency of Students

Almost all of the participants expressed the importance of Muslim Youth "not living in a bubble." Although they felt it was beneficial and important to have friends

that held beliefs, values, and lifestyles similar to their own, they also discussed the need to know what to expect and how to respond to people in the larger society. Rashid explained, “Muslims are too used to dealing with Muslims. Even for myself, I've trouble sometimes dealing with non-Muslims because sometimes I don't understand references they make to different things. I say it's important to integrate with non-Muslims, and have non-Muslims understand Islam as well”.

When asked about the ideal educational environment for Muslim students, Amir also addressed the need for cultural competency:

> You've heard the debate before about whether they [Muslim students] should be in Islamic school or whether they need to blend in with society or something first. In general, I guess across all age groups, I would say an ideal institution for Muslims would be a Muslim school where they're surrounded by Muslims, taught by Muslims, friends with Muslims, but I think a key component has to be that they have to be encouraged to go out with society: to go to activities that are not just for Muslims: to volunteer for causes that are not solely for Muslim causes, to get them involved with community outreach programs outside of their Muslim little groups.
>
> Because I would say, I guess for me, there was a period when you could have fallen either side of the fence when it came to answering those questions in college, but I guess if while I was in high school and while I was in Islamic school, if I had interacted more with these non-Muslims, with these atheists, with these people that question religion, question things, but I had the Muslims to fall back to at that time, it would have been easier to answer the questions…
>
> The best way to build this strong foundation of identity [is] to tell yourself ‘I'm a Muslim’, and it's how you answer questions - you know, ‘I'm proud to be a Muslim; I'm really willing to talk to people about Islam’. But you need to see the rest of the world - you can't be in a little bubble, because once you go out … Let's say you went kindergarten to college, let's say there’s a prestigious Muslim University that's all Muslim, here in San Diego, but once you're done with college, then you have to start answering [for] yourself those questions. If it's almost robotic your entire life, you're never going to answer [for] yourselves those questions. I think the best way to do it [build the strong foundation

> of identity] would be in a Muslim institution, but part of the goals of the institution are to make sure that you're integrated within your society, so you're not just stuck in this little bubble of Muslims.

Increasing the Cultural Competency of Parents

Repeatedly, participants mentioned that parents need to understand how difficult it is for Muslim American youth to live in the midst of the American popular culture and retain their Islamic identity, values, and praxis. They stressed the important of parents “knowing what their kids are going through” and urged them to become aware of how different life is for youth growing up in America than it is from what immigrant parents experienced growing up “back home”. Alia explained that parents who are concerned about their Muslim children maintaining their identity need to know the following:

> They tell you "don't talk to those students, or don't go by these kids." But it is inevitable I am going to face all kinds of students and from all different backgrounds and I can't stay with my mom; she wants us home and she would drop us off at school and pick us up. It was almost like a little bubble and just I am not always in that bubble. I am in school and I am with other students and they are going to be my friends. Even those kids that are doing the things that I don't approve of. I am going to interact with them because they will be my classmates and maybe we will do a project together or maybe I will see them around campus or they will be friends with a friend and so I will be interacting with people of all sorts of backgrounds…
>
> I think being in that bubble at home kept me away from a lot of the social pressures that other students were going through, but for students that are interacting with them for a longer time period you can get sucked in and you can maybe feel peer pressure from your classmates and so I want parents to know that we are kind of going through a whole range of stuff. It is not just developing being a good Muslim but it also how do I find my place among my peers? And how am I going to defend that identity? So it is not just kind of something personal I am dealing with but it is also how am I addressing it amongst other people? And so I think maybe that aspect parents don't realize.

> They feel like "Oh, if you are a good Muslim, that is kind of it." But it is not just that aspect it is also "How am I going to go out into society and be that person?" When you are facing so many people that aren't religious at all and so they can't understand. At least with some students they would go to church a lot and so you'd…I'd I feel more kind of a sense of closeness with them because at least they kind felt…like what it meant to be attached to something.. to a religion, to a faith…[but] a lot of students aren't just religious at all and so even saying that you are religious or that you're close to a believe system, that is difficult and I think maybe parents don't understand that at all. Because they grew up in a Muslim society and that wasn't even an issue. Whereas here it is.. It is just not just being a Muslim but it is being religious at all I think you have to defend when you are at school and I think parents don't understand that.

Increasing the Cultural Competency of Teachers

Teachers were encouraged to recognize that while Muslim American youth have many unique challenges, they "face the same struggles that a lot of other students' face" according to Nuha. She suggested that, "teachers need to remember that Muslim children/youth are like any other American children. They have problems at home, they have peer pressure to deal with and on top of that they have school to focus on". Ayesha however, commented that teachers should be aware that "…our challenges are really different from the general American student population". She advised teachers to have the following:

> Just more competency in what Muslim … the struggles that Muslim kids are going through; definitely talking to them and just listening to them without giving any judgment. I think that's really important because it's very easy to …a lot of Muslim kids develop a dual identity. You can be one person to your family and the Muslim world and you can be a completely different person. You can wear masks and go in between. If you [teachers] aren't open enough to talk to a student, talk to an individual, they might not open up to you and you might never be able to help them. Overall, teachers who have a caring attitude, culturally responsive teaching methods, and have developed a degree of cultural proficiency in dealing with all of their students were most valued by students and had the most impact on them.

Summary

The overall findings indicate that were layers and interrelated factors that impacted the development and achievement of a salient identity in the participants interviewed in this study. Whether or not they identified themselves as American Muslim or exclusively Muslim did not determine the extent to which they achieved a salient Islamic identity. Six out of 12 participants self-identified as Muslim Americans and the other six identified themselves solely as Muslims. They experienced different stages in the development of their identity and in the strategies they used to maintain it. The majority used separation and/or marginalization strategies to maintain their heritage identity, self-worth, and sense of belonging throughout high school and college. However, some used assimilation or integration strategies in high school, and later adopted a separation strategy. Major factors impacting students' educational experiences and their achievement of a salient Islamic identity included (a) parental and family support, (b) school environments and faculty, (c) exposure to Islamic knowledge, (d) social networks, and (e) participation in Muslim youth groups or organizations.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

Introduction

American Muslim students are a unique minority group whose needs have been largely overlooked in the literature surrounding equity in education. Because of their diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds, they traditionally do not fit into one specific category or group. Although these students may have different hybrid identities, the one that they hold in common is their religious identity. However, little is known about how Muslim students develop and maintain a heritage religious identity that entails a way of life that is in some ways incoherent with the dominant cultural in American schools, and is associated in the media with terrorism, misogyny, or oppression. This study examined factors that impacted American Muslim students who have successfully achieved a salient Islamic identity in spite of the internal and external challenges they faced while navigating secondary and post-secondary school. Participants in the study were empowered by the opportunity to contribute to an awareness of the factors influencing the education and identity of American Muslim youth. The study aims to be transformative by expanding the awareness and cultural proficiency of educators, and to further empirical research by adding to the literature in fields surrounding this topic.

Statement of the Problem

The problem being addressed in this study is that many American Muslim students experience external pressures and internal struggles when it comes to maintaining their heritage religious identity. While some report being marginalized, bullied, or 'othered' (CAIR, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2011), participants in this

study faced challenges related to belonging, questioning, or practicing Islam as a complete way of life, especially in the context of public secondary schools. Some Muslim youth attempt to fit in with their American peers by assimilating into the dominant popular culture. By doing so, they often lose connection with their religion and heritage culture. However, like the majority of the participants in this study, others chose separation as a means of preserving their religious identity. Although their Islamic belief system is often questioned and sometimes challenged by teachers and peers (Zine, 2006; Peek, 2011), these students have learned to cope with the intellectual exclusion, social isolation, or moral alienation they experience in various school environments.

The participants in this study differed in terms of their identity development timeline; however they all progressed through the same stages of identity development proposed by Peek (2005). In the ascribed stage, participants were emulating the heritage identity of their parents. They observed Islamic practices and rituals because that is what they were taught to do, at home and at school, and they never questioned it. In the chosen stage of their identity development, the participants made an active choice to practice Islam because they began to question, learn, understand, and implement the teachings of Islam as opposed to being cultural Muslims. In the declared stage of their identity development, the participants not only chose Islam but also declared their identity openly through interactions with peers and teachers, through their outward appearance and dress, and by performing Islamic rituals publicly such as prayer. Although the participants differed in terms of when and where they chose and began to declare their religious identity, and whether they identified themselves as ‘American

Muslim' or simply 'Muslim', they all demonstrated evidence of having a salient Islamic identity.

The proposed salient Islamic identity construct is one that integrates belief, knowledge, and action. It is developmental in nature, is multi-dimensional in its scope, and is impacted by acculturation processes and strategies.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine what factors constrained or supported the development of a salient identity in American Muslim adults who are now between the ages of 18 – 25 years old. It explored the external pressures and rewards, internal conflicts and choices, and the different acculturation strategies that they employed to navigate through various, complex social and educational systems in secondary and post-secondary school. This study is significant because it provides an opportunity for Exemplar Muslims be to heard at a time when the media only highlights the negative actions of Muslim individuals who are linked to violence, oppression of women, and terrorism. The study is also significant because it fills a void in the literature; there are few empirical studies about recent immigration and ethnicity that address the issue of religion. The intent for this study was to explore the various cultural, psychological, and social factors that impacted the development of a salient Islamic identity among secondary and post-secondary American Muslim students.

The major research questions addressed in the study were exploratory in nature:

- What factors constrained, supported, or enhanced the development of Muslim students' identity and sense of self-worth?

- How do school environments, social networks, and familial resources impact the formation and maintenance of a salient identity in American Muslim students?

The participant population included 13 Muslim adults, 18-25 years old, who attended primary, secondary, and post-secondary school in the U.S. They were representative of different ethnicities, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds; five were female and eight were male. The participants were all alumnae of a private Islamic school for students in Kindergarten through 8th grade that has been in operation for the past twenty-one years. However, they attended for varying lengths of time, in different grade levels, and after leaving the Islamic school, they all enrolled in differing types of public secondary and post-secondary schools in California.

The methodology utilized in this study is defined as a *typical design* (Creswell, 2008). Subjects were recruited who are "typical", or in this case Exemplar Muslims in the local community. Exemplar Muslims were defined as being those students who implement the fundamentals of the Muslim faith in their daily life (Haddad & Lummis, 1987). This allowed the researcher to explore the unique challenges, resources, and factors that impacted the development of an Islamic identity among 'practicing' Muslim students within school environments.

The participants were identified through snowball sampling procedures. They were recommended by leaders of Muslim youth groups and Muslim student organizations, by an Islamic school principal, and/or by teachers. A convenience sampling procedure was utilized to select the final group of participants who participated in the study.

Individual interviews were conducted from May, 2013 through February, 2014. Each subject in the study participated in a semi-structured one-on-one interview that was 60 – 90 minutes long. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and then coded using HyperResearch, a qualitative date analysis software program. Phase I data analysis consisted of open coding and inVivo coding, while Phase II and Phase III involved iterations of focused coding.

Major Research Findings

This study addressed the extent to which Muslim youth's religious knowledge, social networks, and various family and community resources serve as assets in the development of a healthy and positive self-identity. Alumnae from a positive deviant Islamic school provided an insider's perspective about the impact of different school environments on their acculturation into the larger society, on their academic achievement, and on their Islamic identity.

Some studies suggest that American Muslim youth experience "hyphenated" selves, referring to their multiple cultural, ethnic, and psychological identities (Sirin & Balsano, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2008). This was also the case with some of the participants in this study. More than half of them identified themselves as American Muslim and some described additional hyphenated-selves with which they identified. However, these youth did not perceive being 'Muslim' and being 'American' as mutually exclusive identities. In fact, like many other American Muslim youth, they struggled with the prevalent and prevailing notion that being Muslim calls into question one's credibility as a trustworthy American citizen (Nguyen, 2005).

Peek's (2005) identity formation model suggests that religious identity development is influenced by contextual, developmental, and psychosocial factors. The findings of this study concur with Peek's theoretical model and suggest that, as with other minority groups, American Muslim students have the potential to make positive contributions and successfully integrate into American society without giving up their heritage identity through assimilation. The participants in this study who exemplify this prototype attributed it to several factors.

From a contextual perspective, school environments played a big role in both the enculturation and acculturation of these students. School environments and teachers, particularly those in middle and high school, also either facilitated or hindered Muslim students ability to transition from an ascribed identity to a chosen, declared, or salient one. Moreover, the development of their identity was influenced by other contextual factors such as the socio-political environment in the wake of 9-11 and the subsequent War on Terror. Several of the participants used an acculturation strategy referred to by Berry (2003) as 'separation' to strengthen and maintain their heritage religious identity in specific school environments and during different stages of their identity development. Also, social networks that included friends, family connections, and organizational affiliations played a critical role in developing and maintaining their Islamic identity. The psycho-social processes of questioning, struggling, and belonging further added to the complexity of the participants' experiences, and in many cases were a function of contextual and development factors.

These factors and processes contributed to the formation of a paramount identity, such as being Muslim, becoming more dominant than the other multiple

identities that often make up a person's sense of self (Peek, 2005). Given that the definition of a Muslim is one who submits him or herself to the will of God, one who has a dominant Muslim identity places submission to God above all other identities, psycho-social influences, and desires. Stryker's (1980) concept of identity salience was particularly relevant in this study. It holds that individuals' commitment to particular roles determines the strength of the identity salience that is associated with that role. Many of the participants having a salient Islamic identity assumed the role of being "ambassadors of Islam" particularly in school environments where there were very few if any practicing Muslims. A salient Islamic identity in the case of these youth may refer to those who strive to build on their Muslim identity to achieve Taqwa (God consciousness) in any given situation.

Findings related to the literature

Prior research supports the findings of this study and acknowledges that among diverse American Muslim students, religion is a significant factor in their identity formation and is stronger than race, ethnicity, or national affiliations. When asked directly about their identity, most of the young Muslims interviewed consider themselves, first and foremost, to be Muslim. However, some also strongly identify themselves as Americans. Many struggle with their hyphenated identity because of negative perceptions held by their peers, teachers, and media, toward Islam and Muslims.

Some research findings suggest that factors such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender, may account for variations in the onset of stages and strategies that Muslim students experience in the development of their identity

(Chaudhury and Miller, 2008; Schlein & Chan, 2010). The variety of experiences and perspectives among the participants in this study may be related to the different racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and family backgrounds and emphasizes the complex nature of factors impacting identity.

Considered by some to be Europe's leading Muslim intellectual and named one of *Time Magazine's* most important innovators for the 21st century, Tariq Ramadan (2004) addresses the problems Muslim students' encounter regarding their identity and offers an integrationist strategy for tackling them. Ramadan posits that rather than being totally isolated in artificial private school environments, students need to have the opportunity to mix with others and view themselves as part of the society in which they live. According to Ramadan, there is no better way to learn to negotiate relationships and situations while maintaining one's values than to work side by side with diverse people in different settings. He stresses the importance of Muslims reframing their position in American society. Although they are a minority group and viewed as a subculture by many, Muslims should not think of themselves as 'others'. To accomplish this, they must learn to develop a sense of self-confidence and of self-efficacy. He recommends they must transcend having a "minority consciousness" (p. 107), one that insulates itself from and feels marginalized by society.

However, some of the participants in this study found that during certain stages of their identity development, it was critically important to insulate themselves from their non-Muslim peers and the dominant popular culture. Although these students chose a separation strategy, it was not due to a "minority consciousness" as Ramadan (2004) suggested but rather it was because of their "God consciousness" (Taqwa). Their

narratives indicated that contrary to Ramadan's advice, while they were in the process of questioning and struggling with issues of belonging and identity, it helped to maintain friendships with 'others' having similar beliefs, values, and/or mindsets.

Private Islamic schools may be a viable alternative for fostering a strong and healthy Islamic identity in American Muslim students (Merry, 2007). Such was found to be the case with the Islamic school attended by the participants in this study. All of the participants attributed factors in the Islamic school environment, such as the Islamic Studies curriculum, the nurturing teachers, and/or the social relationships as being key supports to the development of their identity. Most participants felt that they were well prepared for the public schools that they attend upon graduating, having adapted to the school's rigorous and challenging academic standards. The comprehensive and rigorous instruction they receive provides students with a strong foundation for honors and advanced placement coursework. Furthermore, the Islamic school students were encouraged to recognize that although they are different, as citizens they have the right and the responsibility to contribute their unique perspectives, values, and beliefs to the fabric of America life.

However, not all Muslim students will be able to attend such schools and even those who do will likely attend public educational institutions at some point. Therefore, transformative leadership is needed in both private and public schools, to create safe learning environments that encourage interaction, cooperation, and collaboration between students and between staff members. Teachers in public schools are encouraged to explore the use of Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Wink, 1997) to ensure their learning environments are more fair and inclusive. Teachers in Islamic

schools are encouraged to explore the principals of [Critical] Islamic Pedagogy (Ajem, & Memon, 2011) to ensure their learning environments encourage a balanced and inclusive social consciousness.

The political environment and acts of racial discrimination, religious bias, and gendered stereotyping all have a strong impact on the self-perception and identity formation of American Muslim students (Bigelow, 2008; Shah, 2009). Research shows that individuals' reactions to negative information about the group with which they identity, is correlated with their self-esteem (Berry, 1997). As such, perceptions that members of the dominant culture hold about Muslims as a sub-group, may be one of the key factors affecting students' self-esteem and academic achievement (Abbas, 2002). "In times of transition, exclusive attention to the larger structural forces that impact individuals' lives cannot grasp the depth of their experiences. The ways in which they [and we] respond to the persuasive influence of these forces should be [closely] examined" (Oikonomidoy, 2010, p. 18). Social justice dictates that we make this a moral imperative.

Conclusions and Implications For Leadership

It is the collective job of parents, teachers, and administrators to help students embrace the notion that …"each of us is a part of learning a culture, transmitting a culture, and generating a culture in the multiple facets of our daily lives" (Wink, 2011 p. 62). Students who are successful at this will not need to assimilate; they will be comfortable integrating and contributing to the society in which they live while maintaining a salient Islamic identity.

Parents can assist in this process by transcending traditional mentalities that tend to create generational and cultural gaps with their children. Like it or not, American Muslim students in the 21st century think, feel, and act differently than their parents. Although the strategy of separatism as a means of sheltering children from moral decline and opposing worldviews may be effective during certain stages of identity development, students who are "digital natives" living in America cannot be kept in a isolated bubble devoid of opportunities to interact with individuals or ideas within the larger society.

Because students spend so much time in school or school related activities, it is even more critical that administrators and teachers recognize the internal and external conflicts that Muslim students experience and assist them in developing a healthy sense of belonging and self-efficacy. Failure to do so could lead young Muslims to psychological trauma brought on by denouncing their religious identity altogether on one extreme, or to isolating and viewing themselves (or the general public) as 'others' on the opposite extreme (Berry, 1997). Recommendations for public school leaders and teachers include increasing inclusion and engagement of Muslim students through developing policies and processes that open channels for communication. Hiring Muslim staff, soliciting Muslim parental and community involvement and collaboration, appropriate and sensitive use of curriculum, celebrations of diversity, and training teachers and staff to challenge any and all acts of discrimination, marginalization, or Islamophobia, are all means of working towards inclusion (Shah, 2009).

The most salient implication is that there is an urgent need for public and religious schools to coexist as parallel systems that compliment one another. Cooperation, respect, interaction, and collaboration between public and religious schools are highly advisable. Ideally, it would provide mutual opportunities for students' and staff's growth and learning. For families choosing a faith-based education, it could avoid the isolation of schools and students into cultural or religious enclaves (Sahli, Tobias-Nahi, & Abo-Zena, 2009; Zine, 2008).

Implications for Muslim Youth

Sirin and Balsano (2007) posed the important question, "What are the developmental implications of growing up at a time when most of what you see about your social group is negative" (pg. 109)? This researcher posed an additional one: "What are the means of holding on to your Deen (way of life) when what you see in the dominant, popular culture conflicts with it"? The participants in this study each gave advice to Muslim youth struggling with these questions. The main suggestion was that Muslim students should choose their friends carefully due to the powerful influence of friends on one's identity and choices. Most participants recommended that it was best, particularly in high school to employ a separation strategy and limit their friendships to those who hold a similar set of beliefs and way of life. Additionally, the suggested that youth take advantage of the opportunity to study and learn as much about Islam as possible. This will strengthen their identity and make it easier to answer the many internal and external questions they will encounter in secondary and post-secondary school (see Appendix B).

Implications for Parents

The parents of many, although not all, American Muslim youth are either first generation immigrants or first generation Muslim reverts[4] to Islam. As such, one of the main concerns that was voiced by participants in this and other studies is that parents don't understand how hard is to grow up in America and retain one's Muslim identity and praxis. Parents who immigrated to America have expectations for their children based on a mixture of religious values and practices, as well as parents' own childhood memories and cultural norms. Consequently, they often cannot even comprehend the struggles and challenges Muslim youth must endure while undergoing the process of acculturation in schools and in the larger society. Likewise, parents who reverted to Islam in their adult life, usually did not experience the same pressures and difficulties that their Muslim children do who are now attending public schools and universities.

The participants recommended that parents of American Muslim children should become more culturally aware and familiar with the moral incongruences that their children are exposed to on a daily basis. They should recognize the impact it may have on them psychologically and also on their ability or desire to retain heritage cultural norms or their religious identity. To be supportive, parents must listen to their children and strive to create a balance between being overly strict or too lenient (see Appendix C).

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[4] Muslims prefer to use the term 'revert' to Islam as opposed to 'convert'. This is based on the belief that everyone that is born enters the world in the natural and pure state of belief in and submission to God Almighty, the Creator. However, they are taught to adopt other beliefs and practices by their parents. Such a person who comes back to this original state of being Muslim (one who believes in and submits to God) is considered to have reverted to Islam.

Implications for Teachers

Islamic school teachers. The Muslim students in this study related that they benefitted tremendously from the knowledge of Islam they gained, from the social network of friends they had, and from the nurturing environment they experienced in the Islamic school. Repeatedly they discussed the impact that their teachers had on their understanding of Islam. For several of the participants, this was the cause of their identity developing from being a 'cultural Muslim' with an ascribed identity, to being a 'practicing Muslim' who chose Islam as their Deen.

However, several participants felt that there needs to be more opportunities for Muslim students to interact with the larger society. They made reference to "being in a bubble" while attending an Islamic school. On the one hand, 'the bubble' provided a nurturing environment in which they were sheltered from the life styles of their public school peers that are inconsistent with Islamic teachings. On the other hand, they felt unprepared to answer the kinds of questions and comments that such peers often pose. They recommended that Islamic school teachers provide more opportunities for them to interact with non-Muslim peers through having joint community service projects, interschool visits, and guest speakers (See Appendix D).

Public school teachers. More so perhaps than other minority groups, Muslim students find representations of positive Muslim role models and their accomplishments at best invisible in most school curriculum. More often, there are inaccuracies, stereotypical references, or outright negative portrayals in school curriculum and other media brought into the classroom (Siren & Fine, 2008). Although some Muslim students are able to stand up and confront the sometimes subtle or occasionally blatant

affronts to their religious group or beliefs, it is extremely hard to do so. Participants in this study rarely got close to teachers or professors in their secondary or post-secondary schools. However, on the few occasions when that did occur it was because the teacher/professor made it a point to reach out to the students and take an interest in them personally as well as to offer help or support (See Appendix D).

Implications for Muslim Community and Youth Group Leaders

Muslim community leaders must also re-examine and re-prioritize the vision, mission, and values of Islamic centers, mosques, schools, and other non-profit Islamic organizations. In earlier years, priority was given to the technical work of building such institutions. However, it is time for leaders to give serious and critical attention to the adaptive work that is needed to support the development and preservation of a balanced and socially conscious identity in American Muslim youth (See Appendix E).

Implications for School Administrators

American Muslim youth, like the children of other immigrant and minority groups such as Native Americans, Japanese Americans, and African Americans, find themselves 'othered' and face moral exclusion "in the media, in the classroom, and on the street" (Suárez-Orozco, C., & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 99). If school leaders are committed to fostering school environments that are inclusive and equitable for all students, they must recognize and understand the unique psycho-socio struggles of Muslim students, especially in the current political environment.

However, it is necessary to examine the efficacy of teachers and administrators to provide cultural as well as academic support to Muslim students in American public schools. How can school administrators actively implement socially just school policies,

programs, and practices that support the concerns and needs of Muslim students and their families? One way is through “habit interruption”, a roadmap for changing socially unjust habits of mind, mouth, and body. Leaders must recognize, interrupt, and repair “patterns of formal and informal organizational practices that unfairly advantage or disadvantage individuals” (Jeffries, 2011, slide 18). Yet, recognizing such habits may not be so simple given that we all have cultural blinders and biases. Research centered around the “knowing – doing gap”, a theoretical approach to change, suggests that people often have hidden assumptions or beliefs that prevent them from acting on what they know to be true or right (Kegan, & Lahey, 2010). Understanding individuals’ propensity toward an “immunity to change” is a step in the direction of aligning espoused theories of inclusion and equity for all students, with theories in use (Kegan, & Lahey, 2009).

Currently, accredited credentialing programs are not designed to adequately prepare teachers or administrators to understand or meet the comprehensive concerns and needs of 21st Century American Muslim students. Issues of educational equity rarely address students’ ability to freely exercise their heritage religious identity. Furthermore, few universities incorporate the study of Muslim Americans into their Ethnic Studies curriculum. Incorporating an awareness of American Muslim students’ identity issues into multicultural coursework, sensitivity trainings, and professional development opportunities would serve to increase the cultural competency of Pre-K – 20 educators.

Implications for Educational Policy –

The benefits of preserving faith-based schools have been enumerated by the White House Domestic Policy Council (2008). Many believe that it is a moral imperative to empower families' choice of where and how to educate their children. Organizations such as the American Center for School Choice have developed to raise public awareness and put political pressure on educational policy makers to redefine what constitutes public education. The findings of this study add to the empirical research showing the benefits of and need for increased access to faith-based education. (Smarick, 2013).

Limitations

Generalizability

This study does have some limitations that must be acknowledged. Because of the small sample size and the decision to limit participants to only alumnae of an Islamic school, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to include all American Muslim youth who attend either public or Islamic schools. Although they were few in number, the Muslim youth in this study conveyed their experiences, insights, and advice about growing up as a Muslim in America. Their narratives serve to foster a better understanding of factors that supported or hindered the development of their identity and what they recommend to other students facing similar challenges.

Despite the limitations of the study, understanding the educational experience from Muslim students' perspectives can assist school leaders in going beyond giving mere lip service to multicultural and multiethnic awareness. It can help them to lead

inclusive schools that are positive experiences for all students. This is important because having pride and confidence in their heritage contributes to self esteem, self-efficacy, and enhances the academic performance of all learners (Shah, 2009).

Positionality

The author of this study was born and raised in America. She also identifies herself as a Muslim and strives to maintain a salient Islamic identity. As the founding and then returning principal of the Islamic school attended by all participants, she is highly familiar with the curriculum, teachers, social networks, and school environment. She is also the mother of four Muslim youth who attended the Islamic school, public schools, charter schools, independent study programs, colleges, and universities in California. She is uniquely positioned to understand the struggles, challenges, and successes of American Muslim students given her background and professional experience.

Areas for Future Research

Empirical studies that expand on our understanding of factors impacting the process of acculturation and identity preservation among American Muslims from elementary school through higher education is needed to help teachers and administrators become more culturally proficient and lead more inclusive schools. Further research focused on the challenges and successes of Muslim American youth may inform new approaches to helping all students develop and maintain their religious identity within culturally sensitive and inclusive school environments.

Researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of this study by exploring factors that impact Muslim youth who did not develop or maintain their Islamic identity

or praxis throughout high school and/or post-secondary school. It is prudent to investigate the mental health of those students who lead double lives with conflicting hybrid identities, one identity at school and another around family members. While the sample population in this study included Muslims between the ages of 18 - 25, it would also be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study of high school Muslim students and explore their lived experiences with identity development. Furthermore, studies are needed that investigate to what extent the educational experiences and acculturation strategies of Muslim American females differ from those of males. Researchers attempting to ascertain the impact of school environment on academic achievement and the development of a salient identity are encouraged to also conduct comparative studies of Muslim students attending ethnically dominant charter schools such as those in Dearborn, Michigan, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and San Diego, California.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of 9-11 and subsequent acts of violence, there are deeply rooted fears and concerns about whether Muslim students can positively integrate into American society while maintaining their Islamic values and beliefs. On March 10th, 2011, a Senate House Committee hearing led by Senator Peter King, R-N.Y., took place to examine the need for rooting out home grown, radical Islam in America. Some point out that, albeit isolated, examples of American Muslim youth who were presumably recruited to go back and fight with terrorist organizations justify such hearings. Others however, are concerned that a rabid and hysterical focus on Islamic extremism in the U.S will stigmatize and alienate Muslims, making them feel more targeted. Thomas Perez, the Justice Department's assistant attorney general for civil rights was the star

witness in the latest hearing led by Senator Dick Durbin, D-Ill, on March 29th, 2011. According to reports (Burke, 2011), Perez said, that since the terrorist attacks on 9-11…

> …A steady stream of violence and discrimination has targeted Muslims, Arabs, Sikhs and South Asians in the United States…In each city and town where I have met with leaders of these communities, I have been struck by the sense of fear that pervades their lives -- fear of violence, bigotry and hate…The headwind of intolerance manifests itself in many ways.

Perez [also] said that complaints from Muslim's about discrimination in the workplace have increased 150 percent since 9-11, but he and other witnesses were most concerned by reports that "…many Muslim children are harassed at school -- called 'terrorists' and told to 'go home'…We have a growing docket of cases involving Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian students." Perez added that Muslim students form the largest category of religious discrimination cases handled by the Department of Justice's education division" (Burke, 2011).

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., responded by pointing out "there are two sides to this story…Efforts to recruit and radicalize young Muslims must be dealt with." He added a message, "To the American Muslim community, I will stand with you, but you will have to help your country….Get in this fight and protect your young people and your nation from radicalization" (Burke, 2011).

Granted, we must protect young people from radicalization, just as we must protect them and our nation from unjust practices of discrimination, religious bias, hatred, and bigotry. One thing certain: The education of American Muslim students, both in and out of school, is an issue of social justice that is of significant concern to policy makers, administrators, teachers, parents, and most importantly, to the students

themselves. Undoubtedly, research that is directed at understanding the complexities of Muslim students' experiences will help inform what steps need to be taken to ensure they become productive, positively engaged learners, critical thinkers, law-abiding citizens, and moral human beings with a strong sense of belonging, dignity, and pride in their American Muslim identity.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

The interviews were exploratory in nature using an appreciative inquiry method. The following questions serve as guidelines for conducting interviews with participants.

Background Questions:

The following background questions were asked of each participant.

- Are you a male or a female?
- How old are you?
- What type of school do you currently attend?
- What type of school did you attend in high school?
- How many years and in what grades did you attend the Islamic School?
- Did you attend Weekend Islamic Schools?
- How many years did you attend Weekend Islamic Schools?
- Were you born in the United States?
- What is your father's family origin?
- What is your mother's family origin?
- How many siblings do you have?
- What is your household annual income?
- What language(s) do you speak in your home?
- What languages(s) do you speak outside of your home?

Semi-structured Interview Questions:

1. How do you identify yourself?
2. How do your family members identify themselves?
3. How do you describe your parent(s) and siblings, your relationship with them, and your home environment?
4. Is your background a source of dignity, confusion, discomfort or something else?
5. How do others react to your perceived and expressed identity?
6. How would describe your educational experience at the Islamic school in comparison to other schools you have attended?
7. What resources were available to you in each setting?
8. What was most significant about your high school environment or experience?
9. How would you describe your social network in high school?
10. How would you describe your social network now?
11. Which individuals had the greatest impact on you? Why?
12. What were the biggest obstacles to developing or maintaining your Islamic identity and praxis?
13. What provided the greatest support to developing or maintaining your Islamic identity and praxis?
14. What would you like for teachers to know about the experience of being a Muslim American student?
15. What advice do you have or would you like for parents to know about the experience of being a Muslim American student?

16. What advice do you have or would you like for younger students to know about the experience of being a Muslim American student?
17. What advice do you have or would you like for community leaders, Imams, and youth group leaders to know about growing up as Muslims in America?
18. How would you describe an ideal educational environment for Muslim American students to foster their Islamic identity.

Appendix B

Participants' Advice to Muslim Youth

Source: Noorah

> I would have to say, take advantage. Take advantage. I mean if you are in Islamic school take advantage of all that they're giving you because then if you don't go to an Islamic program when you're older or if you're not in an Islamic high school or anything and people are asking you questions and you forget what you learned in Islamic school, it doesn't really help. But if you keep, paying attention to what Islamic school or Islamic programs have to offer you or what it says in the Quran, or interpretations of the Quran, at least you'll have something, some proof of the advice you have to give to non-Muslims.
>
> I would say overall to all young Muslims, when you grow up you're going to be asked a lot of questions. I would say learn more and keep learning when you grow up. You might not have as much time as you do when you're younger because you'll start working and going to college, you won't have a lot of time but taking advantage of what your parents have to teach you, what teachers have to teach you or just a Muslim … somebody older, Muslim role model has to teach you.
>
> Pay attention to that so that when you grow up, and you will be asked a lot of questions because you're in a society that's mostly non-Muslim, they'll ask you a lot of questions. Sometimes some people won't even ask to be curious, some people will ask to debate. They're just debating your religion, they're debating, they're questioning, they're doubting what you believe in and you have to have a base for [answering] it….[The best then that I can give to younger students] is to learn as much as they could possibly learn.
>
> It helps to go to an Islamic school. If you want to go in an Islamic school, ask your parents. It may cost money but if your parents see that you want to go learn about Islam and they're strong Muslims, of course they will do whatever they can to help you. You want to learn good. Instead of asking for a public school, ask for an Islamic school. You'll learn something and then when you grow up you'll be happy to remember some of the things that you learned and you could give people … non-Muslims an answer to their questions. Because some people they will ask you questions and if a Muslim doesn't know the answer to the question, a lot of people they'll just go, "Okay, there's no answer then." They won't go seeking more. It's not just non-Muslims, everybody, it's

just [the nature of] a human being. [When] we don’t get the answer right away, we just, that’s it.

A lot of people don’t really have the jive to learn more so they’ll take advantage. You see a scarf on your head or a kufi on your head, they’ll say, “Okay, I have a question about Islam. I’ll ask them since they’re Muslim they should maybe know the answer”. As long as you’re not a child, they’ll ask you a question. If you do have a good answer for it, they’ll be satisfied. If they’re really interested in your answer, they’ll be more interested to learn more, ask more questions. As long as you’re educated and you’re out in the real world, being educated by Islam, it’s very beneficial.

A lot of people will ask you questions and the best thing you can do now about that in the future is to learn. Of course learn as you grow older but as long as you have time now and you have fresh minds and open minds and a bigger attention span, just ask questions. Ask questions, answer them, research, learn more about your religion so that you can have an answer for all the questions from non-Muslims later.

Source: Ibtisam

I'd say one of the biggest things… is that it's okay to make mistakes, meaning don't go off and do this and say I'm going to repent later, that's not a mistake, that's, you know, a choice. That's not a mistake…For example, some people, they'll say, "I'm going to date this guy but only because I'm going to go repent later". Okay, you can't do that. It doesn't work. But there are some girls, who, they're feeling alone, they don't have anybody to talk to, they don't know what to do, they're confused, this guy's giving them attention that they don't get from anybody and they go and they do that and then [they] realize it's a mistake and khalus [that’s it], [they] stay away from it…

Some people have said, "I've made too many mistakes, I'm lost, I can't come back to Islam" and because they don't have that parental support, because they don't have, you know, [a friend who is there for them], they don't know what to do. So, I think it's okay to make mistakes. Just know that you can always come back and it's going to be hard and it's going to be a challenge to hold on to who you are, but in the end of the day, you have to remember who you are, and you have to remember why you're doing what you're doing.

Source: Daoud

> For me I feel consistency is key and that's what will allow you to gain the strength in anything. So when I say that I mean be consistent when it comes to your prayers. Be consistent when it comes to coming to the mosque. Be consistent in your family gatherings and also be consistent in showing up to class to school wherever it maybe be that is going to be beneficial for you. Just be consistent at showing up and sooner or later it will penetrate through your heart that okay, fine this here is allowing me to gain strength and that's how I will become stronger. Never give up and never lose hope.

Source: Ishaq

> I should say not that we know, because it's very different to know something and to realize something so we ask Allah to help us to realize it, but that's the difference; the realization.

Source: Muhammad

> I think what needs to be done is that at that age, and high school really, is people need to try to think about reality. It's not practical to think that kids are going to stop playing video games completely, stop watching TV completely, but at least some of their mind state be given to really pondering about the reality of life, reality of death, and what's in store, you know. This stuff just becomes something that's repeated over and over again without ever really pondering how that's going to affect us as individuals, and whether it's really real, you know, and another thing too is, this I would say might be bigger, is for people in secondary school to be questioned and to question themselves, maybe questioned by others as to why you are Muslim. What's the reason that you are a Muslim, and it might be it really is a lot for people at that age to think about, due to the current circumstances but I don't think that it's based on the age, the circumstances can be changed, kids can be taught to start to think about these kind of things, and so ask do you really believe in this stuff or are you just doing it because your masjid and your parents told you to believe. I think that's important.

Source: Alia

> …If it [Islam]….is not a decision that you have made personally, then you are going to face a lot of struggles. You are going to face people that are going to ask you…even if they are willing to accept you for who you are, you know, even if they have questions…if you face people like that, if you are not personally strong, those are going to be moments that are

> going to be very difficult for you. Because people will say "why are you doing this, or why aren't you doing that?" And they'll just… it will be something that is so normal for them… like dating or going to dances and things like that; it is just a part of the experience for them and for you to say that isn't something I am going to do…[is hard].
>
> So if you are not personally strong in it [Islam]…if that is not a conviction that you are holding, it can just be a moment of maybe personal crisis; but don't pretend and don't pretend that you are a certain person. Make sure you have those beliefs and have those perspectives because it does show with the people that you are with. It does show with the conversations that you are having and just be up front and clear with them, that boys isn't something I want to talk about and they will respect it, I hope. (They just wouldn't talk to me about boys) and so I feel like if you are clear with them about who you are for the most part people are going to respect it and if maybe the first few people aren't respecting it, you will find people around you who are going to respect who you are and the decisions that you have made but you just have to be clear with people. Don't hid being a Muslim {laughs}. That's not something you should be hiding {more quietly and seriously}.

Source: Nuha

> [Don't] worry so much about figuring out your identity because that's going to be changing. The goal in your life is not to figure out your identity. The goal in life is to make something of yourself, to make sure that whatever you do, you're helping other people; you're benefitting your community; you're benefitting yourself; you're helping your family in whatever way you can…Realize what your main goal in life here is… that ultimately we were put here on this Earth to worship God (and we should worship Him in whatever way we can through our work)… to worship God and to love God. So, we should do things with an open heart, and we should also worship God in whatever we do. Whether it's cooking a meal for your family…if your intention is right, then that's considered an act of worship and that will help you become closer to God…or, whether it's volunteering at your local high school or respecting your parents, regardless of whether you agree with them or not, just respecting your parents can bring you … will definitely bring you closer to God. I do have arguments with my parents sometimes, but I wish … insha'Allah I hope I can respect them more, and I think it's really sound advice that I've heard from other people, to respect your parents regardless of whether you agree with all of the things they say or not because, after all, they did raise you and they did so much for you.

> And…I think it's really important for young Muslims to appreciate everything that they have in their life and how blessed they are to be Muslims in America. Because…I mean, there's no place like America… The Muslim American community has it really good. Yeah, just be thankful for what you have. If you see something you don't like in your community… if you see some injustices happening, then try to do something about it and don't just complain about it.
>
> [Also…] Don't use social media like Facebook, twitter. It's a waste of time. Instead interact with real people in a meaningful way. Volunteer, help your parents, study hard (both your secular subjects and religious subjects). Make dua for your family, yourself and mankind. Don't procrastinate. You'll miss out on so many opportunities and will be asked by God what you did with your time. Time is a trust. You do not own it. In fact, you do not own anything. Your body, time and everything around you is a blessing from God. Be thankful for all that you have and stop whining. If you see something you take issue with, try to be positive and change it for the better. Don't spend time with people who bring you down in any way. Spend time with positive people who are optimistic, simple, motivated, thankful and thoughtful. Get to know your teachers and other adults in your life. They often have very interesting stories and lessons one can learn from. Read, read, read. Reading is so important in our tradition. Pick up a book. It will never desert you. Books are the best companions. Be connected with the greatest book of all: The Quran. Even if you read a verse a day, that verse could be so profound it can change your life. Consistency is incredibly important! The Prophet (peace be upon him) valued consistency over quantity. Keep a journal and reflect at the end of each day on what you did and what you can improve. Write down your blessings so if you forget, you can refer back to them. Talk to God. Keep thanking Him. He is closer than your jugular vein.

Source: Sayyid

> I think the biggest struggle that you're going to have to deal with… alcohol, drug abuse, all that stuff, is sort of secondary as the main issue. The main issue is everyone wants to identify with something. Everyone wants to find an identity or they want to fit in somewhere. If you're in high school, the Muslims who are going to school with you or the Muslims around you in your life are the people you should be fitting in with. I guess surrounding yourself with good company is one of the prophet's advice that I think is priceless in this situation. [cite hadith]. Whoever you surround yourself with is what's going to dictate your actions later on. I know there's a sense of individuality that's expressed in American culture but there's very few nonconformists in this world. A

> lot of people conform to the people around them. You see a lot of people ...[who say], “I'm just hanging out with them but I'm going to preserve my Islamic identity” but you don't see that in the reality. A lot of people, they will change. I think... It's okay to be a conformist but conform to the right people, I would say.
>
> For high school students, you need to know that a lot of times ... though you can't see something now or you don't know the importance of Islam now, you will when you go into college and when you start having a family or when you get married and you go into even higher education; that as you grow older, you're going to see the importance of Islam. For me personally, every science I study brings me closer to Islam… I know kids in high school, all they're thinking about now is their classes [that they are taking] now or whatever sports they're in. If they don't see Islam as a big part of their lives right now, they will later on, so set the foundation now and surround yourself with Muslims and you can create, I guess, an identity together as I did in high school.

Source: Rashid

> The best piece of advice I could give [you and] myself is that you should always think of your religion as your top priority. This comes before work. This comes before school. If there's something that is directly going against your religion, whether it's work or school, you have to choose religion because that's basically what it is to be a Muslim. It's not simply a religion, it's a way of life. So, if you forsake that part of your life for something else, then you're unstable, then you start doing things that are questionable or you shouldn't be doing. It's just simple, and Islam is meant to make life easier. Try and think of it that way.

Source: Abbas

> Take advantage of your time; take advantage of your time. One thing that the Arabs say, [and] it's a proverb, "Time is like a sword, if you don’t cut it, it will cut you." Time is of the essence; take advantage of your time. Respect your teachers and your elders. Apply the Islamic principles and teachings, and don’t just make it theoretical, make it practical. Live Islam; don't learn it. There's a difference. Islam is a way of life; it's not something you just read in the books, it's something you actually practice. It's something you get rewarded on.
>
> Maintain very good relationships with your friends, with your classmates, with your teachers, with your friends' parents. Be merciful to one another. We competed a lot, but we never put each other down; we never put each other down and said, "Oh, you got second place, you got

third place." No, we always said, Alhamdulillah, Alhamdulillah – Oh, congratulations." We all high-fived each other. So, be merciful to each other. [Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) said], “Be merciful to that which is in the earth, and the one above the heavens will be merciful towards you" ((At-Tabarani and Al-Hakim with a Sahih chain) so just be merciful towards whatever you do, whoever you engage with. Be merciful to your soul,..to your desires, to that which is good for you, to the betterment of yourself, and your family, and society.

Know that you're more than just a regular student. You're Muslim, a student living in America, and that puts itself [or us] in a different context, and that you are an example. No matter whether you like it or not, when you leave here and you're wearing a hijab, you are viewed as a Muslim sister. So whatever actions you do are going to be attributed to Islam ignorantly or with knowledge; it does not matter. Look at yourself as an ambassador. That’s the message that was always told to us, "You are ambassadors of Islam." If you view yourself as a student, as a scholar, as an ambassador, your educational experience will be very enriched. You're going to enjoy it and you're going to love it, insha’Allah.

Of course, fear Allah, subhana wa taala, that’s the #1 advice. Fear Allah and Allah will teach you. At Islamic school, where you're learning about the context of paradise, the context of hell fire, what it presents, sins and good deeds, rewards and actions, and the people that do good deeds, and their history and their lives. It's not a weird phenomenon to see yourself learning more because you're fearing Allah more, and life becomes so much easier to you. That would be my advice insha’Allah.

Appendix C

Participants' Advice to Parents

Source: Noorah

> I'm around a lot of Muslim Somalians or Muslim Somali parents at least, I could say for Muslim Somali parents but I think maybe in general, [for] Muslim Americans, their parents don't… don't understand or especially for the ones who didn't really grow up here and they came from their countries. They don't really get it when their child is going through so many phases and I think they don't understand how hard it is sometimes because you're around a lot of temptation.
>
> When you're back home you're kind of reminded a lot about what to do when you're around people, your own people who are at least fairly strong Muslims and do pray and you hear the iqama [Islamic call to prayer] in the streets and everybody goes to pray. Everybody stops what they're doing and everybody leaves shops just to go pray. You hear the iqama everywhere. It's like a world. You're around a whole world of Muslims and Islam is like in the streets. You can feel it when you're at home and then here it's just a totally different world.
>
> You're around other young people your age who aren't Muslim. You want to do the things that they're doing or you become friends with them. You forget to pray or you want to hang out with your friends, you want to go to public school because it's cool or it's better than going to an Islamic school. You're struggling with reading Quran everyday or at least for a little bit or memorizing the Quran if you're not going to a Quran school, either a Quran school or an Islamic school where they do it.
>
> I think I would like parents to know because it's two different worlds from where they came from. The world here in America, everybody's trying to live the American dream is what they call it. I guess get a good education and a lot of students want to live the whole college experience.
>
> Everybody has a different interpretation for a college life or a college experience. Living in dorms, having fun. At least … everybody wants … I mean a lot of students may want to live up to their other non-Muslim friends. They want to fit in I guess especially in the society now and the economy. Everyone wants to fit in so a lot of people would do whatever they can to fit in. A lot of students or a lot of young Muslim Americans they lose their way sometimes completely or sometimes for at least a

short amount of time when their brains are still developing, they're still pretty young, they're not mature yet.

A lot of parents don't understand it because they didn't live it so they don't know how hard it is or the hardships that are around them. I mean, at least some parents do know. A lot of parents maybe later will understand at least when they have an only child, the only child grows up and they kind of live that life. Their younger siblings are now living that life, they can explain to their parents like now when my siblings do things.

Me and my siblings, the way we grew up are different. They're more open, more outgoing, they got into trouble more than I did but I can explain it to my mom more. Almost a lot of the times the only child is closer to their parents so when their younger siblings are going through things they can explain it to their parents but it's good for them to know from day one so they don't struggle with the first one or the second one. They don't understand what they're going through and it's a lot of times because they didn't live it.

I think I would say, try to understand that America is different; it's very different. You don't hear the iqama from the streets. They have a lot of distractions, social networking, friends that are non-Muslims. Other temptations, movies, videogames, music, there's a lot of temptation around them and I would like parents to just know that it's harder for them especially with their brains developing like I said. They're still growing up.

I would just say maybe try to understand or at least, I would say, put a good Muslim surrounding around them [your children] but put an Islamic sense into your home. Try to get them if you can into an Islamic program or Islamic school. Try to get Islam around them because if you just let them live in a public school and then they just come home and they just do school work and they leave the house again, they're not really seeing it.

Pray together when they're at home, have a come home at night, pray together. If you see the family praying together, I think the family is a big impact when you're growing up. Get them, especially in Ramadan, get them involved in fasting and Quran contest at the masjid. Have them around Muslim friends also. Muslim friends help a lot.

Source: Ibtisam

> You have to remember that it's hard for us. And you know, maybe things were different at your time and when you, parents grew up overseas… being Muslim was the norm.
>
> I think one thing that's missing is that parents do not set the foundation. They don't... they send their kids just to learn the basics, but you're not setting that platform. It's like trying to build a house. You don't start with pillars, you don't start with the windows, you don't start with the curtains. You have to make sure that there is a foundation. So then, when your kids go to Islamic school, the teachers, their job is to build those walls, to build those pillars, to put the windows in. But if you don't have foundation, the whole thing is going to collapse once they're not in this environment anymore.
>
> …You have to have that base, meaning you have to instill in them those values and you have to tell them why those values are important. Don't just say, "You do this, this and this and you don't do this, this and this at school; khalus [Arabic term meaning “that’s it; finished”]! You have to tell the why you don't do that, what's going to happen if you do it. You have to, have to, have to tell them that. And I think it's just building awareness. And in the community, not just [in the] Islamic school, in the community there are so many talks that are just taboo, that you don't talk about. [Things] Like sex, drugs, dating, alcohol. That stuff you don't talk about it.
>
> In the community, no one talks about it. You're not supposed to talk about that. That’s it. So then you have these kids, you know they see in the media, the TVs and movies, which it's horrible [emphasis], nowadays. TV shows and the movies that are coming out. It's horrible [emphasis]. That's what they have. So they see that and they think, "okay, well look at what everybody's doing." And then they go to public school and they see everybody is really doing it, it's not just Hollywood. And I think one of the biggest thing is, just you know, you have to tell them, yes, this is wrong, yes, this is right, but why [emphasis] it's right, why it's wrong, what's going to happen if you do it and the biggest thing I think that's a problem is that, they don't listen.
>
> I've had so many friends who are like, "Oh my God, you talk to your dad? Like oh my God, I can't even talk to my mom or dad." And it makes it sad because they don't have that support, they're going to go somewhere else. They don't have that acceptance, they're going to go somewhere else. If they don't understand why, they're going to go somewhere else to try to figure it out.

Source: Daoud

> I was just thinking that parents need to understand the society first before they understand their children. When they [Muslim youth] go out there, there's going to be things that are going to be thrown at their children that may impact them negatively. But with the correct understanding the parents can give the children it may be intercepted positively and switched around and used towards them instead of against them by allowing them to either shun that which is bad off in seeing good even though it might not be something religious. It might be something that is of good quality or character they need to learn how to accept it.

Source: Ayesha

> Well, I think, the majority of Muslim students now are second generation, and a lot of our parents they didn't go out from this country and they don't necessarily understand what it's like in this specific issue. Yeah, they went through a lot of the same things that we did but it's a different time; It's a different situation. Pushing your kids academically, it seems to be a very integral component of most Muslim parents. There are parents that don't care. As long as you get good grades, they don't really care what else you do. There's more to your child than good grades and you need to recognize that.
>
> You also need to recognize that they are facing so many challenges. It's hard to be an adult and deal with peer pressure and deal with challenges in the greater environment. As a kid, it's a lot harder. Just be recognizing that and talking to your kids and really trying to understand them. Lead by example and don't tell them to do something that you're not doing yourself. I think that's critical because I have friends whose parents tell them to do one thing but they [parents] don't follow [the Islamic teachings themselves] and [so their kids] they don't' really listen in the end. [They don't listen to their parents because] …it's like they don't see an example to follow. I actually had a friend who told me like my dad specifically told me, do as I say and not as I do. She's like, "Why would I do that?" If you're not doing yourself, why should I bother?
>
> [It's hard] because what you're surrounded by is mostly … like the culture and the peer pressure, it's not Islamic. Your pop culture, the things that influence kids nowadays, it's not … or like at any time or any body, it's doesn't generally follow the lines of Islam. When everybody else around you is doing it, whatever like relationships, premarital sex… like drinking, it's very prevalent. It's very widely accepted into society.

> Choosing not to do it, it's hard. It's not easy. No matter who you are, if you're the only person, if you're the only Muslim in that environment and you're the only one not doing it, it's not easy. You're even faced with that as an adult in the working world, whatever, Christmas party or whatever social event, like networking, what does it involve? It's always over drinks or it's always at a bar or happy hour ... We can't always do that and it's hard for us [even as] an adult.
>
> It's even harder when you're a kid… You want to just fit in, you want to be accepted, you want people to like you and Parents, just telling your kids not to do it and just locking them up at home and not letting them do anything else, that's not going to fix anything. When they're 18 years old and in college they can do whatever they want. They're not going to always be under your roof...Many of them [Muslim youth] when they do get out and get their freedom… they're going to explore it.

Source: Alia

> [Sometimes parents] They tell you "don't talk to those students, or don't go by these kids." But it is inevitable I am going to face all kinds of students and from all different backgrounds and I can't stay with my mom; she wants us home and she would drop us off at school and pick us up. It was almost like a little bubble and just I am not always in that bubble. I am in school and I am with other students and they are going to be my friends. Even those kids that are doing the things that I don't approve of. I am going to interact with them because they will be my classmates and maybe we will do a project together or maybe I will see them around campus or they will be friends with a friend and so I will be interacting with people of all sorts of backgrounds.
>
> I think being in that bubble at home kept me away from a lot of the social pressures that other students were going through, but for students that are interacting with them for a longer time period you can get sucked in and you can maybe feel peer pressure from your classmates and so I want parents to know that we are kind of going through a whole range of stuff. It is not just developing being a good Muslim but it also how do I find my place among my peers? And how am I going to defend that identity? So it is not just kind of something personal I am dealing with but it is also how am I addressing it amongst other people? And so I think maybe that aspect parents don't realize.
>
> They feel like "Oh, if you are a good Muslim, that is kind of it." But it is not just that aspect it is also "How am I going to go out into society and be that person?" When you are facing so many people that aren't religious at all and so they can't understand. At least with some students

> they would go to church a lot and so you'd…I'd I feel more kind of a sense of closeness with them because at least they kind felt…like what it meant to be attached to something.. to a religion, to a faith. And a lot of students aren't just religious at all and so even saying that you are religious or that you're close to a believe system, that is difficult and I think maybe parents don't understand that at all. Because they grew up in a Muslim society and that wasn't even an issue. Whereas here it is.. It is just not just being a Muslim but it is being religious at all I think you have to defend when you are at school and I think parents don't understand that.

Source: Ishaq

> I would like the parents to know first of all that...if you really want to raise your kids and have them turn out to be righteous…if you really want your kids to succeed then…[it's best to] put them into a society where Islam is practiced. And if you can't do that then I would you advise you to make sure that your kids go to Islamic schools. Even if the school is not better than another [public] school, keep them in Islamic schools and only allow them to hang out with Muslims.

Source: Hassan

> It's not easy. I mean, sometimes [parents] they're just too strict to their children, which makes them hate religion. I noticed that with a lot of youth. Their parents, their whole life, have been forcing them to live an Islamic life. They've been forcing them to do things in a certain way. Some girls, their parents force them to wear the Hijab and then [the girls] they're taking it off when they get to the university. Just kind of…[try] to understand that there's a huge clash. Just because your children are one way in front of you at your house, it doesn't mean that's how they are when they're outside. They could be doing a lot of different things. Just kind of be supporting to your children and show them that you confide [trust] in them and that you know that they're responsible and let them kind of do things. Don't just let [them be too] loose. Just still monitor them. Make sure that they at least pray and stuff. Don't really be too strong with your children to the point that you will make them hate following the religion.
>
> How can they [parents] be supportive? Put your children in youth groups. You help them go to [them]... The children, when they're young, [for example] me, myself, I mean, when I came out of the Islamic school, I didn't really know the events that were going on in our community. I didn't know about the youth camps. My parents kind of found that out for me. That was what I meant actually by support and let

them look for ways to keep them busy. I would say that's the best thing. Also another meaning of support from parents would be just to let your children constantly know they're good children and just remind them of Allah and such; and support [them] religiously, religious wise.

Source: Amir

Parents – we need a lot of work on parents I think, in my opinion. They need to understand that their kids are going to be facing like literally like a tidal wave pulling them back and forth, and every day's a little bit of a struggle. You have to be patient with them, but you have to find a balance between controlling your kid's life and letting them go free, because a lot of times I notice that parents are on one side of the extreme, they're not finding the middle ground. The problem with that is when you're just controlling a kid and saying "no, you're only going to hang out with these kids" or "no, not going to …", because let's say the kid didn't have a group of Muslim friends to hang out with, and a kid needs friends, he needs his social network, he needs things. I knew a couple of kids that their parents tried to completely cut them off almost from society – they didn't have any friends in high school or anything like that, because their parents didn't want them to have any friends. I think that's extreme, because a kid needs to be a kid; he needs to grow, he needs to learn on his own.

But on the other side, you can't completely let them free to society, because it's a jungle out there (Laugh). I think some of the parents are a little naive, and they think that just because their kid acts a certain way in front of them, that that's how they act out in the world, and it's far from it most of the time – the way you act in front of your parents is night and day different than the way you act. Even me, like the way I act in front of my friends, obviously, it will be different from with the parents. But with other kids, kids that are hanging out with non-Muslims, um I think the parents almost take it for granted that when they were growing up as a child, they didn't have certain temptations that children have now, so they feel that it's not that big of a deal.

But I feel like they need to understand that there are struggles, and if their kid doesn't have those [righteous Muslim] friends to turn to, they need to be their friend. They need to be the one that's constantly talking to them and having these conversations about why we do certain things, or why this, because I can imagine the kid that's a loner – if I didn't have the friends I had, who would you turn to? You need to turn to your parents.

The naivety…of parent sometimes, it is surprising, I know some parents, they would send their kids to Duxies, [Somali] Qur'anic schools on weekends, or Islamic schools on a weekend, and they'd think that would be enough. But I'd remember of like – not the worst, how to describe the kids – some of the kids that were doing some of the worst things - because kids aren't bad these days, they're just affected by the society - were kids that were going to weekend schools, or going to Qur'an schools and memorized five, six, seven Juz [sections] of the Qur'an, and I think their parent's felt like just sending them to a school or sending them to a weekend school, that would raise their children for them. But it won't. You need to raise your children.

The reason I gravitated towards the friends I did was because the values that my parents gave, the values that Islamic school gave, were values that made us attracted to each other as the friends that we were. But if you don't instill those values in your children, how will they know who the right friends are?

You have to find a balance with [what] the parents do with their kids between controlling every aspect of their life, but also knowing what your kids are up to. Because even like with me and my brother, the way we were, like I said, they pretty much let us do what we wanted, we were able to do it because they trusted us, but we were also constantly talking to them and telling us about our experiences, telling them about what did you do today? How was school? I know some kids won't want to talk to their parents about the things they're doing, but we were fine with talking with them about it. It never even crossed our mind to lie to our parents about what we were doing and things we were up to, because we weren't doing anything bad really, per se.

So it's tough, because you could talk to your kids and then they could lie to you, so how are you going to find out what they're really doing? I don't know – that's kind of scary even thinking of myself as a parent. How are you going to know what your kids are doing? [Just] don't be too naive, I would say to parents. You can't be naïve, you can't just assume that your kid is not going to do certain things just because he's your kid. Because…there are kids that are doing things that their parents would not be proud of, and I think [it's] because their parents just assumed that they wouldn't be doing it.

A lot of parents don't know what their kids are up to, and that's dangerous. It's tough on these immigrant parents because they don't really know what's going on in the world, they don't know the troubles their kids are facing. But I mean it's their job: you've got a kid, you have to look into it, you have to understand what they're doing. Like I

remember when MySpace came out and stuff, I was genuinely shocked at what Muslim kids were doing on there, and their parents had not even the slightest clue – not even the slightest clue [emphasis], they were so far behind the game, you don't even know where to start.

…For example, I didn't have Facebook for the longest time, and I don't know if my mum didn't [either] for the longest time, but then when I got it, I only added Muslims. But what I saw with other kids my age weren't just adding Muslims, they were adding like a million people. I would think as a parent, it wouldn't be too much to ask your kid "who are you friends on MySpace or Facebook?" I know that some people would think that's an invasion of privacy, but I feel that specifically [certain parents in the community] they need to know who their kids are hanging out with, even if that means asking them like 'What are you doing online? Where are you going?' – especially if they're young kids. That's something I guess you would say, most of this stuff has to be done when they're younger, because when they're older they can start to rebel. I feel like [with] a 5th/6th grader, you need to be on top of them when they're young, so that when they're older, you can trust them to make the right decisions.

I think… the parents need to stay active in their children's lives. Say you send them off to high school; I honestly think it revolves around [being active in your child's life at] a young age. It's almost too late once they reach a certain age. It's not too late, but it's almost too late. There's only so much you could do for your 18/19 year old kid, I think, because at that point, for the most part, they've [become] molded into who they're going to be for the rest of their life. So I would think the advice to parents is you have to start early, you have to surround them with good friends early, you have to make sure that the high school you're sending them to has Muslim friends that they can hang out with, because a lot of the parents get caught up in rankings and this API or this SAT thing or this [GPA] average. But it's like 'Oh right, yeah, you're worried about your kid's education, but what about who's he going to hang out with?' You're just sending them to the lion's den with no teammates with him...

I'll use for example my parents. They were actively in discussion with other parents of [my] little brother and sister's friends, on asking them "where are you going to send your kids to school?" And even if that means moving, even if that means something … I think it's worth it, I think it's worth it to go to a little trouble so that when your kids are growing, when their molding into becoming who they're going to be for the rest of their life, they're surrounded with the right people. So I think the advice that I can have for parents is [that] you do what I guess my

> parents did [which was] surround your kids with the right kids at a young age. So, surround your kids with the right friends at the right age.
>
> Again, my advice to parents: don't be naïve! Try your best to find a balance, because it's impossible to find that perfect balance between too much and too little, as far as what you're doing [with] your kids [and] how much on top of them [you are]. But I think its a struggle to find that balance. [However,] as long as you're trying to, you're almost going to be on the right path. It's almost like Islam, you're never going to be perfect, but it's the struggle to please Allah that pleases Him. Obviously you're going to make mistakes with your children, you're going to make mistakes, but as long as you're trying your best, trying your best to surround them with the right environment…[just] try your best to know what they're doing, but without [being] overly imposing ...

Source: Nuha

> Just because we're Muslim, we're not immune to a lot … We're not immune to a lot of things that regular American youth experience. Like, I know a lot of Muslim kids who have cut themselves, or done drugs, or had boyfriends and girlfriends, or done a host of other things … or who are experiencing depression. So, parents need to really try to understand their kids and to be more open with their kids about all these things. Because if you try to ignore it or if you try to pretend like your child, because they're Muslim or because you brought them up the way you brought them up, is not plagued by a lot of these things, then that's just plain denial. If parents aren't open and understanding and willing to listen to their kids and what they have to say, then their children are going to go somewhere else to be heard and to gain advice from... So, would you rather have your children look up to you or look up to someone who you might not necessarily agree with or want your children associated with?
>
> [Also,] Parents need to pick and choose their battles. For example, I know a girl whose parents kept bugging her about not wearing colorful clothing. She dresses modestly and wears hijab, yet they kept telling her wearing colors is haram [forbidden in Islam] and that she should only wear black, grey and brown. These issues are not important. It is much more important that your child dresses modestly and has good manners than that they don't wear colors. Parents need to advise their children to keep good company, and must practice what they preach. Children do not learn from hypocrites. Be open with your children and learn to admit when you are wrong, or have made a mistake. Your children will appreciate you more and learn to do the same. Do not rely on your children to do everything for you. They have their own lives and must

> live them to the fullest. Don't [discourage] push your children away from becoming imams/religious leaders if they have an affinity to it. Encourage them to memorize and read Quran. Take them to the mosque. Attend classes with them. Take them to classes with you when they are young. Surround yourself with the good so they will too. Don't let your children watch television or play video games, even though it'll give you a break. They can get sucked in very easily.

Source: Sayyid

> I feel a lot of parents, they think that institutions and programs are going to raise their kids and they don't…They'll send their kids to Islamic school and say, "My kids are going to be raised ..." I mean, "The Islamic school is going to raise my kids." All the teachers, they tend to try to raise your kids. Ultimately, I've seen a lot of kids, they'll go [to Islamic school] K through 8th grade, the same experience I had. They'll go through Islamic school and then they'll go through high school. They'll forget everything they've learned because their parents they thought, just that one period of their life, was going to raise them or one institution was going to raise them. Whereas, Islamic teachings have to be constantly reinforced by their parents. Their parents have to be constantly checking them on, what activities they're engaged in when they go into high school or public school. If the kids are already in public school, then the parents have to make [even more effort] ... I mean, throughout the whole experience, the parents have to make an effort themselves.
>
> One of my brothers is an administrator at a mosque. He says some parents will just drop their kids off and say like, 'My kids, they don't know how to pray. Teach them how to pray'. Then you ask the parents, 'Do you know how to pray?' and they'll be like, 'Well, my parents used to do it a long time ago but I never did it' Just expecting an institution to raise your kid is not a good plan for parents, I think. I think Islam should be part of the parenting process at all times. A lot of people think just being a parent is just providing for your kids and sending them wherever they need to go. That has to come with reinforcement from the parents themselves.

Source: Rashid

> Parents… try and understand the culture and the generations. The generations are also evolving, so just try and understand what appeals to the [youth], or if they're children at the time, what they look forward to, what is hindering them from doing different things. For my parents, it was completely different; things that held them back or pushed them

> forward. Like, I have a relative that I'm trying to hang out with to help him come back to the religion a little bit more. He does some stuff he shouldn't be doing, so my parents always tell me, "You know, have you talked to him yet? Have you told him he shouldn't be doing this stuff?" I'm like, "That's not how it works. You have to slowly build a relationship," because I haven't hung out with this relative for a while. Just recently, we've been hanging out like every week to build that relationship so that it can come naturally, whereas we're not trying to force our opinions onto him; where we can lead by example, basically. It's already ... in my opinion ... starting to take effect. It's just different the way ...[parents sometimes approach things]; different approaches and different culture. That's basically it, just try and understand the cultures.

Source: Abbas

> I would say there's a moment where the cultural practices of certain Muslim countries of discipline may not be applicable and that there's times where a father ought to defend his son, a mother ought to defend her daughter, to understand the context of which they're living in.
>
> You cannot expect your child to certainly adhere to or maintain a lot of the Islamic principles or identity because there are forces outside their nature that will be of influence now, within your own home. That's on the television, that's Facebook, that's Twitter, it's social media; it's the Internet. I think the level of engagement now, you've given cell phones, you've given them iPads, so the level of engagement now has to be much, much different.
>
> There has to be a paradigm shift in the way parents engage their students. It's not like your daughter's going to go away sneak with a guy on a date; no, they're going to be friends on Facebook. They're [Boys are] not going to call your home phone; they're going to her cell phone, so there has to be a different level of engagement; there has to be a different level of engagement. The fitna [temptation] is larger, and so that makes us have to really rethink and retool the methodology in which we parent. That harsh stick sometimes is not going to work. That's the one thing.
>
> I think the rest in general is just to understand what they're going through. It's important to that sister when she's wearing her hijab if she's going to a school where the population is 10 [Muslims only], you know? The support of your son, if he's going to school and he's fasting, you know? I think that needs to be re-looked at. Islam 24/7, you know? Make them busy with Islam, weekend school, Saturday school, Sunday school, Islamic tournaments, basketball, football, camps, however you

can get it in. I think you can't change a person, but you can dictate their environment in a certain way.

I always tell Somali parents – they would shun or they would yell at us, 'Don't kick it with this guy, don't be around this boy. He's such a bad boy'. [I would tell them] No, bring this bad boy into your house. Make sure that he eats with your son or daughter, right? Then make sure that they – you sort of put them in an environment where they're actually together. If you want to take them out, take them out together and say, "Here's $50, guys, go out and eat, I'm going to pick you up by 9:00." I think once you do that, that total engagement is going to change. You can grab that person by their hand and you say, "This is the fun in Islamic context. Go." That's different than, 'Go, no, stop, stop, stop' [and trying to isolate them.] You can't work in those brackets, because that forces – human nature is rebellious by nature sometimes; humans are rebellious by nature - that forces the person, [to think] 'Okay, I want to kick it with this guy'. I think the engagement has to be different because that kid is going to be your children's or your friend, regardless, so you might as well go ahead and engage them in a different way.

I think engagement has to go away from just our own children to other children, to other children as well, Muslim and non-Muslim; Muslim and non-Muslim neighbors, colleagues, team players, whoever, or whichever sport they're connected to. That's dawa opportunity. One thing, growing up, my parents weren't all that open with us playing with non-Muslims until they met some kids and they were really good. They were like, 'Oh, wow, this kid… he has very good manners. Why don't you be around him'? I'm like, 'Pops, there's no Muslims in like a 50-mile radius right now. This is the only friend I have'.

You have to have a social life, so you might as well put it in a context, 'Ok, guys, you want to go to In And Out? Come on, let's go. Here's $10, go to the movies' you know? Then the level of engagement becomes a little bit different. I think we need to do that.

Appendix D

Participants' Advice to Teachers

Islamic School Teachers

Source: Muhammad

> In terms of teachers in the Islamic school, I think it takes a certain amount of knowledge. I think that just Muslims in general in America, we really just got to try to do what we read about in the Qur'an and read about in the Sunnah [sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)], without our own opinions on stuff. I would just say that for the teachers, just like everybody else, just like the parents and everybody, we really got to try to see what this Deen [way of life] is really asking us to do, which I believe is just pure submission to the will of Allah and never putting our own will above the will of Allah. Once that happens then parents will understand what they need to impart to their children, and teachers will understand how they need to provide the knowledge that they have been given in a proper way.

Source: Noorah

> I think specific to Muslim teachers, I think we can still use their help. Even if we're not around them, even if we graduated, I think we could still use their help, still have a bond with them. You know, it would help still having a bond with them. I think both people [students and teachers] need to reach out if they want to bond. If a Muslim student who graduated wants to have a better basis of Islam they should reach out first to their Muslim teachers, be around them more, be more engaged, maybe come back to the Islamic school and help out. If they have time, definitely reach out to the teachers and if they reach out to the teachers, the teachers maybe, whenever they come across them, be on check with them. Kind of like a second mother. [Just to make sure that] they're basically on the right path or at least a good path academically and also religiously.

Source: Ibtisam

> Hmm, I think for the non-Muslim teachers, [I would like for them to know] that it's hard. And even for the Muslim teachers, the Islamic school teachers, it's hard for us. It's hard, when we're in this world that sees Muslims as bad. And it's not like we can just blend in the crowd. You know, we have our scarves and our religious clothing that make us noticeable.

> …it's hard but - I think [this advice is] mainly now towards Islamic school teachers - but we're trying. And I've seen a lot of times where, it's just like [the teachers] they'll see their kids from the Islamic school on the weekends and they're totally different. And they'll be so mad at them and they'll yell at them, 'What are you doing? Look how you're dressed! I thought you were Muslim, this and this, look how you were in Islamic school, why are you like this now?' And I think this is not just for teachers, for parents too. You have to remember that it's hard for us. And you know, maybe things were different at your time and when you, parents grew up overseas… being Muslim was the norm.

Source: Daoud

> In an Islamic school setting I would say that they [teachers] would need to be strict yet at the same time not really harsh in their approach when it comes to educating the students on what is right and what is wrong. I'm not sure whether they do it or not but for me I feel that when it comes to correcting somebody you have to first understand who they are and what they do. Get a feel for their personality and then use an approach that is inviting to them to actually change what is wrong in them to what is good. I feel that sometimes one might think that okay, fine this is a religious value it needs to be inculcated and I'm going to do whatever it takes to get it inculcated but sometimes that could be more hurtful than it is calming and inviting. It needs to be understood correctly both the advice and the person that you're giving it to.

Source: Ayesha

> Don't be judgmental and be open to listening to your students… don't be their parent, try to be their friend and guide them. Through my experience, I feel like some teachers might try to be a little bit too involved in student situations like their interactions with each other [or] within the class. Islamic schools are very small environments. Everybody knows each other, everybody knows everybody's business. I felt like they [teachers]were trying to be involved in the relationships with [our] classmates or [our] friends and I don't think that's helpful. You should be there when they need you. They should feel comfortable coming to you when they need help but if you keep butting in, that's not helpful.
>
> If you pressure them too much they're not going to stick with it. Kids are going to end up making their own decisions. It depends on their environment, it depends on their situation, and there are a lot of kids that in Islamic school they were fine and then later they chose to go a different route. I don't know [why]. Everybody's life is different;

> everybody's situation is different. It just might have been easier to… I guess blend in or go with the flow rather than maintaining your Muslim identity. If you don't provide students with the support that they need, the foundation, then I don't think it's going to stick.
>
> I think just leading by example… it's very important. I've been in schools where teachers, even they didn't practice necessarily what they preached. It's pretty obvious. You see them in school and they're one way and then you see them outside, they're different. Definitely leading by example I think is the number one thing that you can do because there are people that I respect to this day through my Islamic school experience and then there are people that I don't respect as much. It's different, every teacher is different, every school is going to have many different teachers so you can't always predict or control who is around you or teaches you but I think just leading by example and just being very open to listening to what your students have to say and not judging them.

Source: Ishaq

> As for Muslim teachers, I guess I would like them to know it's actually… it's probably *very essential* to know what kind of society that these kids live in and what kind of stuff they're actually going through because you have to know what kind of pressures that they're facing. Like what [are you going to do]…? How are you going to try to do your best to impact this kid… after the help of Allah…? It's very difficult actually. It takes a very strong personality with not just speech but action, it takes a very strong personality to touch kids in this society…But for Muslim teachers, it takes a very [strong] personality that's equipped with action in order to do that.

Source: Hassan

> [Once I saw one of the teachers from the local Islamic school and] she said, 'Masha'Allah, you've grown!' and all of this. She [asked] me religious advice, "What can we do differently as teachers?" I told her, 'Never give up on your students'. Sometimes the worst ones, the most troubling ones are the ones that prosper and become the leaders in society. As a teacher, just know that students, they're living in America and, yes, you guys are teaching them about Islam, they're in an Islamic setting but when they go home, when they go out with their friends, they're not always in that setting. Just be patient with your students. I mean, you're taking the responsibility of being a teacher. Understand your responsibility and don't just give up on students. Don't call them bad things because they're hyper or don't say that they're bad Muslims

and stuff. Just always support your students and understand that there is a major clash going on in their lives. It's really not that easy.

Some students are in confusion. They see an Islamic lifestyle and they see a non-Islamic one when they're not in the Islamic school setting, when they're out with friends. I mean, just the most important thing is for teachers to support *all* the youth that they're teaching and not let anyone of them down. I mean, back in the Islamic school, I used to be at the principal's office almost everyday. That's my nature. I was just very hyper. Had a couple of friends that we were kind of doing things together. I mean, I've been called a bad child and stuff. It kind of still sticks in my head…Kind of that was the feeling I would get from teachers. You know what I'm saying? Because I did cause a lot of problems. There's also one of the leaders in that community, that called me a bad child and stuff like that. When I got to high school, I kind of wanted to prove everybody wrong. Sometimes, the underdog, they want to kind of prove everybody wrong. I mean, I was very hyper and because of that, I would get in trouble sometimes. Did that affect the person I became? Well, it taught me lessons. Just the number one thing is just for teachers to understand that all kids are different and they develop differently. Some kids have a lot of energy and are hyper and might cause problems when they're kids doesn't really mean they're going to cause problems their whole life. Just be patient with the children and just always be reinforcing to them and just always affirm to them that they're good Muslims. That's it. Just never give up on any person. You don't want a child to feel like you gave up on them.

Source: Alia

Other than [in] Islamic school, I didn't have any Muslim teachers…I think the only Muslim teachers I had grew up in different countries and so [my advice] for them is to just be aware that it is just a different environment than maybe what they grew up with... And I think they definitely understand you know what teenagers go through and anywhere it's the same… but just know that the context is so much different and we are not always surrounded by Muslims and so just to also be that person we can turn to when maybe the struggles that we are going through are not necessarily Islamic, and to be more open to saying, 'I know you did that, but it is okay, we can move on from there'. So, understanding the context of what it is like growing up here as opposed to when they grew up in a Muslim country [is important].
[In high school]…most of my days I was not with Muslims. I was with people who were not Muslim and their interest and their goals were so much different than mine in terms of they wanted. [They wanted to be popular or they wanted to have a certain kind of friends. I think luckily

> for me [because of] my family I was kind of kept away from that. I would see it at school but I tried to keep my distance from it and then afterward I would go home and stay by myself. But I think for a lot of the other students that are socializing with students that aren't Muslim, I think for them to get sucked into kind of your 'typical American',,. Issues, it is just so easy because those are your friends and those are the people you are around. And so I think [it's also important] having Muslim teachers that [can] give you guidance but also can help if you do slip, [knowing that they are] people you can turn to.
>
> I think [some students] are definitely going through some of it in middle school too [and even in] Islamic school as well. I think there were so many students who thought what was going on in here [Islamic school] was 'uncool' and then they wanted to go [do] things that were 'cool' or maybe they did hang out with some friends; I don't know how social they were outside of school.
>
> Maybe [they had] older siblings or just [learned things] from family friends and their neighborhood and stuff. And so I think maybe they wanted to emulate that as well. I think the teachers here [in Islamic school] were really good at saying 'you are going to face certain things once you leave school. You are going to face certain things within society and just try and be strong and don't do it'. [What they didn't address is]…'Well, what if you do, do it? Who do I turn to if that does happen'? [And what do I do then?] You know if I do go through that struggle, 'Who do I come to'? Maybe you would be embarrassed to tell them and so [I advise teachers] just to kind of have a more open mind that students are struggling with so many different aspects. And be there to give advice and maybe not judge them.

Source: Amir

> In Islamic school, I do wish the teachers tried to challenge the kids – I don't know if some of them would be ready for it at that young age, but to start asking some of those questions, maybe just getting them thinking in the right direction about why they're a Muslim. Because a lot of people nowadays, Islam's just almost a culture, the things we do, you're going through the motions, it's robotic, you know, you don't think about it too much. And I think it's dangerous when they think like that, because the thought might eventually cross their mind, at some point in their life, why am I doing this? And if they're not in the right environment at the time, they might come up with a completely different answer than I did. So I wish teachers would challenge their kids a little more to think about why they're doing certain things, because they need to realise that at some point they're not going to be teaching this kid, and

> he’s going to be going to some different teacher in some different classroom or in some different setting, and he might not have you to answer the questions, so he needs to come with the answers himself.

Source: Nuha

> Being a Muslim American student is not always easy. Just like people with multiple identities … and there are many other students out there with multiple identities - students are always trying to figure out who they are. I think this quest for one’s identity is even more present in this generation of kids than it was in the last generation of kids. Being Muslim and American are not two mutually exclusive terms, and one can be both American and Muslim at the same time. Muslim kids in America face the same struggles that a lot of other kids face.

Source: Sayyid

> Teachers in Islamic school they ... one thing that they, sort of, lacked in was that they gave us a lot of Islamic knowledge but they ... either they didn't have a lot of knowledge of what high school was or just the public school environment. They always prepared us for things they read in books, such as drinking alcohol or doing drugs and that's not the main struggle of a lot of kids. That comes later after they've lost their Muslim identity. I think they need to focus on how to preserve the Muslim identity in a public school setting. One thing, if I were a teacher in Islamic school, I would tell them, "Find other Muslims on campus." A lot of people didn't ... they weren't told that or maybe they didn't care and they didn't network with other Muslims on campus and all of them, [went on] their own separate paths.
>
> I think just being part of a group helps a lot. If they can encourage that [advice] among the people who are coming out of Islamic school, [it would be helpful]. I mean, you can have as much Islamic knowledge as you want but when you're confronted with public school and the outside world [full of] people who know nothing about Islam, who have no respect for the knowledge that you have, then the struggle is very different than what they predicted for the students. They always told me, ‘Don't get into alcohol or drugs’ or ‘Don't try to have a girlfriend or something to fit in’, and that wasn't the struggle I saw. Among the people that I saw that engaged in that activity, the first stage for them was they would have to find a group that they would identify with. Then once they identified with that group, then they would engage in all kinds of activities that they [the group members] engaged in. That's what I would encourage people from Islamic school [to know].

Source: Rashid

> I'd say understand the American culture. There's a lot of teachers in the Islamic school, at least when I was there, that came from other ... There's a couple that came from different countries, so they kind of understood things from how it is in those countries. Like when teaching, they started shouting at the students and stuff. There's been a couple of times that's happened. The culture is different, so just try and understand the culture, and you could do a way better job.

Source: Abbas

> For me, Alhamdulillah, I don't think I would be the man that I am today if I was never exposed to Islamic school. Of course, Allah plans things, but I believe that had I not been exposed to only two years, only two years of this [Islamic school], I would not be [what I am today]…
>
> I was at a point in 2006 where I was president of the MSA, I was leading the youth group, the Sunday youth program, 65 kids by myself; there was nobody else but myself. Everybody else had commitments and none of the brothers decided to stay around with the program, 65 kids by myself on Sundays. Monday and Wednesday, I was teaching a Quran class here at the masjid, and Fridays I had a youth program at [another] Masjid, so I was doing [this] four days a week, in addition to being a college student.
>
> I don't think I would be able to serve in that capacity or fill that void that many of the Muslim youth needed to really be active and engaged, had I not been exposed to loving Islam and serving Islam. That whole concept was born and a seed was planted in me at Islamic school. I think, when they present the content and they understand the impact that they could have, I think that's one thing that I would say; endless engagement.
>
> I wish they [the teachers] could understand the impact they had on me, [in] just two years, Alhamdulillah [All praise is due to God], just two years...You never know… There are people that grew up in Islamic school [for years] that are doing life in prison, you know? [Then again,] there are people that have been here [in the school for only] one or two years and just the way that they [the teachers] touch people, subhan'Allah [Glory be to God] you never know what impact it can have. Insha'Allah [God willing], I wish that they could understand the impact [they have]. I think that makes the job more enjoyable.

Public School Teachers

Source: Noorah

> [My advice] overall to all teachers, I think, I would want them to know … It's not easy. It isn't easy. It would help, [if they understood] it's not easy being … for me maybe … I mean I'm Muslim Somali or Somali, Muslim, American. I want them to know that but then [also] know that a lot of people are still trying and know that some people are losing their faith a little bit, kind of slipping because they're not around a lot of people to be on check with them.
>
> I think overall non-Muslim teachers…they already know at least a little bit about Muslim students or at least a little bit about Muslims or why girls cover up. I'm pretty sure a lot of them know. I mean at least the ones I have come across [do]. It's amazing for me to come across teachers who know even more than I expect. Like the teacher I was telling you about; his name was Mr. _____. He knows [a lot] and the thing is that he doesn't just know about …
>
> He's a Christian so he doesn't know just about Muslims. He knows about Jews, he knows about a lot and he wants to know more. Once you show that you want to know more to a Muslim student, even any other type of student whatever their background is they feel more belonging into their classroom, belonging in the community or into the university or school. I would like them to know if they know more and they show that they know more, a lot of students tend to feel more comfortable in [being] where they are.
>
> I feel like if non-Muslim teachers or professors know more about Muslims than we Muslims students expect and that they show that they know more or they ask more questions or they [act] more engaged [students will be engaged also]. I mean I think it's not just about [being engaged with] Muslim students…I feel like [this applies to] any type of student from any type of background; if they [teachers] are more engaged or know more about their background and they show the student that they know more about their background that the student would feel more comfortable in where they are, more belonging into their classroom or into their class.
>
> As long as somebody knows that somebody can identify with them, at least one person can identify what them, it kind of makes somebody's day. It doesn't really feel good being the only outcast. Some people don't care but at some point I believe every individual wants to know that somebody can identify with them. So that if they do need to talk, at least

> the other person knows what they're talking about or can expect how they are feeling or can feel what they're feeling. I feel like everybody needs someone to identity with. I think when it's the professor, when it's the teacher who can identify with them, not even identify with them but understand their background or understand the struggles that they're going through, understand their day-to-day happenings or problems; if they can understand that and show the students that they do understand and show the students that they do care, the student would feel more happy, more confident, more comfortable in the environment that they're in.

Source: Ibtisam

> I think for the non-Muslim teachers [I would like for them to know], that it's hard. And even for the Muslim teachers, the Islamic school teachers, [know that] it's hard for us. It's hard, when we're in this world that sees Muslims as bad. And it's not like we can just blend in the crowd. You know, we have our scarves and our religious clothing that make us noticeable.

Source: Daoud

> I would say that teachers should know that times are kind of rough for us, having been given a bad image. Most of them probably know that but they should understand too that we have certain activities, if you want to call it, or rituals that we have to pursue throughout the day and that these would probably trump or be a higher a priority than anything else, [especially] with regards to prayer. Taking care of one's needs from a religious standpoint… allows them to enhance their faith not only from a religious standpoint, but also from an academic standpoint…Understanding your faith and your beliefs…is the way you can achieve in life anything. They [teachers] would need to try and allow the freedom of practicing belief there, whenever and whatever it maybe, so [by doing] that it helps students to inculcate what they're teaching in a way that [enhances] their profession.

Source: Ayesha

> Muslim kids… going through high school or middle school…they're facing many different challenges, they're facing identity issues, they're facing peer pressure, they're facing pressure from their parents and it's just like a multifaceted thing.
>
> Just [try to build] more competent in … the struggles that Muslim kids are going through, definitely talking to them and just listening to them

> without giving any judgment; I think that's really important because it's very easy to… like a lot of Muslim kids do…develop a dual identity. You can be one person to your family and the Muslim world and you can be a completely different person [around your school peers]. You can wear masks and go in between. If you aren't open enough to talk to a student, [or to] talk to an individual, they might not open up to you and you might never be able to help them.
>
> I think just realize that our challenges are really different from the general American student population.

Source: Hassan

> I mean, to tell you the truth, in high school, we never really expected much from our teachers. There are a few teachers that you get close to just because of the clubs that you're part of. There is a youth leadership organization that I was part of. One of our English teachers was the head of that organization so we got close to her. I mean, as far as [advice to] high school teachers teachers, they should just understand that all the youth are different and they think they think differently based on their religious backgrounds. Just kind of be open to all of that. Just kind of, I would say, know your students in a sense. It's kind of tough. Again, just know your students and just understand different religions and different ideologies.

Source: Alia

> I think [it's important] for them to know that we do have a sense that…we know that in society it is not necessarily accepted to be a Muslim. So it is always helpful to have that teacher that, even if you don't ask them to, comes up to you and says 'if anything happens, feel free to come to me', or just shows that they understand that you do carry that sense of unease and is willing to address it and be that supportive person, whether you ask them to or not. Because you will have those feelings at times and so knowing that at least the teachers support you… [having] that adult there to support you… it is very helpful.

Source: Amir

> Teachers in high school and college, I do wish they realized you [as a Muslim student] almost have a second life that you've got to live. Because what they see in front of them, most people wouldn't even realize the things we do on a daily basis: prayer five times, the fasting in Ramadan. I wish they knew about some of those things, just so they could be a little more sensitive to the issues.

> Like for example, when you have to talk with them about praying or about fasting because it's relevant to the classroom setting, I wish they knew about it beforehand, because some of them don't. It's amazing how many of them don't. I mean it was a form of dialogue having to explain things [to the teacher] like,
>
> Student: 'Well yeah, I have to pray at one o'clock'.
>
> Teacher: 'Couldn't you pray at 2:00'?
>
> Student: 'Well, I can, but it's better to pray at 1:00.'
>
> The things you have to explain to them… I wish they knew a little bit more about the religion that over a billion people in the world adhere to. I'm thinking, I guess, just more knowledge about the issues and more knowledge about the current affairs. Teachers, they don't have too much of that in public schools, in high schools. The really didn't know a lot about Islam, they really didn't know a lot about certain things, so I could imagine if a kid feels alone, it would be harder for him to explain certain things he does. So if the teacher knew about those things, knew about Islam, knew why he doesn't drink or why he doesn't party or why he doesn't … then it would help. [Researcher adds, 'Or maybe even why he does and how he feels conflicted because of choices he's made that are contrary to his religion']. That's right. I can imagine a girl [struggling with] wearing a hijab [head scarf] or not wearing a hijab, it might be tough for them.

Source: Nuha

> Being Muslim and American are not two mutually exclusive terms, and one can be both American and Muslim at the same time. Muslim kids in America face the same struggles that a lot of other kids face. Teachers need to remember that Muslim children or youth are like any other American children. They have problems at home, they have peer pressure to deal with and on top of that they have school to focus on. Don't make their lives harder by berating them. Don't humiliate them in front of the rest of the class and don't humiliate them, period. Understand that they might be going through things that you are unaware of and to be gentle and speak with humility and kindness. Don't patronize [them]. Don't think you understand Muslim children because you know about their culture(s), background(s) and religion. Don't buy into orientalist ideas. Don't think of Muslims and Muslim children as monolithic, all robots that think the same, practice in the same way and to the same degree. Don't automatically think that their family is oppressive and they

> live in fear or are forced to do things. This also goes for the community at large. Do encourage them to express their rights. If you know of Muslim students who want to pray at school, facilitate this by helping them work through the school. Do treat your students equally. Show the same concern for all of them.

Source: Sayyid

> As far as public school and university [life goes] I guess I didn't have too much trouble with the teachers. But one thing [was that] they would accommodate for cultures such as like Christians or Jews but they didn't accommodate enough for Muslims. Some of them would be really confused when you ask them like, 'I need to go outside to pray', or they don't understand why would you need to pray at this time. 'Can't you go pray when you go home or something'? [I advise] educating teachers on basic knowledge of Muslims and Islam to just know what activities Muslims do and how [teachers] can be more accommodating to them and also just their side of the story [about] a lot of historical or political matters. Because in classes, they teach a lot of ... I mean, a lot of these teachers, they teach just straight off the text book and I know that they personally don't even have a lot of knowledge of matters that happened in history or politically that are happening now. They will just take the stance that the media has already taken. In college, I saw it a little bit less. You see more educated, more open-minded, and more opinionated professors so they would, I guess, some of them would present more Muslim-friendly stances and some of them wouldn't. I would just say to be more accommodating of the Muslim population for the public school teachers.

Source: Rashid

> I would say try and research a little bit about every religion to be a little bit open minded about every religion. Most of the time, it's not an issue, but there are those times where it is [an issue], and it's just simply because of ignorance. A lot of issues in the world are simply because of ignorance, so as long as they research a little bit, I think they should be fine. In terms of the experience, they should just know that it could be hard for students to accommodate both studies and religion sometimes without sacrificing one for the other. Sometimes, even workload on certain days can be an issue, like on Jumu'ah[5], when you need to turn in a paper, like a three-page paper from one day to another on Thursday to

[5] Jumu'ah is a weekly congregational service that includes prayer and a short sermon called a Khutba. It occurs on Fridays and attendance is mandatory for all males having reached the age of puberty. See Al-Qur'an, Chapter 62: Verse 9).

> Friday or from Friday to Saturday. It can hinder you because you have to set aside time for this. Also, the culture is different for Muslims. There's a different community that we hang out with, so in terms of Muslims in my experience, I'm obligated to the community in a lot more ways than like a regular American would be, whereas they hang out with friends when they need to, and then they do school stuff and work stuff when they need to. For me, I have volunteer work I need to do; I have to go to Qiyams [special prayers offered late at night or before dawn] or different things. So, just try and research a little bit to know what everybody does to help out.

Source: Abbas

> I think [that the challenge for] non-Islamic school teachers… is the diversity of the students that are in a classroom; [it's] understanding their needs. When you talk about a multicultural-competent instructor and educator, you have to be cognizant and aware of the students that sit in the seats that you're teaching, and what it takes for them to actually learn and absorb the knowledge that you're presenting to them, that you're disseminating to them. If you're a true educator, I think it takes a conscious effort on your part to understand what it is that the student is going through as a person and what it is that you can do to help to serve this person at the juncture that you're at.

Appendix E

Participants' Advice to Community and Youth Group Leaders

Source: Ibtisam

> Don't be so hard on your kids. Yeah, I think they just [not just the Imams, everybody] see the youth, not being as strong as they can and they give up on them. And they just yell at them. And the kids are like, 'Okay, someone's yelling at me again. Whatever. Let me just get through this and I can just move on'.
>
> [Instead, say to the youth]…'You know what, I saw this and this and this, you know, and I'm here to talk' and just make yourself available. [Tell them,] 'If you want to talk, I'm here. No judgment. Not going to yell at you, I'm here to talk'.

Source: Noorah

> I think I would say I guess, pull all the young Muslim students, pull them back to the masjid. I know there's a lot of activities that go on here in the Masjid and at the Youth Group Center and they do like do events or invites on Facebook like social network because a lot of Muslim Americans are on the social network sites.
>
> I know they have a lot of them and they do send out invites. It helps to do that but maybe approach them or… we do have a lot of our lectures of course in English… maybe target a lot of the lectures to young Muslim students. I wouldn't say just Friday prayer but maybe memos here and there. Anytime there's an opportunity to speak to … a gathering. A lot of people come together to the masjid; maybe target the young Muslim Americans.
>
> Everything that we have to say during Friday prayer pertains to everybody, it is … the imam is speaking to everybody, every Muslim person but once you … if you acknowledge young Muslim Americans, say, maybe even just say, 'Young Muslim Americans', they will probably will pay more attention.
>
> I mean it's pretty hard because there's a whole group of people there but I believe the people who need more, more reminders are the young Muslim Americans because they're growing up around a lot of distractions and temptations. I think maybe acknowledge them more, any opportunity that they have. I know imams are busy and other community

> leader is busy but as long as they're being acknowledged, maybe keep more events of course and more invites on Facebook, it helps.

Source: Daoud

> I feel that a lot of the Imams themselves know that it is difficult because they themselves have their children who are growing up over here and they learn from their experiences and reflect upon that. I feel they know a lot that they need to, to actually allow the community to flourish with the good that they need to flourish with. They understand that this society is harsh and that we are once again have a certain image by society and they are taking the necessary steps to defer away from that [image] from a bad [one] to a good [one]. They're going up and educating the community at large about who we are and they're coming in and educating us on who we need to be. I feel they are doing a good job and they should keep doing that if they can. There's always new ways and approaches to things that are more beneficial or efficient. I think they are keeping up to date with it though.

Source: Ayesha

> I think our community does a pretty good job. There's plenty of opportunities for young people to get involved if they want. There are youth groups. There's different conferences that happen. There's plenty of activities but just allowing kids to have a say and being involved in what they want to do and then allowing them to develop those programs as they go [would be helpful]. Give them some voice in the matter [instead of] just planning everything out for them. I think that would be useful. Giving them fun opportunities like sports or whatever they want to do like hiking or movies. Why not have movie nights for girls once in a while, things like that, giving them a place to have fun in an Islamic environment.
>
> In some communities it seems like you are pushed out of the decision making and they don't feel like they … they don't want to go to the masjid or they don't want to be involved. I don't feel like that's our community but I feel in some of the other masjids that I've been to, it seems that way.

Source: Ishaq

> My advice would be first go back and remember what is was like and what kind of things these kids are going through. Cause I don't believe, unless Allah chooses to guide someone, I don't believe you can reach these kids unless your completely honest with them and genuine with

> them and real with them and you let them know that, “I know what you’re going through” and then you try to do your best to show them an outlet, you try to do your best to combat that problem.

Source: Muhammad

> This advice is really for myself to implement it, but it’s just to [introduce] stuff properly and put our own egos and opinions aside and to really just follow Allah as messenger…I think that, I mean I don't really have experience to know what it's like to be a leader and things like this, so there's a whole lot that people in that position see and understand that I don't probably understand, especially when you're dealing with other people [and] there's a lot of factors involved. From my transition, I would say, this religion is so beautiful and it's so attractive the way it is, and I feel like nowadays it's tried to [be made] make attractive in ways that are not as attractive as what the real Deen is. When you give it as it is I think that people appreciate it a lot more and they can see the truth of it more than when you're trying to make it more appealing. And of course you have to make stuff presentable, but I feel like nowadays this idea is taken too far to a point that stuff gets watered down a little bit, In trying to attract others, trying please others, so I think the Deen is already so beautiful, the way that it is, the way that it was presented in the past, the way that the Sahabah taught it, the way that those who came after them taught it… and for myself once I saw that, I was amazed at what Allah (SWT) has given us. It was really refreshing after having been given stuff that wasn't I feel as pure, I guess.

Source: Hassan

> [For leaders, I have the same advice as] for parents. You have to understand the society that you're preaching in. It's a predominantly non-Muslim society. There's a lot of clashes in between the Islamic lifestyle and non-Islamic lifestyle. Just kind of understand those clashes and provide programs for the youth to address all of those issues, make it interesting for them, kind of reaffirm them and try to make, especially for the Imams and stuff, you have to kind of affirm with the youth and make them feel comfortable coming to the masjid because some Imams are just kind of strict and some leaders, they're strict. I mean, for example, there's always those kids that are playing around, stuff like that, which is what I did as well. I used to play around during prayer and when I was young, I used to play around [the masjid] and some brothers would get mad at me, but I was a kid. I guess that's what I was programed to do. You know what I'm saying?

> Some leaders and some elders are kind of too harsh with the youth… It might be a reason for why they don't want to come back to the majid because they get yelled at or they feel like they're not good enough or something. Just kind of be patient with the youth. That's something I learned through the youth group. When I started, a lot of the youth were very hyper and they actually reminded me of myself. I was just very patient with them. I never really screamed at them…You have to be patient with the youth. That's the number one thing. Just be reaffirming and show them that you're there for them. That way, you can get their respect. Once you get their respect, then that's it. They'll start listening to you and you can actually mold them to better people. Just support.
>
> Leaders should show that they support their youth and that they're there for them, not against them because the youth… can take a lot of things the opposite way than when an adult. We as adults, we're more logical. We think that the way we're saying something to a kid, even though what we're providing them might be the best but for that kid, it might cause them to shut down and kind of want to avoid that adult for the future. You don't want to do that especially the leaders. Number one thing is just supporting the youth and understanding that there's just so many, the Muslim youth are just bombarded daily with these haram [things]. It's kind of like a clash. Just try to reaffirm them and establish programs for them in their community that address all of these different issues and subjects. That's it. It's up to Allah.
> was the biggest, biggest transition for many people. Just that period, that time is when the youth should really be busy in Islamic work and volunteer work.

Source: Alia

> From what I see [on Facebook] they do great things; they have camps that they all go to and they hold meetings and I think those are really great for you to see other high school Muslims even though they are not at your school maybe but you have that community at the Mosque and I think that is great to have that support group.

Source: Amir

> As for [leaders of the] masajid, you could have events and programs for the youth that are not just like lectures, because they're going to die of boredom from lectures. Have programs like they did [at the masjid] here, where it was like basketball tournaments and leagues that just bring kids together; that show Muslim kids that there's other Muslim kids out there - that you're not alone, that you don't need to conform to society just to fit in, you have this other outlet.

> Even those tournaments, those things that we did some times, you look at it, sometimes people ask you why do you do it? A lot of the guys just come once, and then you don't see them again for like seven or eight months. But then it's like, you never know what that one little word that was said, or that one thought that crossed that one Muslim's mind, that hadn't seen Muslims for months, might come back to him at a later time. He might think "why am I here? Why I am with these other people? Why don't I go hang out with my Muslim brothers and sisters?" And you never know what little thing will affect them.
>
> So I guess the thing that masajid [plural of masjid] could do is just try to focus on youth. And when I mean focus on them, it's like that should be definitely a priority I think, because right now they are slipping a little. When me and my brother, when we're talking to high school kids, we're genuinely worried for them, because I don't know - if I was by myself in high school - what I would have done.

Source: Nuha

> Growing up as a Muslim in America, like I said, is not an easy thing. Growing up, in general, is not an easy thing. There are lots of factors that weigh in and that affect kids growing up, like peer pressure, their parents, cultural expectations, their friends who … the company they keep, prejudices, race, or discrimination against certain racial groups. So, I think imams and religious leaders really need to consider this. Especially if they're counseling the youth or they're working with the youth, they need to be really understanding of what the youth are going through because it's really easy to turn the youth away if you say the wrong thing or if you … At the same time, I think it's … If you know how to approach the youth, it's really easy to gain their trust. Yeah, it's really easy to gain their trust. Once you've gained their trust, then that usually can't be broken. [The best way to approach the youth is] with sincerity… being very open and understanding in a non-patronizing way because a lot of youth feel like the adults, or the elders, or the community leaders look down on them.
>
> Just because you are a male, does not mean you [should] only cater to males. Please take the women and girls into account as well when making decisions. Do not compare women to pearls, gems, fruits, candies or anything else. That just objectifies women. Women and girls are what they are, not anything else. Please take the time to understand issues such as cutting, depression, drugs and alcohol, peer pressure, gender and sexual orientation, suicide, gender interactions, and other important issues pertinent to the youth. These are real issues which our community is not immune to. We must address them instead of brushing

them under the carpet. Try to get the youth involved and when they have ideas, build them up instead of putting them down. If you don't agree with their ideas or have other plans, don't automatically throw them out. Create a safe space for dialogue and communication, free of passing judgment. Understand that everyone is in a different place in terms of their spiritual progress and meet them where they are. If you reprimand them constantly, know they will not come back to you or seek your counsel. They might even associate the mosque, religious organization, etc. with all things negative. Muslims, like all people make mistakes. Try to overlook them and move on. Remind people of the mercy of God more often, rather than a fire and brimstone approach.

Source: Sayyid

I think one of the problems we saw ... I mean, we still see this, a lot of these in San Diego is that imams, they are not very youth friendly or they'll push the youth out of the mosque because of the way they are behaving or something like that. I think imams need to be more accepting or more ... The mosque should be more youth oriented rather than people who are in their late 40s are coming just purely to pray. I think the mosques should have programs for youth because that's one of the things that help me a lot is that. They weren't necessarily mosques but an organization would have these programs and I used to go to each one of them and that was a constant resource for me. I think the mosques should have these programs, imams, or youth leaders, I think they need to ... Part of the education of what they teach the kids that part of their programs should be how to deal with the high school experience or the public school experience rather than just schooling Islamic knowledge at them.

That's one thing you [I noticed]; see a lot of programs. A Youth program is defined as them playing basketball for two hours and then reading a Hadith for like 15 minutes which is ... I don't it's enough. I think rather than reading Hadith, one youth group leader said… after they used to play basketball or whatever program they used to do for fun for like an hour, he would just ask them about their personal life or what's going on in their lives and what questions they have. A lot of people ... I've seen people in youth groups or youth programs their whole life for many years and they won't change or they would completely turn the opposite way and that's simply because they would ... they'll have their fun and then during the time of Islamic ... the lesson for the day, they would just sort of ... what do you call it? They would just sort of zone out or they didn't want to hear that because that had nothing to do with personal lives at the moment. I think that youth group leaders [should] include an education about how to deal with life in America because that's one thing

> that our community is still trying to catch up to. How to deal with ... how do our youth deal with life in America because this is the country that they're raising in so that's one advice I would give to them.
>
> [Also] when they think about expanding some area of the community, they should think about the youth sector. They would think about rather than just making another building for parking or building for praying, they would think about building a basketball court. Rather than thinking about making like programs for more Islam 101 courses, they can think about youth courses. Like I said, I think the biggest emphasis for all youth group leaders, the imams, community leaders, anyone dealing with the Muslim community is that they have to think about the youth as the future, which a lot of them don't. They just think of the youth as just kids or they'll treat them like kids. That's the problem. These kids will ... they'll go to these youth programs and like, "Okay, over here, I'm treated like a kid," and then they'll go back to their friends and be like, "Okay, here I'm free like an adult." Between the two, they're like, "I'd rather be treated like an adult and I'd rather engage in whatever activities I want to engage in," I think that's [another] thing we need to consider.

Source: Rashid

> If [the leaders are] American Muslims, then they most likely already understand the culture somewhat, and all they have to do is start getting involved with the youth. If they're not, then they need to quickly cater to the youth because Muslim youth that grow up in America, unless there's something outside of school and family home, if there's nothing there for them to go to, then they're going to start going somewhere else. If there's not a Muslim event ... not event, but a Muslim program for them to attend, then they'll start trying to hang out with their either Muslim friends, which most of the time is good, but if there's no event, then the Muslim friends are going to go hang out somewhere else. That can lead to the clubs, then that could lead to different ... that could lead to parties, and it's weird how much of the stuff revolves around clubs and parties if you talk about it.

Source: Abbas

> Growing up as a Muslim in America, it's no easy task. I think every group has their own issue, I think, and the immigrant parents have their own issues, dealing with the language barrier, but they maintain their Islamic identity. These kids are at jeopardy with their Islamic identity…I think that we have to really have a series of talks, a conversation needs to be held, "What is the Muslim identity?"

Muslim identity puts people in a fear or flight position, and depending on the environment that we present as a community, depending on the environment that we present and the institutions that we establish as a community, most will run to flight unless they have the Islamic knowledge and their retention of identity so they don't go in that flight mode and they actually stay there and they fight [to maintain their religious identity, affirming], 'This is what Islam is'. I think as community leaders we need to rethink our engagement [in] Islamic institutions. How can we teach Islam in the context of what you're dealing with as a Muslim American? [Laughs,] I think we need a high school ultimately.

Appendix F

Participants' Vision of An Ideal Educational Environment

Source Material: Noorah

> For young Muslims, their parents would have to do it themselves, to put them in either in Islamic school or for older Muslims, once you grow up you decide who you want around you and you decide what you are [allowing] around you. To go to a good school and to have at least, always like an MSA, a strong MSA normally works.
>
> I know that [the] MSA in UCSD is pretty good and they're pretty strong and they do… high school conferences every year and they're really close knitted. I think if you put yourself around a good Muslim circle, Muslim student circle and put yourself in a good university or a university where you do know good Muslim students, that works.
>
> Yeah. Because of where we are in society now, just like I just said, as long as you put yourself around a good circle of Muslim friends and a good school, a good education, with at least going into a university where you can find people you can identity with, which is other Muslims, and maybe build an MSA in whatever college or university you're at and attend those MSAs and let your MSAs grow.
>
> Researcher: But then the ideal educational environment for say, for example, students in grades K-12 would be what?
>
> [I think that attending]…an Islamic school… that's the ideal. [Name of local Islamic school] or any other Islamic school. Or if you cannot attend for any reason (any other Islamic school where they have the Islamic studies and all the Islamic studies including math, science and your regular subjects), [then]go to a public school [located in] a pretty good area that has advanced [classes and teachers] … that are very engaged in students' learning; take them to that school for students K through12…Take them to those types of schools but then also [in] their free time, take them to [other] Islamic activities [after school or on weekends] …like a separate Islamic school, what we call Dugsi in Somali. Take them to a Quran school; take them to youth group [meetings] at the masjid [mosque].
>
> …As long as …they're going to a public school, let them take advantage of every other Muslim gathering or Islamic class or a Quran class. You let them take advantage of that so that they do [it] every week. I look at time in weeks. It's like, what are [you doing] during this week because

school is in weeks. When they’re going to school five days a week, if you can, let them after school go to a youth group.

On Fridays, go to a youth group and then on the weekends if you can find a Quran school, let them to go to the Quran school so that in the week they have some type of balance between going to a good educational school where they’re engaged and where their teachers are engaged in how much their students learn, and then going to… a youth group [in order for] the students to have Muslim role models in their life. [It is important] that they come across those role models every week or a couple times a week and they don’t lose Islam, and they just keep growing, and then you know when they grow up they’ll want to be around more Muslims and put themselves in a good environment, an environment around Muslims and in a good college.

Source Material:_Ibtisam

I've always thought that we need to bring back the way, like I've said this before, the way the companions learned and the way the Prophet learned and the Imams and the scholars that passed away. I think one thing is we've forgotten our roots and we're so concerned with graduating and then getting in the best college and then graduating from college and a new thing we started here in MAS Youth is a Qur’an competition and it's every month and the surahs are not long and I have people tell me, " No, I'm too busy with school. I can't memorize Qur’an." So I think we need, yes, it's important to do school, yes, it's important to study and get education but I think we can't forget our background. I think we need to have a way where we can learn about the Companions, we learn the Qur’an and it may an Islamic school type of environment, but like bigger. And like from the babies all the way to the Ammus [Uncles], everybody.

Yeah, and we’d just have everything and ...We'd go to the science fair awards and it'd just be like our [Islamic school name] and then we'd go to school the next day and then just completely the entire day is devoted to all the Companions and then, well not all the Companions, a Companion and then we'll learn about them and the next day is math and the day after that is Qur’an and the day after that is science and then we just go outside and lay in the park all day or just… I think, now, the way we live, you, if you don't have the best car, if you don't have the best education, if you don't have the best clothes, it's like, you didn't accomplish anything. But I think at the end of the day, if you don't have time to read the Qur’an, you didn't accomplish anything.

Source Material: Daoud

I feel that at an elementary and middle school level this environment itself at the mosque is somewhat ideal in that when it comes to inculcating certain practices of the faith, it's there. The means of doing so is available for them whether it be the teachers, the prayer hall, the Imams. Everything is there. At a high school level I feel it's slightly more difficult over here…in the United States. I haven't really studied the curriculum or the activities of those schools that are high schools, Muslim schools, to see whether it would be ideal or not. To have mentors in a school setting that have extremely high values and inculcate them themselves I think is the most important. No matter what the venue itself is whether it be [in] a mosque or actual school. As long as those mentors allow students to incorporate good character and conduct throughout the day with going home and having parents do the same; that way there's no conflict between the two. That would be an ideal setting for an ideal Islamic environment for Muslim students.

Researcher: An ideal Islamic environment. I hear you talking about then the teachers being mentors who themselves embody and also teach values and morals… so I'm assuming that means that could be Muslim or non-Muslim teachers. Is that correct?

Correct.

Researcher: What about the student body? …You mentioned you think that would be an ideal Islamic environment for fostering the Islamic identity. So if we're talking about now outside of K-8 because you mentioned you thought that an Islamic school setting K-8 would be ideal. What about beyond 8th grade especially when it comes to social interactions? There's so many different aspects of a educational environment. So what do you think K-12 or 9-12? Can you elaborate a little bit on that ideal environment, for example, in high school?

I feel that for the schools nowadays that the environment itself can't really be ideal but as a group of students who hold on to it strongly believe in their faith they can provide that ideal environment themselves to themselves and to others around. In that when others see that they're focused and they know what they want to do and that it's good that others would want to join whatever they're doing. Whether it be in the form of a MSA or any other group that just keeps themself occupied with those things that will allow them to succeed.

Researcher: So you're thinking that if there is at least that type of group in an educational environment in high school that that is perhaps one of the more important things for fostering the Islamic identity.

Yes. I think too what would be good if someone who was older as a leader go in and help provide or build a foundation of stability for those children in there. Then once again, **as a mentor, see who has the capability of having those leadership skills to take over and that's how they'll learn at a young age.** From there, monitor how successful that is from the outside and of course having one of the younger ones be responsible they can monitor it from the inside. That way you can completely see how that group of students may develop well.

Researcher: This would be in what grade level?

In high school or even at a university level. You would think everyone would be an adult and be responsible for themselves and learn how to take charge of what they need to. So at a high school level now I would see a group as a MSA being very beneficial.

Source Material: Ayesha

My final question then is if you can envision or imagine an ideal educational environment for Muslim-American students that would allow them to foster their Islamic identity, what would it look like?

You mean like an elementary school?

Researcher: Not only elementary. When you think about the development of the identity, it doesn't only develop in elementary school. What do you think the ideal educational environment would be for Muslim-American students, if you could create one, what would if be like? Would it be …

I don't think there's any ideal. Every community is different, every community has different needs. Muslims are very diverse and they all have very diverse backgrounds and needs. I don't think there's any one ideal educational model that's going to be catering to everybody. You need to realize that it's a diverse community that we're going to be reaching out to.

Researcher: When you say they all have diverse needs, do you think when it comes to going to school Muslims have diverse needs when it comes to what they need to foster their identity?

I don’t think there’s one clear cut model that would help everybody. We got to keep doing what we are doing. Muslim environment, one where it’s academically balanced with Islamic identity, so having a very strong education and focus and Qur'an, the Islamic studies, [inaudible 41:58] the prophet.

Everybody needs to be exposed to that because that plays a critical role and knowledge is the first step and then being able to actually implement it, having prayers as a routine, which most Islamic schools do anyways. Other things like fasting, Ramadan, and things like that, having Qur'an, that’s a critical role in your development but then also being able to prepare kids for the outside world, which is very different.

I’m not exactly sure how you would do that but we need to figure out some way because you eventually aren’t going to be in Islamic school forever. You’re going to go on to the real world, you’re going to get jobs, you’re going to be interacting with other people who aren’t Muslim and don’t necessarily have the same views as you do. I think somehow transitioning people into that phase.

Researcher: What would be in your thoughts the best way to do that, for example, many of the Islamic schools go just elementary school or some go to elementary and middle, some go to high school. What are your thoughts and in some religious communities they even have their own colleges, what are your thoughts on what our community needs, what are the Muslim community needs?

The Muslim community definitely needs more scholars that are American born that understand the American identity I guess that have gone through the process. I think we need to have more scholars develop. That’s one of the needs that we have. I mean our scholars are great from other countries but I think we need also scholars who are born this country and understand the needs and are educator in Islam too to guide the current generation that understand what they’re going through.

Researcher: Are you thinking …

A program that is built to empower and educate future scholars.

Researcher: I see. Would that be a specific school or an Islamic school that is specifically meant for scholars?

Yeah.

Researcher: What are your thoughts on the ideal environment for Muslim American students in high school?

That's a tough one. I don't know. High school is very difficult. A lot of high schools have MSAs but they don't necessarily always have guidance in what they should or shouldn't be doing. I think what they need is some continuation of Islamic education and reinforcement. That's not going to be available in public school but some kind of program where Muslim kids can continue their growth because once it ends after middle school they're not going to go back so just keeping them continually exposed to Islam and the knowledge is very important.

How to go about that, I don't know. I don't know if weekend school suffices for that but some kind of implementation into their educational curriculum.

Researcher: What do you think of the idea of expanding Islamic schools up through twelfth grade or charter schools that like, for example, that would have more Muslims in [the] school and that would have more of a values based focus.

I think it's a great idea. I think it's definitely beneficial because that age is very critical to developing who you are and if you don't have the right environment you can easily go into a different direction.

Researcher: Did you see that? Did you know a lot of kids that did that, that originally attended Islamic schools up through middle school and then …

I wouldn't say a lot but they're a significant amount but everyone also went through different experiences after Islamic school. It wasn't like everyone went through a homogenous pattern. Their home environment also played a factor.

I've had friends who actually gone through Islamic high schools but aren't necessarily practicing but then their home environment also had other issues. They've gone through … their parents have gotten divorced or they had multiple things going on.

I can't judge or say that it was because of this or that but.. and there are also kids that have gone to public high schools and they're very strong Muslim leaders now. There's no recipe for success. All you can do is really try and make [du'a] that it works out. There's no recipe honestly. There's no guideline.

Source Material: Ishaq

I think like the Islamic school… there needs to be an Islamic high school; there has to be an Islamic high school. That's something that's a very big project. And I would say also, a student came to me and said, 'You know I wish that, I wish that there wasn't mixing, there wasn't mixing with the girls because every time we talk the girls are just looking at us." So I would advise that after that, there should be a separation after the 4th grade or from the 5th, after 4th grade there should be a separation. 5th grade through 8th grade at least for the middle school should need, the sexes need to be separated, definitely for the high school. That's what I would advise after that and alhamdulillah, I would advise to change the curriculum for actually the Islamic program. I'm not saying it's…actually it's very good and it's the best in San Diego. But I think that in order to produce even more, I think the curriculum as far as ….Islamic studies, what they're learning, I think there should be a change in the Islamic studies curriculum.

Researcher: Like what? What kind of change?

Well, I don't know exactly what books they're learning from, but from what I know, I know its maybe the sirah of the prophet, which is all good stuff, but there's…like I said, the Islam for me personally, the Islam that affects my heart the most is the most uncut Islam. When you use and you talk about the hadith that people don't like to mention…or if you talk about the verses in the Qur'an…where people they hesitate to mention…to me that's, that's, that's what brings life to the heart in my opinion. Cause you are offering Islam is it's purest sense and I guess that's why the sahabah accepted it because it was offered in that form. So that's what I would advise; the separation between the mixes of the sexes, and….the most important thing in an Islamic school has to be the Islamic Studies curriculum. Actually, that's the purpose of …Islamic [schools]…actually, I take that back too, because just the fact that they are around Muslims that's good, that's very good, that's actually maybe the most important thing. The teachers are Muslim, they wear hijab, very important…but I would also say that the curriculum that should be very focused on, [what should be] very highly paid attention to is the Islamic Studies curriculum and then, there has to be a high school.

Researcher: What are your thoughts about the Qur'anic curriculum?

I think its great. I see the students and they're young and they have already memorized five Juz of Qur'an and I think its great. So I think there should be an Arabic, Qur'an and Islamic study class. So I have no complaints against the Qur'an program at all and I have no complaints against the Arabic. I think one thing I would do though is make sure the

teachers who are teaching Islamic studies, which is very important, that someone needs to sit down with them and really find out what their belief systems are. I think I noticed that today people don't pay attention to that much anymore. And a lot of times people's true beliefs don't even surface because a lot of people don't pay attention to them so, all of a sudden one day they say something and it's just like, "Wow, I didn't know this person believed this the whole time." So, I think that's something that's very important. To teach Islamic studies you need somebody to sit down with these people and say, 'What are your beliefs about this, about this"…you need to find out what their menhaj [their method of understanding Islam] and their aqeedah [certainty of belief within one's heart] is. Not menhaj as in – are they Shafi or Maliki – no, menhaj means methodology of understanding Islam. So, that's what I would advise and we definitely need a high school, we need a high school, we need a school…

Source Material: Muhammad

Researcher: So finally I would ask you then, how would you describe an ideal educational environment for Muslim-American students to foster their Islamic identity?

So if we're looking at ideal Islam, we're not constricted by the situation, **I really believe that one of the big things is the separation of genders**. I always try to understand and personally I hope that I try to see stuff as trying to follow truth, and I try not to just take what other people tell me and just believe it, I try to see is this really what is right, is this what needs to be done, like trying to understand this whole gender separation thing, you're told different things especially living in society.

In doing that, trying to see how the Prophet (SAWS) wanted it to be, the way that the Sahaba did it is that there wasn't too much interaction, just a few words here and there, but looking at the proofs for things like this, especially for youth and things, that to have just an adequate learning environment - they should be separated because even just based on my own experiences, in Islamic school, you got so much talk about all this girl, that girl, this boy ... you hear other stuff if you have family members that are opposite genders... That stuff, when you're growing up, you're dealing with all these new feelings and things so in terms of focusing on studies and stuff…I don't know how to express the idea 100% but it's difficult…

I feel and in terms of the environment, really at Islamic school, alhamdulillah the teachers know a lot and so that's one of the ideal

things, that teachers understand their Deen properly and understand what they're teaching well, understand how to teach it, that's a huge thing.

Q: Do you think that's just in terms of the QIAS classes, the Qur'an, Islamic Studies, and Arabic or do you think that goes across the board for all subjects?

A: Definitely goes across the board in terms of developing the mind of an individual, is that knowledge, having proper education definitely shapes the way an individual thinks so if somebody understands math properly and science; especially science and English and literature. All these things, people should have a strong understanding of these things because personally just being in the place that I'm at right now, you have people that don't have proper education and stuff, they're very good people and all, but they don't see things with the same understanding as people that are blessed to have proper educations.

I believe that especially in the young years to have proper education in everything, and it goes across the board, but especially one of the things is, **another thing I think is important…is very good Hifz of Qur'an program**. Because the Qur'an is the light of Allah; Allah tells us it's a cure for what is in the hearts, and you see many times people that memorized Qur'an when they were younger, even though there are a lot of exceptions especially nowadays, but a lot of people that memorized the Qur'an they go on to do so many great things, and it protects them, they tell you. This is coming from them; they tell you the Qur'an protected them in so many ways, and this is stuff we don't see, this is from the realm that we don't see. People are memorizing Qur'an; [so] when you have a school itself that is **teaching Qur'an properly, this will have so much Baraka [blessings] and it does have Baraka, wherever it's being taught, at whatever level it's being taught**. The more it's done and the better it's done, the more Baraka will come. That's one aspect and then the other aspect [that] is in line with that [is] for the students to be made to understand what is being said by Allah and what is being asked of them in the Qur'an. **So it's not just memorization, but memorization with understanding.** I feel these are very, very key. Personally I think we were talking about the idea of teaching across the board – I think that this is much more important than any other subject for young kids to be taught to memorize the Qur'an and to understand it; and it's [all subjects] all important in my opinion but this is very, very important.

Source Material: Hassan

An ideal education environment. I'm guessing Islamic school environment, that's what you mean by that, right?

Researcher: Is that what *you* mean by that??

Yeah, I mean, definitely that would be the most ideal for youth to grow up in that environment for Muslims, around Muslim teachers, around people that practice the religion, around people that pray.

Researcher: For what grades?

Oh, the whole youth. From pre-kindergarten till high school if possible. It would be great to have an Islamic high school that would be even better so that the youth don't go through that culture shock. At least when they finish high school, they get to university and it's all mature individuals. They're not going to have to go all that craziness in high school.

Researcher: If there was such an institution, just an ideal institution, what would it look like? What would it be like?

It would feel like the Al Azahar University.

Researcher: In what way?

Just in a way that you're just surrounded by Islamic individuals, Islamic teachers, Sheiks. They're always readily available in case you have questions. Like in Islamic school, whenever I had questions, I had somebody to go to.

Researcher: Would it have… Muslim teachers? Would it have non-Muslim teachers? Would it have sport activities?

Yeah, of course. Any educational [institution] should have all of that. Sports, obviously for the youth that are sport bound. Just other organizations such as chess club, something that might be insignificant but some students would like. Just see their interests; kind of have surveys for the youth, pass those out. Kind of let them know that you're thinking about their needs as an institution and you want to accommodate their needs. Just try to make it more comfortable for them. The most important thing is just having that Islamic environment for the youth. That's the most ideal for any Muslim youth that's growing up in America because it reaffirms to them that they're living in an Islamic community and they get comfortable within that and they get used to being around Muslims, they get used to seeing women with Hijab and

stuff. They get used to all of those things that Muslim youth that don't grow up in those environments are not used to.

I know a lot of Muslim guys my age are looking to get married. They haven't grown up in a Islamic school. Their mother doesn't really wear Hijab. They don't know women who wear Hijab. They kind of find it as something that's scary or they're going to get too many looks [from people] in society. Growing up in that Islamic environment and schooling and everything, kind of gets the youth used to that so there wouldn't be that clash later in their life.

Source Material: Alia

I think Islamic school is a great example to go off of. Just having teachers that are Muslim and are just very well rounded I would say [is important]. They don't just have their Islamic knowledge; I think that was a great thing to have in the teachers here at [name of local Islamic school]. They didn't just know about Islam but they [also] knew science or they knew math. [Having] someone that is more relate-able in terms of an American standpoint is [important because]… you will have to go off into the world and pick a major or pick a career and so having someone that can combine both to be a great example for you and to follow…I think for me that was really great. Because especially growing up, my mom didn't have much of an education and if I wanted to aspire to get an education, who are the examples I can follow? And there really weren't [any]. So I think coming to [name of local Islamic school], you know all of your teachers are educated. All of them knew stuff about Islam. They knew Hadith, they knew the Qur'an and they knew it from an academic point; they didn't just know it from a cultural point and I think to make that ideal environment you definitely need those types of teachers that have that Islamic knowledge but also have that subject knowledge...

But just having an environment where the other students are Muslims and it just being a family-type of space where these are people you can turn to when you are having struggles and when you are sad, when you are happy, when you are mad….[you know] that these are people that you can turn to. So I guess [the ideal would be] more of a family environment.

Researcher: What grades would this particular environment include?

Speaker 2: All of them. I think K through 12 would be great. Because I think even in the high school years you are still struggling. Even if you have had those eight years at an Islamic school then to go on to a high

school, I think you are still struggling. Because I think you are at a different age and you have different social pressures than you did when you were a kid. I mean being in elementary school at a public school was, I think was easy. It was just little kids. I think it might be harder now though because I talk with my nieces and nephews and the kids are talking about things that I would have never talked about when I was in elementary school. But I think in high school I think you are developing the kind of the person you are so I think it is crucial to also have it [an Islamic school] also in high school. Because I think those are still formative years where you are building your identity…So I would say that whole range from K through 12. Those are the years where you are developing the person you are so, you kind of need that extra support, I would say. Or that support. It shouldn't be extra.

Source Material: Amir

You've heard the debate before about whether they should be in Islamic school or whether they need to blend in with society or something first. In general, I guess across all age groups, I would say an ideal institution for Muslims would be a Muslim school where they're surrounded by Muslims, taught by Muslims, friends with Muslims, but I think a key component has to be that they have to be encouraged to go out with society: to go to activities that are not just for Muslims: to volunteer for causes that are not solely for Muslim causes, to get them involved with community outreach programs outside of their Muslim little groups. Because I would say, I guess for me, there was a period when you could have fallen either side of the fence when it came to answering those questions in college, but I guess if while I was in high school and while I was in Islamic school, if I had interacted more with... non-Muslims, with these atheists, with these people that question religion, question things, (although I had the Muslims to fall back on at that time), it would have been easier to answer the questions.

So I think a Muslim school is the right way to go, because that's the only way to really build this. I think the *best way* [emphasis] but not the only way, because obviously there's more than one, the best way to build this strong foundation of identity is to tell yourself "I'm a Muslim", and it's how you answer questions - you know, 'I'm proud to be a Muslim, I'm really willing to talk to people about Islam'. But you need to see the rest of the world - you can't be in a little bubble, because once you go out … Let's say you went kindergarten to college, let's say these a prestigious Muslim University that's all Muslim, here in San Diego, but once you're done with college, then you have to start answering [within] yourself those questions. If it's almost robotic your entire life, you're never going to answer [within] yourselves those questions.

> I think the best way to do it [build the Islamic identity] would be in a Muslim institution, but part of the goals of the institution are to make sure that you're integrated within your society, so you're not just stuck in this little bubble of Muslims.

Source Material: Nuha

> It would definitely be an institution that does focus not solely [on Islam] … I mean, it focuses a lot on Islamic Studies and Quranic Studies and Arabic, but it also focuses on secular academic … on secular subjects, core subjects like math, English, history, and other fields as well, like geography and perhaps Latin even because Latin is such a useful language in this day and age. Although, it's not really spoken or anything, it really helps to develop your English skills, and it also helps you if you want to learn any other languages, like Spanish or Italian or Portuguese or even French.
>
> I think it's very … it's crucial to instill, from a very young age, a love for Allah (SWT), and that Allah loves human beings, and that's why he has given us all of these blessings, and all of these bounties; and that God is most merciful and most loving and compassionate. Also, it's crucial to teach Muslim children and youth to love the prophet (SAWS)…
>
> Researcher: So, this institution, what would it look like? What grades would it include? An ideal educational environment, would it be …[how would you] …describe it.
>
> Right. It would include preschool … So, it would be from preschool through twelfth grade, and I would have it so that in preschool, it's actually a combination of Montessori and Emilia … Reggio Emilia, which is another, I guess, approach to teaching.
>
> Then, I guess also the … I would have it just be sort of like a Montessori school, actually…I'm really a fan of the Montessori approach … or maybe a Montessori, Reggio Emilia sort of thing, and sort of bringing in some of the aspects of a traditional school. Then, maybe in high school, for those students who are mature enough, maybe you can … there would be a joint program between the local community college and the high school so that the students would be prepared. Well before it's time for them to go to college or university, they'll sort of have an understanding of what a college setting is like and be able to take classes in that setting.

Researcher: What would the student population look like? What would the teachers be like?

Right. All of the teachers would be accredited. Ideally, they would have their master's in education. Some of them might even be … Maybe for the science teachers, some of them might be engineers or scientists who just really have a passion for teaching and are willing to … I mean, are excited to teach the youth and instill love for science, and mechanics, and engineering, and whatever else that they have. The teachers would use … would cater to all learning styles, so kinesthetic, visual, auditory … So, they would use a lot of different approaches to teaching.

Researcher: Would they be Muslim or non-Muslim teachers?

I would say that all the teachers would be Muslim.

Researcher: What about the students?

Yeah. All the students would be Muslim as well.

Researcher: Anything else?

Let's see. I'm trying to think. For physical education, they would have different options, like Yoga, Karate. I think there's a Muslim inspired martial arts. So, maybe they would have the option of doing that. Yeah, they would have more options for physical education and also with sports. So, soccer and … Oh, archery would be cool because it's sunnah...

What else? I'm trying to think. It would also be nice for high schoolers to have the option of interning maybe at a university or … Because I know, at some high schools, they do have sort of an internship program… where maybe in your senior year, you can shadow a professional or you can be an intern somewhere at a institute or at a school.

[In summary], I would also include a hifz [Qur'an memorization] program. Also, I believe in a well-rounded approach to teaching. We want our youth to be like the Muslims of Andalusia; Renaissance men and women. Subjects offered: English, Math, Chemistry, Physics, Geography, History, various languages, Arabic, Latin, Quran, Art, Art History, Islamic Studies, Fiqh, etc. In high school, AP or IB courses should be offered. Students have the options of interning and attending classes at community college. More guest speakers should be

invited…Sports should be offered and other alternatives, such as archery, martial arts, yoga, swimming, weight training. A more hands on approach to learning should be fostered.

Source Material: Sayyid

I would really want in this Utopian educational idea that Muslims ... they understand ... Because one thing I noticed in [name of local Islamic school], you sort of hit the roof on a lot of subjects where if you study in Islamic school in 6th grade, it was very similar to [what] you study in Islamic school in 8th grade. For me personally, in every class, I hit the roof in a lot of subjects. Like I studied Arabic until 5th grade and then... after that time, it was the same thing. I know that shouldn't be like that for academic subjects like Arabic...but as far as Islamic studies goes to acknowledge that the students are growing and that their knowledge of things should also be growing because just reinforcing the same ideas is not going to do them any help. I guess programs that cater to kids growing or I guess programs that cater to ... or programs that teach [students] to learn as much as you can pretty much. These programs, I guess, they would ... they would keep teaching Islamic studies or Qur'an but they would ... I'm lacking the words to describe this. I guess, you can say that just for the Islamic teaching sector to keep making ...

Researcher: Growth? Development?

Speaker 2: Yeah, but I guess I'm basing it off of the problem I had in [name of local Islamic school] but in general, I would want classes to encourage students to ... or have a resource that the kids can keep learning about these subjects.

They [these subjects] should also include ... sort of an education on American culture. I think even just having one separate class on American literature or American culture just ... because one thing I noticed when I went [graduated] out of [name of local Islamic school], I realized I was in this bubble that like, I had no idea of anything out[side] of ... I was raised in sort of like this immigrant Islamic bubble.

To acknowledge that ... these schools should understand that these kids are being raised in America and they're going to become American Muslims. Though I found that [my American Muslim] identity throughout high school and college, to reinforce that identity early so they're not ashamed to be American [is important]. Because [for] a lot of them [kids in Islamic school], ... the identity issue becomes... they're raised in, like I said, this immigrant Muslim bubble and then they'll go out and they'll be like, 'Well, ... I'm in this bubble but it's in America. I

need to ... now, I have to embrace this culture that I have no idea [about]'. It can happen even in America like it did to me because I was in an Islamic school but ... I didn't learn a lot about it [American culture]. I didn't know what Americans were like. I sort of [felt like]…even going out of Islamic school…non-Muslims or Americans, they were sort of like a different species to me. [It's important]…to, I guess, reinforce American values within the school as far as classes go.

I think one thing we lack ... I'm seeing a lot of Muslims that are okay with not being stellar in their education. They sort of have the model of their parents who because they came as immigrants, they didn't have a lot of job opportunities and they took whatever job they can find and then the kids, they'll grow up thinking these are the only jobs that suit me. They don't realize that they should be at the top of their game when it comes to academics. One thing that's ... one cloud over my head [after] going through [name of a local Islamic school] is that, it accommodated too much for failure because I would ... I know in some subjects I wouldn't pay attention or I would slack off and the teachers they would somehow find a way to ... they'll give me a make-up test or a make up [assignment] and they wouldn't let me fall on my face. I went into high school with the same thing that I'm just going to coast through. I started the first semester, I had a terrible GPA, and I was like, 'This is weird. I thought I'm just supposed to coast all the way through college and have this stellar education'. I guess to ... let children fail, let them know that although the teachers in [name of a local Islamic school] want to be very parent like, they have to at some point say, 'If you're failing at your subjects, then you're failing at your subjects and you need to make some mistakes before you start capitalizing on your successes ...'

That's one thing. I know these are not that definitive and more objective based, but I guess that's what I want or would want from Islamic education or something I would send my kids to definitely.

Researcher: If we talk even a little more general than that, if you had an ideal educational environment for Muslim-American students to foster their Islamic identity, what grade levels would this educational institution include? What would the teachers be like? What would the students be like? How would you, like if somebody would come to you tomorrow and say, "Okay, create the ideal Islamic environment." What would it be?

I know we had ... a lot of people they always wanted Islamic high school in San Diego specifically. I always thought when I was younger that if we had an Islamic high school, I thought it was just an extension of Islamic school, like four years and that the bubble would

just be a little bit bigger until they got out of college. I think there shouldn't be any bubble in the first place. I think that like the Islamic school, if I were to think of one it would go through K through high school until they go university. But, I think that it should not take the form of like sort of a bubble where they don't understand what's going on in the world around them. I'll base it off a model. I guess, there's a lot of Muslim or ... There are a lot of Christian high schools, private Christian high schools but they're short of public school in their nature as in anyone can go there as long as you pay the fee, I guess. The kids who come out of these high schools, they don't seem disconnected with the American culture or America ... Of course, these are American schools. I don't know of any models like these in America that Muslims have done but I think that some type of Islamic school K-12 that does not just include Muslims but includes anyone who pays the [tuition]... of course, these are private [schools]. I'm thinking way down the line of like of payments and stuff like that because the only reason these schools are open is because they're private schools [requiring payments].

I want a school experience that doesn't disconnect them from American culture because in the end of the day, they are American Muslim and their kids, they'll probably have no connection with... at that point, I guess their grandparents' identities, because their grandparents all came from different countries; but their kids are now American Muslims and their kid's kids are not even thinking about where their grandparents came from. They're going to think of themselves as Americans. That's why I guess I described my generation as a pioneer generation of American Muslims because in the beginning, we thought we're just going to take the identity of our parents. [Now] we realize we're not in the same setting as our parents.

Just understand that these schools are going to be in America and they have to take on ... they have to not just accept it but they have to embrace the fact that they're Muslim Americans and never think of themselves as ... I want these schools to never put Islam, I guess, first and then America in second because I think that's irrelevant because Islam is their religion and America is where they live... I know there are some conflict between American values and Muslim teachings. As far as that goes, that's what it means to be an American Muslim is to understand what American values are Islamic because a lot of times you don't think of American values as Islamic. [However], there's beauty in American values and a lot of times I see this beauty when I see a lot of immigrant Muslims interacting with American…I guess these schools have to be very accepting of [certain] American values, American culture, and teach… as long as it is within Islamic teachings… teach American literature, teach American history.

That’s sort of a general model I would think of as far as the [ideal] school ... this Utopian school I think of.

Source Material: Rashid

It'd be very similar to Islamic school, except that it doesn't only accept Muslims. So, where they teach Qur’an, they [would] teach Arabic; there's a musala [place to pray], there's extra-curricular programs for Muslims to go to within the school, or for anybody to go to, but I also think it's necessary to have non-Muslims go [to this school]. That's simply because people are too used to dealing with Muslims ... Muslims are too used to dealing with Muslims. Even for myself, I've trouble sometimes dealing with non-Muslims because sometimes I don't understand references they make to different things. I say it's important to integrate with non-Muslims, and have non-Muslims understand Islam as well. That's the main thing. Basically, everybody [ideally will] reach a similar understanding of what Muslims in America are, then there's not much for you to do from there. That's basically the main thing. [An] Islamic school except ... wide acceptance of non-Muslim students.

Researcher: What about teachers?

Teachers as well, and there'd have to be some set of rules that limits… opinions teachers want to give about a certain Islamic subject. That's another thing; don't discuss fiqh in school because that can cause a lot of issues within the students. That's when the family gets involved, and they're like, "No, you're going to follow this way." Don't make fiqh an issue in school; just agree to disagree. That's the biggest thing.

Researcher: Back to the teachers and this idea of educational institution…would there be both Muslim and non-Muslim teachers?

Yeah, because even non-Muslims have ... There's something you can learn from any person. There's one thing, one positive thing, you can learn from anybody. It's not whether their other traits are going to affect ... whether they drink, or smoke, or date, or stuff like that, but it's whether they ... That's what I'm talking about. You just need to limit them talking about certain issues, kind of like limiting professors and stuff on cursing and stuff, and they get reprimanded for that in colleges, if they curse too much. It's similar to that, just have a set a rules that limit the way they talk about certain stuff. They can talk about dating and stuff, but not in terms of encouraging it.

Researcher: You mentioned the advantage to having non-Muslim students… what would be the advantage to having non-Muslim teachers?

Because they can understand ... They understand those parts of American culture, whereas Muslim teachers, because they stay away from those parts of American culture, they don't understand the nature of it sometimes, or [assume the] nature is most of the time bad… but I'm not saying that. I'm saying non-Muslim teachers have been through those things, like when a Muslim - and you always hear a lot of Muslims say this - saying, 'I've been to that life; You don't want to go there', and stuff like that. They [non-Muslim teachers] can advice students on certain aspects of American culture.

Researcher: What grade levels would this institution include?

I would say high school because eighth grade, or up to eighth grade is ... I realized I really started developing my way of thinking in high school, whereas in eighth grade it was already set for me [ascribed]. Like, it just makes sense that you do it this way because everything is there for you and this makes sense. But in high school, you start seeing why it makes sense, like [why Islam] makes sense. Like why you should do it… Because you see the ills of what happens if you don't do it, and you see the benefits of what happens if you do…[practice Islam].

Source Material: Abbas

K through 12; K through 12. If you get a private school [or college], that's good but I think there has to be sort of exposure outside the shelter of an Islamic school. I think K-12, I think each facet or each stage is critical in the development of the student. Obviously, K through 5 is very important, but I think a lot of the transformation, the maturation process, occurs in late or middle school, in the high school years, 7 through 12. In those ages, 7th through 8th, 7th through 12, and I think we need that [an Islamic school. Even if it's] in junior high, I still think we need that because it's critical.

I've been doing khutbas [sermons given during weekly congregational prayers] these past four weekends. [I was] out in Michigan last weekend where they have a high schools established. They have a high school established and I think we need that. I wish I had that and I wish… (as a Muslim we're taught to love for your brother what you love for yourself)… I would have loved for myself to be in that situation, so [that] I was never exposed to those downward spiral years that I was out of my element, that I was out of my environment; I felt as a minority amongst minorities, you know? I say that because really those schools were full of minorities, [in the context of] America, and I was a minority amongst minorities.

I think, so our future kids don't go through that, we need to establish a K through 12 [school], with all of the sciences presented and the rigor is still the same, and then we actually incorporate things that you witness in high school, like football programs and basketball programs, nice athletic programs. In addition to that, we have competitions and things of that nature, clubs, robotics club, whatever it is that do great things. Then still have ASBs; they still have their own enrichment, but I think we need to do that so we produce as a community confident, competent Muslim student scholars. That's my ideal educational institute.

Researcher: What kind of teachers?

Multi-culturally competent.

Researcher: Multi-culturally competent; so Muslim and non-Muslim?

Muslim and non-Muslim.

Researcher: Multi-culturally competent.

I think Muslim and non-Muslim. Obviously, I'm not sure the non-Muslim would be teaching Qur'an class, so then I don't see it as an issue.

Researcher: Just making sure that they are highly qualified in the area that they're teaching, right?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Absolutely; as long as a person is qualified for the job, you know? You're in the environment; you're in the environment, you're in the context. I think there are things that come into play, ethics and morals and values in high school. You learn a lot of them, but it's like, "Oh, my God, this is what it is." I think it makes things much easier.

Researcher: Do you think that this school would be in the context of a private school, where Islam and Qur'an and all of these could be taught during the day like it currently is being done at the lower grade levels, or do you see it as being more of a charter school situation where there would be not as much integration between the religious studies and the secular?

I would like to see it the former more than the latter; I would like to see that maintained throughout. Obviously, it could be that you complete your high school career [with] just two years of Arabic, as opposed to every single year you [being required to] do Arabic, or you do Islamic

studies three out of the four years, three semesters' worth. It could be the semester system or the quarter system, depending on how you want to arrange it. I think it just depends on the arrangements of it.

I would like to see people walking down the halls and engaging in… what was going on at lunch breaks and going to Dhur [prayer], you know? [Independent study model] Charter school is so independent. It's sort of like you've got your work, your packet, khlas [that's it]. I think I'd like to see it [an ideal educational institution] more in a very immersed society; [where there are] ASBs, football programs, basketball programs, and there's actually competitions and there's classes full of students on a campus; where there is the bell ringing for each period and people are doing hall monitoring. Just a typical high school in America, but it's an Islamic school.

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