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"I AM A QUIET STRUGGLER": CONCEPTUALIZING THE IDENTITIES OF MUSLIM AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

by

Wesam M. Salem

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Major: Instruction and Curriculum Leadership

The University of Memphis

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Dedication

In memory of my beloved brother-in law, Saleh who passed away one week before my dissertation defense.

Acknowledgements

My Lord! Enable me to be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to do righteousness of which You approve. And admit me by Your mercy into (the ranks of) Your righteous servants (Qur'an, 27:19)

I am fortunate to have been surrounded by people who offered me their unwavering support throughout thinking with and writing this dissertation. To begin with, I am grateful to the Muslim American youth who allowed me into their world and candidly shared their stories of struggle and success, their counternarratives, and their outlook on the future.

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Lastly, I am also appreciative of and intrigued by all the work of the scholars and researchers who put to the fore issues of prejudices and stereotypes surrounding the schooling of Muslim American students in the U.S.

Abstract

Wesam M. Salem, EdD. The University of Memphis. May, 2019. "I am a Quiet Struggler": Conceptualizing Identities of Muslim American High School Students within the Context of Islamophobia. Major Professor: Dr. Celia Rousseau Anderson

The spread of Islamophobia in the U.S. positioned Muslims as different and inferior to American society and racialized their experiences by subjecting them to narratives of prejudices and stereotypes. This postcolonial interview study examined how Muslim American high school students conceptualized and negotiated their racialized identities within the context of Islamophobia and how the negotiation processes informed their learning in school, particularly the construction of their mathematics identity. The study built on postcolonial theorists, mathematics research, and decolonizing approaches to research to interrogate and (un)settle traditional and predetermined interviewing practices. Participants included six high school students (2 males and four females) ages 15-17 years old who attended public high schools in the city of Windson (pseudonym) in the Mid-Southern region of the U.S. Using critical discourse analysis (CDA), this dissertation interrogated the Eurocentric discursive practices and the dominant socio-political discourses that informed Muslim American students' positionalities and their mathematics identities within the social and the educational contexts they navigated. Findings suggest the broader sociopolitical discourses inform and shape Muslim American students' negotiation of their Muslim American identities. Within these negotiation processes, Muslim American youth constructed subcultures to within the spaces they inhabited to foster a sense of belonging and counter discourses of Islamophobia. Furthermore, the dominant Eurocentric educational discourses and practices in public schools that privileges Western knowledge constructed a sense of separation and further othered Muslim American youth. The instruction of Mathematics is constructed within the Western thought as a value and culture-free

subject which also aided in marginalizing the Muslim American population as well as other minorities. Dominant discourses such as grading and tracking informed the construction of a fragile mathematics identity and fostered unfavorable views of mathematics.

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Chapter Overview

In chapter 1, I provide some background on the Muslim American population in the U.S. I also provide a brief examination of the research on Muslims identity. Furthermore, I briefly introduce mathematics identity research and its relation to learning. Last, I outline the significance of the study, purpose and research questions.

In chapter 2, I describe my theoretical framework, which informs and guides my study. I explain how I use postcolonial theory to situate the concept of Islamophobia and examine the Muslim American identity and mathematics identity. I also outline the research with Muslim American students and how it informs my study. Moreover, I detail research on mathematics identity and the theoretical approaches to examining it. Last, I conclude with making connections to research questions and purpose.

In chapter 3, I delineate the methodological approach of my research study. I describe how I use postcolonial interview study to explore Muslim American students learning experiences. I also describe how I used decolonizing methodologies to interrogate and (un)settle Western tradition of interviewing. I also outline my sources of data and discuss issues of trustworthiness, research ethics, researcher’s positionality. I also provide a description of my participants, selection procedures, and research site. last, I provide a synopsis of the research analysis and representation.

In chapter 4, I share my analytical thinking of my interviews as well as my interpretation of my participants’ narratives in relation to my research questions. I also share my participants' reflections, positionalities, and how they viewed themselves and their learning of mathematics.

In chapter 5, I discuss my findings in relation to the three research questions I detailed in chapter one while interrogating my research practices that imposed Western oriented discourse and tradition. Moreover, I discuss the methodological implications of my postcolonial interview and how it informed my analysis and contributed to how we (my participants and I) made sense of our experiences and how we constructed the knowledge of the world around us. Lastly, I conclude this chapter by identifying my study's contribution to current research and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Taking the continent as a whole, this religious tension may be responsible for the revival of the commonest racial feeling"

-Fanon, 1963, p. 161.

Relocating into a Western culture as a Muslim Arab graduate student, I became aware of the struggles and the pressure to conform to the mainstream society as I looked and behaved differently. I remember many incidents when I was asked questions that made me a little uneasy such as: "Do you have hair?" or "What is this thing you are wearing?" (referring to my headscarf, the *hijab*). On one occasion, I overheard a young child asking his dad, "Is she a woman?" My Muslim Arab identity took on a different representation in the new context where negotiation of religious identity was inevitable. In addition to feelings of alienation for belonging to a different race or ethnicity, religious identity added another marker to the racialized identities I attended to within the social and educational contexts I inhabited. I realized that I was identified by my *hijab* and the perceived notions associated with it (i.e., foreign, non-Western, and, on occasion, terrorist). My behaviors and actions were negotiated against this backdrop of perceptions of backwardness and otherness. My vulnerability and, in some cases, my fear of being identified as the "other" or different informed my interactions with peers and colleagues and how I positioned myself as a Muslim American. I found myself taking every opportunity to advocate that Muslims are not radicals and that Islam is a peaceful religion as a way to dismantle some of the inaccurate views people may hold of me as a Muslim.

At that time, my children were young and attended an Islamic school in the city where they were not exposed to similar experiences as mine navigating the larger sociopolitical

contexts. My two daughters attended public high school and were able to grow into confident young Muslim American teens without feelings of being *othered* or marginalized. It was not until my son attended middle school when experiences of alienation surfaced in our discussions at the dinner table. He made remarks identifying himself as the "brown kid" and making statements such as "this teacher picks *only* on me". My heart shattered and feelings of agony and despair seeped into my body. Who are my children? Americans? Muslims? Arabs? How can they negotiate these identities while navigating through school? Why is he feeling different when he is born into the culture and speaks its language? I lent a more observant eye to peers' interactions and to the hidden messages within the curriculum and within instructional practices that encompassed assumptions of otherness and backwardness. I assumed that these messages and practices informed differential treatment and, hence, impacted my child's schooling experiences. I wondered how the Muslim youth[1] are countering and resisting the pressure of mainstream conformism to preserve their religious practices without being isolated and secluded. I wondered how they are maintaining their identity as Muslim Americans without compromising their Muslim identity. I also wondered how schools are making efforts to dismantle such stereotypes and narratives of exclusion or whether schools contribute to these narratives. Arguably, such narratives may be evident in disciplines such as social studies or language arts, as they are educational spaces for exchanging and expressing political opinions and learning about historical and current events. However, for a discipline that is viewed as objective and culture free such as mathematics, how do these sociopolitical narratives inform students' learning of the subject? Being that mathematics is the gatekeeper for school achievement and college admission, I

[1] I use the term youth, teenagers, and adolescents interchangeably to refer to individuals ages 15-18.

wondered how these experiences impact Muslim students' mathematics learning and how they view themselves as learners and doers of mathematics in public schools against a backdrop of Islamophobia.

Background: Muslims in the US

After passing the Immigration Act of 1965, the U.S. witnessed an influx of immigrants from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. Among immigrants were Muslims who took the U.S. to be their new home to obtain their "unalienable" rights of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (Declaration of Independence (U.S.),1776, para 4). The succeeding generations of young Muslims were born and raised as Americans while keeping ties with their Muslim identity and ethnic heritage. The PEW Research Center estimates that there are 2.15 million Muslims in the country with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Muslims are forecast to reach 2.1% of the total population in 2050 (Lipka, 2017). Muslims have the youngest median age of any major religion in the U.S. This young population comprises the second and third generation Muslim Americans who are children of immigrant families and are born and raised in the US. The racial diversity of Muslim Americans is evident. According to the PEW research center's survey, 41% of Muslims are white, 20% are black, 28% are Asian, 8% are Hispanic, and 3% are of other or mixed race (Mohammad, Smith, Cooperman, & Schiller, 2017). However, the PEW Research Center reported that Americans' views of Muslims are less than warm on the "warm thermometer" identified by the survey. With 100 being the warmest and 0 being the coldest, Muslims were rated 41 on this scale, alongside atheists (Lipka, 2017).

The attacks of 9/11 transformed the social and political dynamics of our society and unleashed a widely spread fear across the U.S. of Islam and Muslims (Khan, 2009). This period was marked by growing hostility toward Islam and stereotyping and marginalization of Muslims

in ways that subjugated their day-to-day experiences. Narratives of Muslims being backward, violent, and associated, if not the source, of terrorism dominated the news and social media. Accordingly, Islam and its followers were beheld as a group of people who do not seem to hold American values and principles and, thus, are "incompatible" with the west. The election of Donald Trump as the president of the U.S. prompted further controversy that escalated the unfavorable views of Muslims with his inflammatory and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Some of his statements like, "Islam hates us" and "racially charged furor" videos on Twitter (Baker & Sullivan, 2017, para 1) further marginalized the Muslim population in the U.S. and made them vulnerable to increased bigotry. The lack of knowledge of Muslims and Islam outside the biased media contributed exponentially to the growing and the thriving of Islamophobia in the U.S.

Significance of the Study

Multiple reasons warrant the study of Muslim students' learning experiences, particularly in mathematics. First, the recent shifts in political discourses marked by divisive messages by the president of the U.S. and his supporters have fueled an unfounded fear of Muslims and created the us/them dichotomy. The spread of Islamophobia in the U.S. positioned Muslims as different and inferior to the American society and, hence, racialized their experiences by subjecting them to narratives of prejudices and stereotypes. The stereotyped views of Muslims trickled down to educational spaces where Muslim students were subjected to marginalization and othering, impacting their learning and their positionalities in class. Second, research on Muslim American students' learning experiences, specifically in mathematics, and how these experiences influence their learning is scant. Muslim American students are viewed as a homogeneous and monolithic group in a manner that dismisses their ethnic and racial diversity. They are mainly perceived as Middle Easterners who speak Arabic as their native language. In the following sections, I will

elaborate on these points by first delineating how Islamophobia racialized the experiences of Muslim Americans and then sharing the research on Muslims in the U.S.

Islamophobia and racialized experiences. It is evident that Muslims came to the forefront of national attention with the attacks of 9/11. The spread of the unfounded fear of Islam and its followers, Islamophobia, engendered restrictions on and screening of Muslims entering the United States, increased surveillance of Mosques and Islamic institutions, proposal of bills against imposition of Shariah law, and, most recently, banning particular Muslims from entering the U.S. (Abu El-Haj, Rios-Rojas, & Jaffe-Walter, 2017). This rampant panic and fear of Muslims contributed to their othering and alienation in the U.S. Hence, Muslim teens were caught in a space of confusion and terror as they were associated, through religion, with the perpetrators of terror attacks at home and abroad (e.g., 9/11, San Bernardino, November Paris attacks). They were faced with a myriad of questions about their religion and affiliation with the perpetrators of the attacks, wherein they were forced to validate their beliefs and religious practices (Khan, 2009). Muslim American students reported experiencing differential treatment and being targeted with hateful comments such as *terrorist*, *towel-head,* and *go back to your country* (Abu El-Haj, 2006). Moreover, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) 2018 quarterly report revealed anti-Muslim bias was up 83% and hate crimes were up 21% compared to the rates from the first quarter (Hooper, 2018). Not only do Muslim Americans face the challenge of being a minority religious group, "being a Muslim took on social and political undertones" that racialized their experiences (Khan, 2009, p. 32). Paired with stereotyped and biased media coverage of Muslims (Said, 1978/2003; Shaheen, 2003), these encounters created a new space for Muslim students in which feelings of inferiority influenced their schooling and experiences at a younger age.

Meer (2013) located the discussion of Islamophobia within the field of race and racism in the special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* dedicated to this topic. He examined the historical, theoretical, and analytical alignments between the concept of Islamophobia and antisemitism and the trajectory of the racial formation of the two concepts. He noted that the word *race* was found synonymous with "blood" and "religion" in the dictionary of Sebastian de Covarrubias in the sixteenth century. Therefore, religious affiliation (i.e., for Jews and Muslims) can be viewed as a racialized identity and as a marker for racism. Raymon Taras (2013) concedes that

> [t]he racialization of cultural attributes involves stigmatizing strangers through essentialist framing. Racializing religious markers of identity is intended to do the same. Accordingly, Islamophobia can be characterized as a cryptic articulation of the concepts of race and racism even if overtly it appears as a form of religious-based prejudice (p. 422).

Therefore, Islamophobia positions Muslims within racialized minority groups who are regarded as vulnerable to the domination of the mainstream discourses and educational practice. Hence, it is essential to explore how this population of students navigates the educational system to underscore their social and academic needs.

Muslim students' mathematics identity as a blind spot. The term *identity* is generally used to define and describe an individual's self, group affiliation, structural positions, and ascribed and achieved statuses. It generally results from internal subjective perceptions, self-reflection, and external characteristics (Peek, 2005, P. 216-217). The process of individuals' identity negotiation and the process of learning inform each other and encompass a conceptualization of individuals' self across the contexts they inhabit. These processes depend

on the individuals' past history and life experiences (Gee, 2001; Wenger, 1998). These processes are also socially and culturally contextualized (Sirin et al., 2008; Swann,1987).

It is widely established that identity research presents the basis for understanding the individual's social and emotional development (Peek, 2005) and predicts learning trajectories in school (Ogbu, 1987; Wortham, 2006). Nonetheless, current research on Muslim American students primarily focuses on issues of race and gender and examines the interplay between their religious and national identity (El-Haj, 2006; Peek, 2005; Zine, 2000). It explores how they negotiate their *Americanism* against a backdrop of Islamophobia and the rhetoric of *otherness* in which their religion is perceived as conflicting with the Western ideologies. For example, Khan (2009) conducted a qualitative case study to explore the challenges facing the Muslim youth in the U.S. and how they negotiate their identity within the spaces they inhabit. Her findings suggest that Muslim youth respond to the dominant negative assumptions of Muslims being violent, oppressed, and not belonging to the West by crafting hybrid identities that are representative of their commitments to Islam while simultaneously being Americans. Her participants did not view any conflict between their American and Muslim identities, rather they expressed hyphenated-selves, which Sirin & Fine (2005) coined to explain the identities that are comprised of both the American and the Muslim identities. However, the research has not investigated how these challenges relate or impact their learning and achievement in school.

While there is a growing body of research exploring the racialized experiences of marginalized groups (e.g., African Americans) and the impact on their learning and achievement (Larnell, 2016; Martin, 2000; Nasir, 2012), Muslim American students are visibly absent from this research, particularly within the mathematics identity research. Despite their marginalization and dominant discourse of Islamophobia, their learning and schooling

experiences remain a blind spot and "very little research has explicitly investigated how increasingly salient articulations of *Muslim identities* connect with the issue of Muslim schooling" (Meer, 2009, p. 379, italics in original). In addition, a clear articulation of what is meant with *Muslim identity* and what it entails is absent, considering the heterogeneity of the Muslim population's ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Additionally, because mathematics is regarded as a superior subject, a proxy for intelligence, and "holds unearned privilege in society" (Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 10), it is critical for research to explore how marginalized student populations learn and view mathematics. With the increased emphasis on educational reform in the area of mathematics and the push for more students to enter the fields of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), the discipline of mathematics becomes the stepping stone towards success and future pioneering careers. Hence, success in school mathematics opens up the doors for higher education endeavors and advanced college mathematics courses. As such, educational reform efforts undertook the task of improving and advancing all aspects of mathematics education in schools, including students' performance, teacher education, and curriculum design. Furthermore, identity research gained momentum in mathematics as a way to explore the factors influencing students' learning of mathematics. It aims at illuminating how teaching practices, class discourse, and sociopolitical contexts inform how students learn mathematics and how they position themselves as learners and doers of mathematics. Despite the narratives of marginalization, Muslim students' mathematics learning experiences and how these narratives inform their mathematics identity are strikingly absent from research. Also, with the national assessment data being segregated by race and not by religion, no data is projected in relation to the Muslim student population, particularly with respect to their achievement in mathematics. As such, it is

quantifiably unclear if the current societal and political discourses and practices influence Muslim students' achievement in schools and whether it triggers inequitable practices.

For all the reasons outlined above, illuminating Muslim American students' learning and how they position themselves in school, specifically pertaining to learning mathematics, becomes of great significance. Hence, this dissertation study aims at bringing to the fore the experiences of this population as they learn and do mathematics while being Muslims in the U.S.

Purpose and Research Questions

This postcolonial interview study examined how six Muslim American students in public high schools negotiate and conceptualize their American-Muslim identity and how this conceptualization informs their construction of their mathematics identity. The research questions that guide this study are: (1) How do Muslim American teens conceptualize their Muslim American identity when dominant narratives deem them inferior to Western society? (2) How do Muslim American teens navigate and negotiate the cultural difference between school and home against a backdrop of Islamophobia, othering, and marginalization? (3) How do Muslim American teens conceptualize their positionality in mathematics classrooms and their identity as doers of mathematics?

The purpose of this study is to illuminate how teaching practices, class discourse, and sociopolitical contexts inform how Muslim American students learn mathematics and how they view themselves as mathematics learners. Also, the study explores how the growing Islamophobia shapes their Muslim American identity and informs their mathematics identity construction process. The research study holds implications for school curricula and instructional practices to reconceptualize educational equity and social justice in mathematics classrooms for Muslim students in the United States.

In the following chapter, I detail how I conceptualize identity and delineate the theoretical framework within which I will examine my research questions. I also draw heavily from current identity research to explore the mathematics identity construction process with Muslim American students in public high schools.

Chapter 2

Theory and Literature

In this chapter, I detail the overarching theory of my dissertation study and how it informs my thinking of the schooling of Muslim American high students and their learning of mathematics. I outline the concepts I draw upon from postcolonial theory and describe how these concepts are weaved into Islamophobia, Muslim American identity, and mathematics identity. I borrow from research with Muslim American students to delineate what Muslim American identity entails. I also draw from the mathematics identity research to explore how Muslim American students construct and negotiate their mathematics identity. I conclude by providing a summary of the theoretical approaches to exploring mathematics identity that are found in research.

Theoretical Framework

Because of the scarcity of research that explores Muslim Americans' schooling, I draw from multiple research strands to design my study and inform my methodology and data analyses. This particular student population exists within multiple identity development frameworks considering the diversity of their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of my theoretical framework in which I employ postcolonial theory; current mathematics identity research with other minority groups particularly African Americans (Martin, 2000; McGee, 2015; Nasir, 2002); Islamophobia as a postcolonial concept (Meer, 2014; Sayyid, 2010); and Muslim identity research (El-Haj, 2007; El-Haj, et al., 2017; Meer, 2009; Peek, 2005). In the following section, I elaborate on each of the research strands in relation to my study within postcolonial theory.

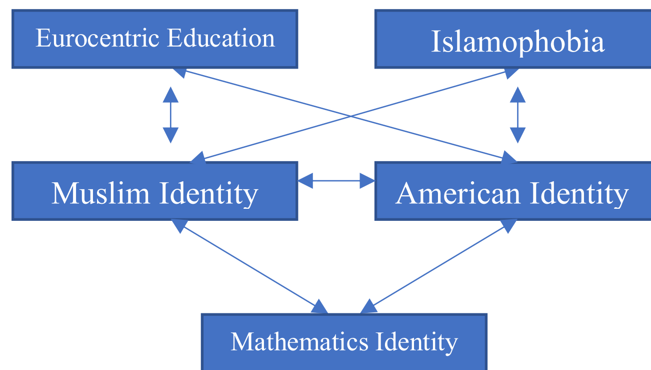

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework Situated in Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonialism (or postcolonial theory), as a field of study and theoretical framework in research, emerged during the mid and late 20th century as a critical practice that "involves the discussion of experiences of various kinds such as those of slavery, migration, suppression, and resistance, difference, race, gender, place, and the responses to the discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy, anthropology, and linguistics" (Quayson, 2000, p. 93). The groundbreaking work of Edward Said, *Orientalism,* in the 1970s, was instrumental in producing postcolonialism as a field of study and theoretical practice. Other writers such as Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Chinua Achebe, and Frantz Fanon also laid the foundations of the field by interrogating the settlers' practices and the Western views of the east.

The rapid development of postcolonial theory in the past decade makes it very difficult to describe or to provide a stable and monolithic definition of the term postcolonial (Schwarz, 2000). For example, Henry Schwarz (2000) uses the term Postcolonialism in a historical sense to mark the struggle to overcome European domination and the worldwide movement of political, socio-cultural, and academic decolonization after World War II. The discovery of the Americas in 1492, the decimation of the indigenous population, the enforced migration from

Africa and Asia to the Americas, and the flourishing trade between Asia and Europe shaped the modern world and necessitated "distinguishing a specifically colonial relationship from the long histories of contact and trade between East and West" (Schwarz, 2000, p.2). In his seminal work, Said (1978/2003) illuminated the Western views of the East and the concept of Otherness which is a foundational concept to postcolonialism. His book *Orientalism* is regarded as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the 'Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (p. 2). Hence, the discourse of Orientalism produced the dichotomy of West and Orient and constructed the inferior Oriental subjectivity and the Western superior subjectivity simultaneously (Said, 1978/2003). In this sense, postcolonial studies are regarded as "the radical philosophy that interrogates both the past history and ongoing legacies of European colonialism in order to undo them" (p. 4). In the largest sense, postcolonial studies serve as the study of "all impositions on people by other people from foreign territories" and questions the binaries imposed on the "Others" as being inferior to the West (e.g. first world/Third world, literate/Ill-literate, civilized/Savage) (Schwarz, 2000, p. 4). The historical sense of postcolonialism renders an understanding of the concept of Islamophobia historically, as it locates the origin of the concept within the historical events of colonial encounters with Muslims and the crusaders' wars. In the following section, I will detail how Islamophobia is situated as a postcolonial concept.

The historical West/Orient dichotomy and narratives of othering were transformed by the modern West producing the concept of "liberal subjects" which is assigned to members of the society who are viewed as rational, westernized, civilized, and "capable of full citizenship in democratic nations" (El-Haj et al., 2017, p. 313). In contrast, Muslims were constructed against the liberal subjects as oppressive, illiterate, inassimilable, and thus, unworthy of full citizenship

in democratic nations (El-Haj et al., 2017) or “impossible subjects”, to borrow the term from Njai (2004). Within these narratives, Muslims were dubbed as “terrorists” and Muslim women were also viewed as captives of an oppressive culture and longing to be freed. Arguably, these narratives trickle down to public school systems that are tasked with enforcing particular notions of citizenship and nationalism (El-Haj et al., 2017).

Furthermore, postcolonial theory expands its purview beyond the historical sense to encompass dominance over knowledge and academia. Schwarz (2008) explains that another form of imperial dominance is manifested in the way by which we study and learn about the world and by how we construct knowledge (i.e., academic scholarship). The academic practices and theoretical approaches are created and structured by Europe’s imperial dominance since 1500 (Schwaz, 2008). These academic practices and ways of knowing were developed from an orientalist view of the Other that is subjective, inaccurate, and serves the colonialists’ desire for dominance and control (Said, 1978/2003). Hence, this type of academic dominance is insidiously informing school curriculum design as well as textbook contexts and teaching processes in the classroom. Liz Jackson (2014) argues that the textbooks in the U.S. generally

> bolster an anti-Muslim, assimilationist view, as voices invoked promote a dramatically negative view of Islam and Muslims in the world today, and protest more positive views, ever citing popular “knowledge” in the United States as evidence about negative things students should learn in schools. (p. 89)

Similarly, El-Haj et al. (2017) argue that Western liberalism ideology informs educators’ views and is manifested in everyday practices in public schools, thereby creating exclusionary spaces for Muslim youths. Schools are spaces where particular practices of citizenship and national belonging are celebrated and deemed normal and compatible with the society.

Evidently, “[s]chools are key institutions within which a politics of ‘banal nationalism’ unfold” and where stories construct “who belong to this nation? Who is ‘self’ and ‘Other’?” (El-Haj, et al., 2017, p. 313-314). As such, I argue that these spaces inform and influence how Muslim American students position themselves in classrooms and inform their identity construction.

Therefore, drawing from the above-mentioned literature, postcolonial theory provides a theoretical space to examine Muslim students’ conceptualization of their Muslim American identity and how this conceptualization is informed by the dominant socio-political narratives and discourses. Within postcolonial theory, concepts such as marginalization and othering as well as the dichotomies of them/us, West/East, Liberal subjects /impossible subjects are brought to the fore and situated within the larger narratives and discourses.

Islamophobia

Islamophobia, as a term, first came to existence in the 1990s and appeared in the publication of the Runnymede Trust report (1997), *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (as cited in Kalin, 2011). Within that report, Islamophobia is defined as “the dread, hatred and hostility towards Islam and Muslims perpetrated by a series of closed views that imply and attribute negative and derogatory stereotypes and beliefs to Muslims.” (Kalin, 2011). Furthermore, the term Islamophobia is found in psychology and refers to the unfounded fear of Islam and its followers (Haque, 2004). It signifies intolerance, racism, and discrimination against Muslims (Kalin, 2011) and has been used to denote the growing tension between Islam and the Western societies in which Islam was viewed as being incompatible with the modernity of Western society (Abo-Zena, Sahli, Tobias-Nahi, & Safiya, 2009).

The fear of Muslims and Islam, Islamophobia, can be elucidated as a historical phenomenon drawing on Said’s (1978/2003) claim that “[n]ot for nothing did Islam come to

symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma." (p. 59). Meer (2014) delineated an understanding of Islamophobia as a postcolonial concept that was rooted throughout history from the medieval times through the colonial encounters with the ottoman empire to the Islamophobia of the 1990s. Hence, Islamophobia is a historical and political construct that originated from the colonial encounters after World War I when the British empire conquered the Ottoman empire which had previously spread its rule over half of the world (Buehler, 2011; Meer, 2014). At the time, European colonialism celebrated conquering the Islamic Ottoman empire (Meer, 2014). The West's fear of the return of the Islamic empire to rule the larger part of the world paved the path for the emergence of Islamophobia in its current context and conceptualization. However, "neither long-standing historical factors nor a mass media bias explains Islamophobia. They are factors that provide an environment in which Islamophobia can survive and thrive" (Buehler, 2011, p. 542). Despite the literature that defines the concept of Islamophobia, some argue that the concept remains problematic (Vakil, 2010) and "comes off as a nebulous and perpetually contested category" (Sayyid, 2010, p. 2). The concept is surrounded by many inquiries that question the relationship between Islamophobia and racism or orientalism and whether Islamophobia as a concept provides a context that differs from the context of discussing orientalism or racism (Sayyid, 2010).

If we accept the argument that Islamophobia and racism are related, then, arguably, Islam as a religion is *raced* and Muslim identity is associated with racial identification. Nonetheless, rather than suspending the term, deconstructing its usage and connotations becomes pivotal. Vakil (2010) argues that because the term Islamophobia is politically and controversially charged, establishing an accepted definition that simultaneously advances a robust and a

dynamic conceptualization of the term that cuts through multiple phenomena (i.e., racism, advocacy, racialization) becomes impossible. According to Fekete (as cited in Vakil, 2010), Islamophobia is structured as "anti-Muslim racism" (Fekete, 2004 as cited in Vakil, 2010, p. 3) that racialized Muslims and *raced* the religion. Additionally, the concept illuminates how the "Muslim presence is problematized in various contexts" within Western societies as well as globally (Sayyid, 2010, p. 2). For instance, the deployment of the term in a Western context like the U.S. where Muslims are regarded as a minority of newly-arrived immigrants differs from the use the term in countries like India or China where Muslims' presence cannot be dismissed as they are a majority (Sayyid, 2010).

Therefore, I use the concept of Islamophobia within postcolonial theory drawing on the argument that Islamophobia raced the religion of Islam and created *anti-Islam racism* which racialized the experiences of Muslim youths in public schools. Hence, it is pivotal to take into consideration how these racialized experiences inform their learning and schooling, particularly within mathematics classrooms.

Conceptualizing Identity

The term identity is generally used to define and describe an individual's self, group affiliation, structural positions, and ascribed and achieved statuses (Langer-Osuna & Esmond, 2017). It is shaped by "internal subjective perceptions, self-reflection, and external characterizations" (Peek, 2005, p. 217). In this study, I examine the concept of identity through postcolonial theory. Specifically, I draw on Hall's (1990) conceptualization that identities are not monolithic or static; rather, they are multiple self-representations that are malleable and actively changing and always becoming. Bhabha's (1994) description of identity is useful. He wrote that it is "never a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an

image of totality" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 51). Moreover, identities are socially situated, negotiated in the moment, reinforced through social interactions (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), and are dependent on past history and life experiences (Gee, 2001; Wenger, 1998).

Moreover, it is widely established that identity research presents the basis for understanding individual's social and emotional development (Peek, 2005) and predicts learning trajectories in school (Ogbu, 1987; Wortham, 2006). Sfard and Prusak (2005) argue that identity research is the "missing link" in educational research that examines the sociocultural and sociopolitical influence on learning and schooling (p. 5). The identity negotiation process is complex and encompasses how individuals conceptualize their knowledge of self across the contexts they inhabit. This negotiation process is influenced by social and cultural contexts (e.g. dominant discourse and political events) and by an individual's characteristics such as religious background and ethnicity (Sirin et al., 2008; Swann,1987).

Hall (1996) interrogated the concept of identity in the introduction to *Questions of Cultural Identity* and explicated why the concept of identity has been critiqued despite the "veritable discursive explosion" (p. 1) surrounding the concept. This deconstructionist critique of identity places the concept "under erasure" as being no longer "good to think of" (p. 1). However, because there are no other concepts to replace it and/or reconstruct it, identity remains a concept to think with. Hall argues that identity operates "in the interval between reversal" (p. 2) and argues for situating the debates about identity within the processes of historical development and globalized phenomenon such as forced migration. He states that

> identities are about…the process of becoming rather than being: not; who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (p. 4)

Particularly, Hall (1990) rejected the unified identity and self-sustaining subject while decentering the subject and bringing attention to the discursive practices of subjectification that "appears to entail, the question of identification" (p. 2). Identification, as Hall defines it, is formed when certain characteristics, ideals, and/or commonalities are shared with another individual or group establishing a certain allegiance or solidarity. This identification is recognized to be the process of construction that is "never completed" and always in "process" (p. 2). Thus, identification is fluid, constantly negotiated, and informed by socio-political discourses and discrimination experiences. I found Hall's (1990) conceptualization of identity and its critique alongside the concept of identification helpful in understanding and conceptualizing the Muslim identity which I will detail in the following section.

Muslim American identity in research. The concept of identification (Hall, 1996) serves to explicate the Muslim identity, as it forms the core of what constitutes being and becoming Muslim (i.e., shared ideals and commonalities that form allegiance and solidarity). Within the larger socio-political and historical contexts of marginalization of Muslims in the U.S., Muslim American identity came to the forefront in the past decade to encompass constant negotiation of the dual identities of being Muslim and American at the same time. In addition, Muslim Americans share the same experiences of being othered and marginalized within sociopolitical and historical contexts (Sirin et al., 2008). However, Sirin et al. (2008) argue that Muslim American identity encompasses many dynamics and many construction processes figuratively and historically. In other words, "there are many routes to being Muslim in America both figuratively and historically" (p. 261). The authors acknowledge the complexity of the label "American-Muslim" and assert that the examination of Muslim American identity is not necessarily an examination of their religious or ethnic identify. Rather, Sirin et al. (2008)

theorize that investigating the Muslim American identity is an examination of the collective identity as this population shares the same meaning-making and belief systems.

Nonetheless, I am cautioned here by Hall (1996) not to assume the notion of unified, stable self, and essentialist identity. Instead, identity must be viewed as "strategic and positional" (p. 3). Hence, any proposed description of identity and its negotiation processes is not intended to be generalized or assumed to be the same for all individuals; however, it provides a glimpse into the complexity of the construction and negotiation processes as well as constituted positionalities. Reducing the researched group to a set of characteristics or an essence runs the risk of assuming that all group members basically go through the same process in constructing and developing their identities. The complex concept of identity calls for exploring and detailing the descriptions of individuals rather than "generic findings of larger groups" (Darragh, 2016, p. 23).

In the following section, I continue to delineate my conceptualization of identity and Muslim identity to explicate how this conceptualization extends to Muslim American youth who are the focus of my study. As such, I provide a review of the current research with Muslim American adolescents and how they negotiate their Muslim-American identities.

Muslim American youth. One line of research focuses on Muslim students' religious identity and its interplay with national identity (El-Haj, 2006; Peek, 2005; Zine, 2000), particularly in contexts where their identity as Muslims is positioned in conflict with the Western ideals. Sirin et al. (2008) conducted a mixed methods research study with second and third generation Muslim American youth in which they explored the interplay between Muslim youth national identity and religious identity and the degree to which experiences of discrimination informed their Muslim American identification. The study investigated the relationship between

American and Muslim identification within post 9/11 sociopolitical and historical contexts. The study employed quantitative and qualitative measures such as survey measures and identity maps to examine the how Muslim American youth negotiated their dual identities. Findings from this study suggest that the majority of the participants identified strongly with their Muslim identity. However, the great majority of the participants constructed "integrated or parallel identity maps that reveal the coexistence of multiple identities" (Sirin et al., 2008, p. 274). These findings suggest that Muslim American youth constructed parallel or integrated dual identities in which both identities exist simultaneously in varying dynamics. This integration of identities or "working the hyphen" is referred to as "hyphenated selves" (Sirin & Fine, 2007) in which being both Muslim and American are deemed by the majority of the study participants as inseparable but still negotiated idiosyncratically.

Lori Peek (2005) conducted research with Muslim students in which she explored the process of religious identity construction for second-generation Muslim American college students in Colorado and New York. The data she collected with 127 Muslim university students ages 18 to 33 (82 were women and 54 were men) included focus groups, multiple individual interviews, and participant observation. Peek's (2005) research findings suggest that religious identity development for Muslim American students encompasses three levels: religion as ascribed identity, religion as chosen identity, and religion as declared identity. She argues that as individuals move through these phases, their religious identity becomes salient and their religious affiliation and commitment increases. Also, Peek (2005) posits that the movement between the three proposed phases is not linear and one's religious identity may fluctuate between the three phases depending on the larger discourses and events at that moment.

Assuming that identity construction is socially and historically contextualized, the time required for the development process differs from one person to another; thus, this proposed model is not meant to be universal. Peek's (2005) research asserts that Muslim American in the U.S. take on different routes to being Muslim and attend to different practices reflective of their Muslim identity. They differ in how they choose to practice Islam and their choices of making their religious identity visible or invisible in the public. While some girls choose to wear the headscarf, others may choose not to. Also, while some youth declare their Muslim identity and pray in public, for instance, others may choose not to. This conceptualization of the Muslim identity renders an understanding of the differences within the research participants and their positionalities and may provide an insight on how their Muslim identity informs their national and learning identities.

In another qualitative case study, Isik-Ercan (2015) conducted research in a Midwestern city in the U.S. where she interviewed 15 Muslim Turkish-American children (aged 7–13) as well as their parents and observed them in their spaces (i.e. homes, school, cultural events, and after school activities) over a period of 5 months. Her research interest focused on exploring how these Turkish-American children negotiated their religious identity within the spaces they inhabited. She discusses the complexity of identity development, particularly religious identity, suggesting that this complexity stems from: (a) the limited knowledge people have of Muslim students and Islam, (b) Muslim students' unique physical, social, and academic needs, and (c) their exposure to multiple discourses about culture, religion, and history compiled with the history of racism and colonization in the U.S.

Her research findings posit that students in the study positioned themselves as Muslims as well as Americans at the same time and found no conflict between their Muslim and American

identity, which aligns with the findings of Peek's (2005) research. However, Turkish-American students who were in mono-cultural classrooms expressed hesitation in reporting their Muslim identity "due to the lack of affirmation and validation of their religion by their teachers or peers" (p. 243). This holds implications for teachers' knowledge of their students and how this knowledge contributes to how students negotiate their identities. I also argue that this knowledge of Muslims and Islam can be at the core of countering Islamophobia particularly in the classrooms where educators create buffer zones of knowledge and awareness that construct inclusivity.

In her paper, El-Haj (2006) argues for radical reconstruction of how social justice and equity for Muslim students are conceptualized in the U.S. post 9/11, particularly in public schools. As the Muslim American identity is politicized, she posits that focusing on cultural differences is inadequate to address institutional racial processes and hierarchy. Hence, she suggests that "educators must move beyond a model of cultural understanding and attend, instead, to the particular processes of racial subordination to which…Muslim youths are subjected within and outside of schools" (p.15).

Research with Muslim students examined how this population embodied and practiced their belief system within the larger Eurocentric spaces they inhabit in schools. In her critical ethnographic study, Jasmin Zine (2000) explored the experiences of 13 Muslim teens in public schools in the Greater Ontario area and how they negotiated their Muslim identity within their educational and social spaces. Over a period of 6 months, she interviewed the students as well as their parents, and observed the students while in school, during after-school activities, and in their local mosques. In her article, "Redefining resistance: Towards an Islamic subculture in schools", Zine (2000) postulated that her participants "practiced Islam as a comprehensive way

of life" (p. 295). Though these students found themselves in conflict with the dominant Eurocentric ideology as their Islamic culture is regarded as foreign, they created subcultures within their educational spaces such as the Muslim Student Association as "a system of social support and camaraderie" (Zine, 2000, p.295). Moreover, Zine (2000) argues that these subcultures are a form of formalized resistance that Muslim students constructed as a form of social identification and to ensure the continuity of their belief systems and practices. Zine (2000) posits that "[u]nlike race, Islamic identity is not naturally overt- it must be asserted; therefore, it can also be erased purposefully, making a more dispensable form of social identification" (p. 299). The individuals' choice of concealing or bringing to the fore their Muslim identity adds to the complexity of the term and what it entails. For some Muslims, this cannot be negotiated taking into account their choice of dress.

For example, girls who choose to wear the head scarf (*hijab*) do not negotiate the visible/invisible Muslim identity as their religious identification with Islam is inescapable. Thus, their positionalities and subjectivities are informed by the factor of evident identification. Additionally, when examining Muslim identity, another important factor must be considered, that is "religious minority youth are more likely than peers from mainstream religions to incorporate aspects of other religions into their own values…[that] puts Muslim youth, and other religious minority youth at risk because for them the norms at home may conflict with the norms at school" (Abo-Zena, et.al, 2009, p. 9). Their religious practices appear foreign and different and position them as inferior to the dominant culture. Thus, their religious identities as a defining factor of their selves are threatened and compromised, especially when they have strong religious affiliation.

Nonetheless, the current sociopolitical context has created a need for a collective identity of "Muslim Americans" in which some youth find common ground for their shared beliefs, traditions, "meaning-making systems" and experiences (Sirin et. al., 2008, p. 262) in which they create a support system to counter perceptions of Other. Within this collective identity and formalized resistance (Zine, 2000), racial, language, and ethnic differences become vehicles of celebration of the diversity of Muslims and are minimized against a common belief system and shared language (i.e., the language of the Qur'an).

Although the research with Muslim students in the U.S. has explored how they negotiate their national and religious identity, "very little research has explicitly investigated how increasingly salient articulations of Muslim identities connect with the issue of Muslim schooling" (Meer, 2009, p. 379). It is unclear how their racialized experiences due to Islamophobia and the violent political discourse impact their learning and schooling and inform their identity negotiation process. Thus, this study will illuminate Muslim students' experiences and contribute to the discussion of identity research in mathematics education particularly as pertaining to Muslim American students.

Identity in mathematics education. Echoing Hall (1990), Bishop (2012) used the term mathematics identity to mean "the ideas, often tacit, one has about who he or she is with respect to the subject of mathematics and its corresponding activities" (p. 38). This includes the way a person engages in discussions, acts, or participates in mathematics classrooms (small groups, individually, whole class, etc.). One's mathematics identity can be external, which includes others' perceptions of him or her within mathematics spaces, and internal, which includes how he or she views himself/herself as a learner and doer of mathematics (Martin, 2000).

As established by the *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics* (NCTM, 2000, one of the goals of mathematics education is to develop learners who are “confident in their ability to tackle difficult problems, eager to figure things out on their own, flexible in exploring mathematical ideas and trying alternative solution paths, and willing to persevere” (p. 20). Further, helping students develop positive disposition towards mathematics creates confident, agentic, and persistent learners (NCTM, 2000). The standards articulate the importance of identity factors such as confidence and perseverance as predictors of learning outcomes and achievement. As such, identity and how students position themselves in classrooms is regarded as a critical issue in understanding teaching and learning mathematics (Boaler & Greeno, 2000). Consequently, identity is viewed as an educational outcome, particularly in relation to student’s persistence in learning mathematics, and is “an integral part of mathematical proficiency” (Bishop, 2012, p. 37). Moreover, identity research in education framed identity and learning as linked and informing each other in which learning is a process of becoming.

> Because learning transforms who we are and what we do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming-to become a certain person or, conversely, to avoid becoming a certain person. Even the learning we do entirely by ourselves eventually contributes to making us into specific kind of person. We accumulate skills and information, not in the abstract as ends in themselves, but in the service of an identity (Wenger, 1998, p 215).

Current mathematics identity research examined some of the factors that inform the development and construction of students’ mathematics identities. For example, Boaler (2002) argues that pedagogical practices influence and shape students’ construction of knowledge and determine how they engage in mathematical thinking and problem solving. She views students’

mathematical capability "as a complex relationship between knowledge and practice" (p. 43). Moreover, when students experience a conflict between the type of classroom norms and practices offered to them and their learning style, they reported a dislike for mathematics class and expressed their intentions of giving up when they are able to (Boaler, 2002).

Moreover, Boaler and Greeno (2000) challenged the common views of mathematics as a difficult subject and cognitively challenging, making mathematics "attainable only by some." Instead, they argue that "learning is a process of identity formation" (p. 171). Therefore, when learning is staged in narrow and formalized "figured worlds" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), it limits students' agency and leads them to reject mathematics or "*disidentify"* with school (Nasir, 2012, p. 13, emphasis in original). This is when narratives of dislike of mathematics or incomprehensible concepts and ideas of mathematics emerge among students and mathematics becomes a "difficult" subject. Consequently, practices of learning mathematics gained attention as being the vehicle for defining the type of knowledge constructed and for providing insight into students' mathematical conceptualization and understanding. In a study of reform efforts in traditional mathematics classes, Boaler and Greeno (2000) found that students from traditional mathematics classrooms were offered participation opportunities that related to the notion of received knowing wherein the mathematical authority was external to students and was driven from textbooks and teacher. Hence, many of these students reported their dislike of mathematics and their intent to give it up as soon as they are able to because they perceived mathematics to be limiting their agency. In contrast, students who were in reform-oriented classrooms and were given the opportunity to use and apply mathematics as well as to propose theories and critique each other's thinking and reasoning reported narratives of positive disposition towards mathematics in which they see themselves as doers of mathematics.

Arguably, students' ability and success in doing mathematics is not sufficient by itself to support the development of strong mathematics identities (Boaler & Greeno, 2002). Thus, "students can master the practices of traditional mathematics classroom and lean the math competently without taking on the identity of themselves as mathematical thinkers or 'math people'" (Nasir, 2012, p. 19). Furthermore, Wegner (1999) conceptualized learning (in-the-head phenomenon) as an aspect of identity (an engagement and participation) and identity as the result of learning. Other research (e.g. Bishop, 2012; Boaler & Greeno, 2000; Martin, 2000; Nasir, 2012; Sfard & Prusak, 2005) recognized the theoretical interconnectedness between learning experiences and mathematics identity development and construction (Larnell, 2016). Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning here that students' ability to do mathematics successfully by itself is not adequate for the development of their positive mathematics identities. It is their engagement and participation in authentic mathematics events in which they see themselves as learners and doers of mathematics that influences their positive mathematics identities (Nasir, 2012).

Mathematics Education Research

In the past few decades, the focus of mathematics education research has shifted from a cognitive perspective, which was concerned with the individual and related cognitive performance, to a more social and cultural approach to understand learning and teaching. Learning and teaching was viewed as a sociocultural practice with concepts like culture, socialization, participation, and belonging, emerging in relation to learning and teaching mathematics (Gutiérrez, 2013). In addition, following this sociocultural turn in mathematics education, a sociopolitical turn materialized in which concepts like power, privilege, race, gender were highlighted as factors informing the learning of mathematics and the construction of students' mathematics identities. In the following sections, I elaborate on the two perspectives of

mathematics research (the sociocultural and sociopolitical) and how mathematics identity is viewed within each perspective.

Sociocultural perspective. Within the sociocultural perspective, identity research shifted from the psychological perspective that highlights motivation, beliefs, and attitudes, to the sociocultural perspective that underscores intersectionality with diversity, race, gender, culture, and language (Larnell, 2016). The sociocultural perspective decentered the cognitive function in teaching and learning and brought to the fore the social interactions and contexts and their influences on the individual's sense of belonging (Gutiérrez, 2013).

Within this turn, classroom context and school cultures were examined wherein concepts such as communities of practice, participation, and belonging were investigated as factors that impact identity development. Therefore, within this social-turn era, identity research highlighted marginalized and racialized experiences of minority students and examined how these dynamics informed students' mathematics learning and identity construction. For example, Danny Martin (2000), in his book *Mathematics Success and Failure Among African-American Youth,* developed a conceptual framework for understanding mathematics achievement and persistence among African Americans. In this framework, he situated achievement and persistence outcomes in the larger sociocultural and historical contexts and investigated mathematics identity construction as well as mathematics socialization. The use of mathematics socialization in the framework highlights the fact that the dynamics of home, school, and societal structures are active factors in the construction of one's identity. Thus, the interaction between mathematics socialization and identity allows for students' consideration of what it means to be African American while participating in mathematical learning contexts. This multilevel framework asserts the importance of examining the broader learning contexts (i.e. sociohistorical,

socioeconomic, community, family, school, classroom, curricula, and peer interactions) to understand mathematics learning, achievement, and persistence among African Americans (Martin, 2000). Particularly, it underscores students' agency in navigating these contexts and the forces of reproduction and oppression outlined by community beliefs about mathematics and African Americans. Martin (2000) posits that lending attention to the community beliefs about mathematics shows "the legacy of denied opportunity and differential treatment in mathematics contexts" (p. 177).

Likewise, Na'ila Nasir (2012) projects the complexity of identity and its processes in schools and in after-school programs for African American youth. She argues that African American youth's identities are shaped though the opportunities offered or denied in an educational setting. For example, African American students in an urban high school who participated in higher level mathematics classes developed a positive racial identity and positive disposition towards African American heritage and academic achievement. In contrast, students who were on the lower academic track developed identities of opposition and negative disposition towards school in general and learning mathematics in particular (Nasir, 2012). It is also worth mentioning here that high-achieving African American students are often accused of "acting white" and risk a social isolation and rupture in their racial identity that impacts their positionality in school and mathematics classrooms (Nasir, 2012, p.73). Furthermore, taking into account the sociohistorical dimension of racism and racial disparities in the United States, Nasir (2012) posits that the intersectional relationship between racialized identities, socialization, and learning mathematics becomes inevitable. For African American youth, race is an integral aspect of their identity "because it is lived and enacted subtly on multiple levels of experience" (p. 4). Framing her study on the premise that refrains from essentializing the subjects, her research is

grounded in the cultural perspective of learning and identity development and focuses on African Americans' racialized experiences and how these experiences inform their participation in mathematics and their mathematics identity.

It is evident that grand narratives of racism and marginality inform and shape the construction of students' mathematics identity, particularly for African American students and other minority student populations. Educational spaces arguably become fertile grounds for systemic marginalization and stereotypes of minority students (McGee, 2015). Ebony McGee (2015) examined the racialized experiences of African American students and how they navigated the classroom spaces while being positioned as mathematically deficient or incapable of learning mathematics. She argues that the intersection between mathematics identity and racialized experiences can guide research in explaining and interpreting the mathematical experiences of African American students and other minority students. Her framework introduced the constructs of fragile and robust mathematics identities that describe the African American college students' racialized experiences in the mathematics classroom and how they negotiate socially constructed narratives of racism and stereotypes. By the term *fragile* she refers to the "delicate and vulnerable relationship between Black students' mathematics success and the persistent racialization" they encounter in mathematics class; and by the term *robust* she refers to "the agency and resilience students develop in spite of racial stereotypes while learning mathematics" (McGee, 2015, p. 604).

The robust and fragile mathematics identities encompass three components that shape these identities: motivation to succeed in mathematics; type of coping strategies used to counter racialization; and one's own dispositions related to success in mathematics. When students develop fragile identities in response to structural forces within the school or society, they

usually abandon mathematics and limit their participation in mathematics-related fields. The fragile and robust mathematics identity framework sheds light on the academic success of African American students as they navigate the plethora of challenges constructed by the racial social forces.

Sociopolitical perspective. One reason for the popularity of identity research in education is that it operates as an analytic lens for educational research (Gee, 2001). It presents a window to explore the multifaceted and contextualized educational experiences as they inform positive identity construction and learning. Gaining insight on the factors that contribute to positive identity construction (such as equity, power, socialization, culture, etc.) sets the trajectory for targeted educational reform efforts and strategies.

In contrast to sociocultural perspective, the sociopolitical turn in examining identities stemmed from the recognition of mathematics education, as well as research more generally, as being a *political act* in which power relations exist in interactions and relationships. *Political act* does not mean the common understanding that relates to government and political parties; rather, it refers to how power, privilege, and oppression manifest in education and research (Aguirre et al., 2017). The sociopolitical turn in mathematics education and research allows us to question issues of power, privilege, and identities and challenge inequitable practices in schools and classrooms (Gutiérrez, 2013). Recognizing that identities are socially constructed and are shaped by lived experiences of privilege or oppression, a deep understanding of the political nature of mathematics is prudent. Moreover, this shift in mathematics research renders another dimension to identity conceptualization as being a performative concept and as "something you do, not something you are" (Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 44). Identity is greatly impacted by the institutional

structures and the larger political narratives; therefore, when investigating mathematics identity development, examining these contexts becomes inevitable.

Since teachers' practices and decisions inform students' mathematics identity development, Gutierrez (2017) argues that mathematics teachers need political knowledge to be successful in developing positive student identities. Political knowledge will enable mathematics teachers to recognize inequitable practices and make decisions that challenge the status quo, constructing more inclusive spaces for all students. Moreover, Gutiérrez (2013) argues that teachers who take on the sociopolitical turn are able to recognize that certain students' behavior, though outside the common norms, occurs as a result of identity-at-work as a means of resisting differential narratives. As such, these teachers refrain from labeling the students and think of ways to support them while negotiating their mathematics learning in class. As it relates to outside classroom contexts, political knowledge allows teachers to recognize policies and district structures that could impede students' success and achievement, particularly within marginalized student populations. For example, Gutiérrez (2017) argues that school success stories of low-income students in schools in Northern California were disrupted by district policies such as the teaching to-the-test movement. Evidently, these acts, if not challenged, particularly by the teachers, could influence students' mathematics identities and learning.

Issues of equity

With the growing diversity in educational settings in the U.S., concerns for inequitable practices brought attention to social justice projects and the examination of students' identities within the context of mathematics. Research findings suggest strong interconnectedness between issues of equity, power, sociopolitical context, culture and how students construct and develop their mathematics identities (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Martin, 2000; Nasir, 2012). Cobb & Hodge

(2010) offer a provisional definition of equity that focuses on instructional practices and classroom events that contribute to students' learning of mathematics and developing identities. They argue that the "concept of equity encompasses a complex range of concerns that emerge when people who are members of various local communities and broader groups within society act and interact in the mathematics classroom" (p. 180). Among these concerns are: students' access to mathematics learning opportunities; societal function of schooling where differential practices are enacted and constituted; and students' development of fragile/robust mathematics identities. Therefore, equity and mathematics identity development inform each other and cannot be separated.

Theoretical Approaches to Examining Mathematics Identity

Langer-Osuna and Esmonde (2017) outlined four theoretical approaches to study identity and its construction processes in mathematics classrooms. The four approaches view identity as discursive (poststructural); positional; narrative; or psychoanalytic. In the following section, I will outline mathematics identity research within these approaches.

Poststructural or discursive approaches to identity research. The discursive or poststructural theories of identity construction view identity as a product of socio-cultural discourses that subjugate and constitute the subject (Langer-Osuna & Esmonde, 2017). This view of identity as a production of discursive practices draws from Foucault's (1976/1990) identification of discourse as an effect of power as well as a point of resistance. As such, it underscores how the grand cultural, economic, political, and social discourses influence the life and schooling experiences of students, particularly minority students and students of color. It also allows the understanding of "how knowledge, truth, and subjects [i.e. persons] are produced

in language and cultural practice as well as how they might be reconfigured" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 486).

For example, Stinson (2013) provided an explanation of the "White male myth" that permeates the Western culture in which statements like "Boys are just 'naturally' skilled at mathematics" implicitly include White and Asian students and exclude African Americans (p. 72). As such, it becomes a metanarrative that supports transcendent and universal truths that dominate Western culture. Hence, "[t]hese discourses, although initially understood as lower-case *t* 'truths,' often become upper-case *T* 'Truths' though their repetition within Western culture" (p. 72). Consequently, such broad discourses make certain positionalities available and constrain how students may exercise agency as they construct their identifications in relation to such dominant discourses (Langer-Osuna & Esmonde, 2017).

Narrative approaches to identity research. This approach to investigating identity attempts to operationalize identity as set of stories or narratives told about the self or others. Sfard and Prusak (2005) operationalized the concept of identity to better serve as an analytical lens for education research. In this respect, they view identities as stories arguing that this view renders the term identity as more "explicit and fully operational" (p. 15). Sfard and Prusak (2005) highlighted one's own personal narratives and incorporated the view of the construction of identity a communicable practice. Hence, Sfard and Prusak (2005) operationalized identity as "collection of stories about persons or…individuals that are *reifying, endorsable,* and *significant"* (p. 16, emphasis in original). This narrative definition of identity offers an understanding of identity as "*discursive counterparts* of one's lived experiences" (p. 17, emphasis in original). Though this definition underscores individuals' agency and makes researching identity more easily accessible and investigable, Sfard and Prusak (2005) argue that

some may claim that this definition runs the risk of reducing the identities into narratives, which undermines the potential of identity as tool into self-concept and sense-making. For example, Wenger (1998) posits that identity should not be reduced to a discursive text to represent the essence of the story, as such, as these narratives are not "the full, lived experience of engagement in practice" (p. 151).

Furthermore, the perceived gap between the actual identity (narratives of the actual state of affairs told in the past tense) and the designated identity (narratives of what the state of affairs could be and have the potential to occur) is likely to develop a sense of exclusion. For example, the individual's actual identity is represented as "I am good in math" while the designated identity is represented as "I want to be good in math". The perceived gap or disparity between how an individual is actually positioned in mathematics and what the individual aspires to be creates a sense of despair and exclusion (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). As such, narrative identities are suitable research tools that center the sense of belonging and how mathematics is linked to self-concept (Langer-Osuna & Esmond, 2017).

Positional approaches to identity research. The sociocultural perspective of identity research links the identity to participation in social practices in which actors (i.e., students) make sense of their figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) where these actors position themselves within a certain role, action, or behavior. Therefore, the positional approach views identity as situated within social interactions and position the individual in relation to others who inhabit a particular social context (Langer-Osuna & Esmonde, 2017). Positioning theory postulates that through human communication we give meaning to our actions and to the socially and historically constructed story lines within which we locate ourselves (Langer-Osuna & Esmond, 2017). The positional approach to identity research emphasizes the role of the teachers and the students as

nonparticipants in the construction of positional identities (Langer-Osuna & Esmond, 2017). Therefore, this approach links identities to a particular form of participation, such as participation in the mathematics classroom for instance. Within any social context, the individual displays certain traits and behaviors and takes on a specific role that shapes how he/she positions himself/herself in relation to the context. Within this dynamic, the individuals are not seen as agentic subjects who can determine their own identity; thus, their positionalities inscribe certain identity within that context. Using this view of identity could help illuminate the power and discourse interplay that informs and shapes individuals' positionalities within the mathematics classroom and the identity that could be inscribed on them as a result. Within educational contexts, teachers could limit or make available positive students' positionalities within the mathematics classroom by rendering multiple participation and engagement opportunities in making sense of and doing mathematics (Boaler & Greeno, 2000).

Psychoanalytic approache to identity research. This approach is concerned with identities in relation to "emotions, anxieties, and subconscious desires" (Langer-Osuna & Esmonde, 2017, p. 642). Additionally, it is concerned with storylines individuals tell about their experiences and how they consciously or subconsciously read the world around them. Individuals' lived experiences construct their internal and external psychological realities and determine how they respond to the world around them (Langer-Osuna & Esmonde, 2017).

Identity in this view is a process of identification and comparing self and others to certain norms. It is usually the interplay between the mind and the body (Vanheule & Verhaeghe, 2009). Concepts of psychoanalytic theory can be applied to understanding educational narratives in the mathematics classroom. Bibby (2010) argues that institutional bureaucracy and assessment contribute to increased stress and anxiety for teachers and students that potentially informs

identity construction. Such experiences result in constructing negative learning identities, pushing students to give up or leave the mathematics field. Moreover, teachers' practices and the motivational or discouraging discourses teachers use in their classrooms influence the personalities of the students and impact their learning. Bibby (2010) uses Lacan's theory of mirroring and recognition as a lens to examine teachers' practices. She argues that this theory could be used in classrooms to examine how teachers' practices support or humiliate students. These practices can influence how students construct their academic identity and can obscure students' engagement.

Conclusion

It is evident from research that the process of identity construction and students' positionalities occur at the intersection of multiple factors such as context, gender, discourse, race, and ethnicity, to name a few. These factors occur at the micro-level (i.e. within classroom interactions and socialization) or the macro-level (within socio-political and cultural contexts). Furthermore, the identity research presents researchers with an analytic tool to examine students' learning, teaching practices, and the larger structural and societal dynamics. It renders a holistic approach to understanding the complexity of the educational process and how students, specifically from minority groups, learn and do mathematics. Furthermore, research on Muslim American students provides an insight into the complexity of ascribing to Islam as a religion with larger narratives of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism. Research with Muslim students relates the dominant sociopolitical discourse of Islamophobia to students' mathematics identity construction as narrative and as positional. Hence, to understand the learning and schooling experiences of Muslim students, particularly in mathematics, it is prudent to examine how they construct their mathematics identity against a backdrop of Islamophobia and violent narratives of

exclusion framed within postcolonial theory. Taking on the positional approaches to examining identity within both the sociocultural and the sociopolitical perspectives, this study examines the Western colonial discourse of othering, difference, and marginalization and how it informs the learning and schooling of Muslim American students.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Methods

In this chapter, I outline how I used postcolonial theory to explore the experiences of my participants in mathematics classroom while situating these experiences within the broader sociopolitical narratives of marginalization. Here, I delineate how postcolonial theory and the articulation of Muslim and mathematics identities informed the choice of methodology and methods. This chapter provides an overview of how I developed and used a qualitative postcolonial interview study with my participants. Following that, I articulate how I conducted my analysis and representation within this theoretical framework. Moreover, this chapter discusses issues of trustworthiness, research ethics, researcher's positionality, and describes my participants, selection procedures, and research site.

What's a Methodology?[1]

In qualitative research, the methodology is an integral element of the research design that reflects the onto-epistemological and theoretical choices of the researcher (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015). The methodological undergirding of the research design increases the trustworthiness of the research outcomes (Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009); therefore, without a clear description of the methodology, the research would be fragmented, disconnected, and disoriented. However, in the past few decades, many researchers interrogated the stable, predetermined, and postpositivist methodological research designs and (re)conceptualized methodologies as "temporary structures that are being regenerated again and again" (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015, p. 80). The fluidity in methodological approaches and methods created

[1] A larger portion of this section was published in the Qualitative Research SIG of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Newsletter, Fall 2018.

possibilities for alternative analysis and representations outside the realm of traditional, linear, and prescribed design. These possibilities opened up spaces for emergent critical and postqualitative research designs that became fertile ground for differential and oppositional consciousness research (Sandoval, 2000) and decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 1999).

Furthermore, Harding (1987) presented a broader understanding of research methodology and methods, which I believe provides space for multiple theoretical frameworks that bleed outside the realm of traditional research and its prescribed procedures. She postulates that methodology is the theory and analysis of how research should proceed and develop. Thus, methodology encompasses an application of a theoretical underpinning (such as postcolonialism in this study) within an identified discipline (such as mathematics education) (Harding, 1987). Moreover, Harding (1987) views the research method as "a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence…[whether] listening to (or interrogating) informants, observing behavior, or examining historical traces and records" (p. 2). Consequently, she conceptualizes methodology as a way for thinking with research outside the narrow picture of prescribed, organized, and static methods and calls, as such, for methodological approaches in critical research that challenge traditional research to provide space for subjects' experiences and voices. Hence, when conducting research with racialized and colonized subjects, using these broad conceptualizations of research design elements to weave in new methodological approaches and methods resists conforming to the colonialist practices and ways of doing research. Be it a methodology for feminist research (Harding, 1987), for oppositional consciousness research (Sandoval, 2000), and/or for research within the critical paradigm in general, researchers trouble traditional and Western methodological approaches and suggest new ways to conduct research with marginalized and racialized subjects.

To elucidate my research methodology, I begin by sharing my conceptualization of methodology within my research theoretical framework (i.e., postcolonial theory). Then, I explain how this conceptualization aided with the suspension of the Western tradition of interviewing practices to open the space for interviews with non-Western participants (i.e., Muslim American students). Lastly, I explain the "meetings" or conventions (Nordstrom, 2018) that informed how I (re)constructed my postcolonial interview study.

(Re)conceptualizing Methodology

In the past few decades, many researchers interrogated postpositivist and Western research designs to create openings for the proliferation of poststructural and postmodernist theories. For example, Elizabeth St. Pierre (1997) wrestled with categories such as methods, methodology, and data. She placed the concept of data "under erasure" (p. 179) working on the "verge of intelligibility" to theorize different types of data: emotional, dream, and sensual data that has the potential to create new knowledge (p.176). Similarly, St. Pierre & Pillow (2000) trouble the linear notion of the research and the prescribed research process by interrogating the process and its validity. They wrote:

> Where, when is research? If we resist the impulse to normalize and regulate research (now we have it right!), will it be acceptable for each researcher to define her own categories, her own process – to define "research" and "science?" Can research be so situated (hasn't it always been?) and, if so, how will we know it's valid? How will we even know whether it's "research?" (p. 10).

Furthermore, Koro-Ljunberg (2015) interrogates the use of the methodological language, specifically how labels are being used in research as ways to create "realities" or "onto-epistemological spaces" that falls under colonialist language and discourses, is historical, reflects

power, and mirrors user's beliefs and ideologies (p.11). Because this language is grounded in the Western and colonialist ways of knowing and produces labels, signifiers, and metanarratives, it has the potential to marginalize the researched by the process of signifying and categorizing. Inevitably, and building on the previous arguments, the research design prescribed by Western scholars produces binaries (i.e., researcher/researched) that are equivalent to the binary distinction produced by colonialism (i.e., Occident/West) and are power-laden. For that purpose, it becomes important to interrogate such research practices and the prescribed methods and discourses, particularly when conducting research with non-Western participants like the participants in this study. Additionally, knowledge about the Other or the Orient has been collected, classified, and disseminated by the West and through the eyes of the West (Said, 1978/2003). This Western knowledge of the Other/Orient "subjectified or thingified the colonized subject by first disempowering it, repetitively branding it and then coercively assigning it with a set of characteristics for imperial exigencies" (Azeez, 2016, p.711). In other words, the colonial discourse, which is historically situated, produced and reproduced the Other as different, backward, violent, and illiterate to extend and maintain the dominance of colonialism from past to present. Consequently, many researchers, such as Smith (1999), argue for the deconstruction of Western scholarship through decolonizing methodologies and the inclusion of the indigenous and the Other's ways of knowing that draw from multiple cultural knowledge systems. Arguably, such methodologies have the potential to "provoke revolutionary thinking about the roles that knowledge, knowledge production, knowledge hierarchies, and knowledge institutions play in decolonization and social transformation" (Smith, 1999, p. xii). In the following section, I detail how I drew from the above-cited methodological arguments to construct and conduct my postcolonial interview study which I call *Ziyyarah. Ziyyarah* is an

Arabic word that means a visit in which a person visits with a friend or family member or acquaintance that usually takes place at the house of the visited party. It is customary for the host to offer food and/or drink as a welcoming gesture for the visitor. They enjoy an informal setting of conversations and interactions.

***Ziyyarah*: A Postcolonial Interview**

Interviewing, in general, emerged in the last few centuries as a socially and historically situated research practice (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). By bringing to the fore stories and narratives of the researched, interviewing reveals how individuals make sense and understand the world around them as they share their stories and experiences pertaining to the topic investigated. Hence, this research approach is believed to illuminate humans' social interactions, practices, beliefs, and/or behavior. Interview study is one type of qualitative inquiry within which interviews are regarded as the primary mode of research. The history of using Interviews, as a sociocultural practice, began in the 19th century with the journalist interview conducted by Horace Greely, editor of the New York Herald Tribune (Brinkmann, 2018). Brinkmann (2018) states that many interview studies employed interviews to explore specific phenomenon or events such as the study of "the authoritarian personality" by Adorno, Frenkel-Burnswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950) (Brinkmann, 2018). On the important role that interviews play as a research practice in revealing the experiences of the participants, Atkinson (2007) writes that

> [h]umans are the storytelling species. Storytelling is in our blood. We think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story. Our life stories connect us to our roots, give us direction, validate our experience, and restore value to our lives. (p. 224).

While I find Atkinson's (2007) view helpful in underscoring how interviews have the potential of relating our stories and experiences to research, within postcolonialism, many questions emerge: Who is telling the story? Who is listening? Whose voice is represented, textualized, and contextualized? How do we conceptualize narratives and interpret storied experiences? Are oral narratives the only product of interviewing? Evidently, the prescribed, Eurocentric, and power-laden interviewing practices appear to be unfit for my participants who have non-Western roots. Although they might have lived their lives in Western society, many are still bound to their cultural, linguistic, and religious practices that might not be similar to the Western values or norms. Thus, I interrogated the interviewing practices and built on current research to make space for (re)thinking of the interview process to meet my research needs within my theoretical orientation. I detail in the following section how I (re)thought and (re)constructed my postcolonial interview study.

Chase (2018) argues that without a sense of how narratives are conceptualized, nonnarrative ways of making sense of our experiences and the social world around us become marginalized. Emotions, feelings, and body language are part of the narratives and the stories told that render a glimpse into individuals' identities, positionalities, and meaning-making systems. In addition to the told stories, the pauses, the body movement, the eyes' movement, and stares all become an assemblage of narratives that constitute the subject. As such, this interview study takes on the understanding of narratives as specific meaning-making activities that encompass storied and non-storied forms of discourse and communication (Polletta, 2012). As for conceptualizing the subject, Megan Blumenreich (2004) problematizes the conventional method of narrative inquiry and interviewing wherein she argues for a poststructuralist approach to the production and analysis of the participants' narratives to avoid the risk of reproducing

dominant language and hegemonic discourse. She draws on Foucault's critique of the concept of the subject itself and builds on his view of the subject as the source of "variable and complex variation of discourse" and not the sole source of discourse (Foucault, 1984, p.118, as cited in Blumenreich, 2004, p. 77). In addition, many researchers within postmodern and transformative research (re)considered interviewing practices to bring attention to the decolonizing capacities of research beyond traditional and neopositivist research (Smith, 1999). While "cultures, languages, and social practice-all may be spaces for marginalization" within the colonialist onto-epistemology, these narratives have also "become spaces of resistance and hope…[within] wider framework of self-determination, decolonization, and social justice" (Smith, 1999, p. 4). Consequently, within critical postmodernism and poststructuralism, many researchers critiqued the assumption of the subject's static formulation of narratives as reflections of the subjective and lived experiences. They argue that the knowledge is created and constructed in which "the meanings of a subject's statements are… always in motion…[and] can never be final" (Denzin, 1996, p.5).

With respect to the power relations with the interview practices, the postmodern sensibilities interrogated the researcher/researched roles, which privileged the researcher position, to theorize an inter/intra active role of the subject and the researcher and created new forms of interviewing that are more collaborative and contextual. Because postcolonial theory interrogates binaries of West/East, Researcher/Researched, researchers within this paradigm are urged to examine the power dynamics and the political nature of the research through reflexivity and examination of researcher's positionalities. Decentering the researcher's privileged position while focusing on the subject's meaning of self or epiphanies "seek[s] to produce narratives that ennoble human experiences while facilitating civic transformation in the public (and private)

sphere" (Denzin, 1996, p. 277). Moreover, views of the society as "a series of fragments in continuous flux" in which meaning is ambiguous and cannot be reduced to single representation (Borer & Fontana, 2012) replaced the static and monolithic views of the society and its members.

In this study, I extend Denzin's (1996) understanding of the subject's statements and the critique mentioned above of participants' narratives and the power relations within the interview practice to undertake a postcolonial interview approach that examines the narratives of my participants' lived experiences and how they make sense of the world around them. I am also reminded of Hall's (1990) conceptualization of identity as always becoming, malleable, and in motion; thus, the narratives are not static and are not a final reflection of the participants' experiences and positionalities. I am also drawing from Blumenreich's (2004) poststructural interview study that situates the participants' narratives within the larger socio-historical and sociopolitical contexts and accounts for the researcher's role in the meaning-making process while interrogating the researcher/subject power relations.

Drawing on Smith's (1999) argument to decolonize research methods and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of nomadic subject and Nordstrom's (2015) data assemblage, I constructed the *Ziyyarah*, a postcolonial interview to (re)think beyond the traditional and prescribed methodological approaches to research. As explained by Braidotti (1994), "[the nomadic subject is] a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity. This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity" (p. 22). The subject within this view and its narratives oppose static and rigid figuration. Instead, the subject, its narratives, and identities are always becoming, in motion, and cannot be reduced to essences.

Moreover, *Ziyyarah* interrogates the reproduction of colonial subjugation that traditional interviewing inscribes on participants. I argue that the *Ziyyarah* interview is inclusive of participants' ways of knowing and culture. It shifts our thinking of interviews and creates a line of flight that troubles traditional interviewing to become a "provisional space" (St. Pierre, 1997) that is a mixture of both striated and smooth spaces. Therefore, rather than just conducting a static and predetermined interview (i.e., striated), *Ziyyarah* embodies the participants' cultural practice that embraces the intra-action between family members, conversations, events, and space (i.e., smooth). Between the two forces of the striated and the smooth, Nordstrom (2018) offered meetings of conventions as a way to think of data and methods. I draw from her work to offer meetings or conventions between traditional interviewing practices and *Ziyyarah*. The following conventions or meetings guided my (re)thinking and (re)construction of the *Ziyyarah* interview.

***Ziyyarah* Meetings or Conventions**

The conventional research method of interviewing entails a predetermined process of devising a structured interview protocol that includes detailed questions for the participant who is expected to give or provide an answer. This process of gathering participants' responses to interview questions creates a rigid and static space that leaves no room for conversations or interaction outside the interview protocol. In other words, within traditional research conventions, the narratives of the participants are centered and privileged wherein interactions or intersections with the surrounding place, time, or the people within are dismissed as irrelevant. The following outlined conventions attempt to (un)settle interviewing practice by bringing attention to participants' ways of knowing, the tradition of storytelling, familial connections, and

the space they inhabit to create fertile grounds for creating new knowledge. In what follows, I explicate my thinking of *Ziyyarah* within the following three meetings.

First meeting: unstructured and conversational interview. My choice of unstructured interviews draws from Barth’s (2016) argument that this type of interview can "deconstruct" the Western's fixed and monolithic notions of participants' identities and allow for the participants to compose their own identities and "insert" in their stories where they feel most comfortable (p. 91). It also provided a space for the participants to share their beliefs, perspectives, feelings, and aspirations as they told their stories. This process alleviated further colonizing of the participants and disrupted issues of language imposition and linearity in the predetermined interview questions and probes. There were no restrictions or impositions on how the participants told their stories, what stories they wished to tell, and what details they wanted to share. For that reason, the use of unstructured interviews aided in producing an in-depth and thick description of the participants' experiences that are rooted in participants' culture, discourse, and language.

I found using a conversational, relational, and un-structured interview mirrored the culture and communication style of non-Western participants and embedded their style of storying. Because "the reality is a conversational reality, and the conversation is a fundamental mode of human relationships" (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 583), the interaction between the participant and the researcher broke the inscription of the postpositivist approach to interviewing and opened up space for a rich and in-depth storytelling experience. Moreover, this practice involved communicative and socio-cultural practices that offered the possibility for the participants to attend to their culture and ways of knowing while sharing their narratives. In addition, the power of interviews was manifested in creating potentialities for connecting the micro-interactions within the sphere of the interview with the macro-oriented interpretations of the larger social

sphere (Brinkmann, 2018). In other words, the micro-interactions between participants, family members, and the space within the interview (as a conversation) is viewed as a reflection of the larger societal practices and norms that construct and inform these micro-interactions. Thus, these micro-interactions have the potential of illuminating normalized and mainstream societal practices that this study examined and explored.

Second meeting: (Un)settling the "I”. Many researchers within postmodern and transformative research (re)considered interviewing practices to bring to fore the decolonizing capacities of research beyond the traditional and the neopositivist research (Smith, 1999). Views of the society as "a series of fragments in continuous flux" in which meaning is ambiguous and cannot be reduced to a single representation (Borer & Fontana, 2012) replaced the static and monolithic views of the society and its members. Within the *Ziyyarah* interview, the researcher and the researched are actively engaged in the meaning-making of the narrated stories and experiences. Because my participants and I shared the same ideological inclinations as we ascribe to the same religion, we had some commonalities that we might have shared with respect to how we made sense of our experiences. For example, my participants and I share the same theological undergirding and are guided by the Qur’an and the Prophet’s sayings and ways of life. Though we may not share the same level of adherence to the religion, we share a collective consciousness and a Muslim identity (Stonebanks, 2008). The power relations in which the researcher assumes the role of all-knowing is tempered, as it cannot entirely be dismantled, and knowledge is constructed inter/intra-actively.

I acknowledge that I am positioned as an insider to this research. I identify as a Muslim American who is subject to the broader sociopolitical dynamics and narratives, as are my participants. I am also fluent in the Arabic language, which is the language of the Qur’an (the

Holy book) and the source of many idioms used by all Muslims. Correspondingly, my Muslim identity and my positionality contributed to the dynamics of the interview space where I am entangled within and with the space and the participants. I argue that both my language and my identity allowed for my participants' distinctive linguistic styles and their storied experiences to occur and become part of the data. Because of the informal space and arguably my visible identity as a Muslim, my participants were able to use phrases that are distinctive to the language used by all Muslims (e.g., *alhamdulillah*, *masha'Allah*, *Masjd, Eid,* etc.) without the need to translate or contextualize the use of these terms. These phrases were always already part and parcel of the participants' narratives and experiences. This process decentered mainstream culture that regards the English language as the dominant language for research and (re)centered participants' culture and language. However, I am reminded of Spivak's (1993/2009) argument that "only a native can know the scene" in which she posits that

> [t]he position that only the subaltern can know the subaltern, only women know women, and so on, cannot be held as a theoretical presupposition either, for it predicates the possibility of knowledge on identity. Whenever the political necessity for holding the position, and whatever the advisability of attempting to "identify" (with) the other as subject in order to know her, knowledge is made possible and is sustained by irreducible difference, not identity. (p. 253-254).

In other words, Spivak (1987/2006) reminds us of the anti-essentialist approach to researching the Other, challenging positions that view the subject as static and complete. Sharing the same identification (i.e., subaltern) does not constitute sharing the same experiences or positionalities within even the same social and historical contexts. For example, even though I am a Muslim *hijabi* woman, my experiences and my stories are unique and might not be replicated with

another Muslim woman who is also a *hijabi* within the same sociopolitical context. The intersectionality of the participants' race, language, gender, ethnicity, and culture rendered such a unique experience that was revealed through their narratives and the stories they told.

Moreover, I am an Arab Muslim American woman who has been residing in a Western country for the past 18 years with Western education and training. Though I ascribe to the same theological understanding and some of the religious practices as my participants, I am aware that we are different in our adherence and commitment to the traditions of Islam. For example, as a *hijabi* who chose to wear the headscarf, I am practicing an aspect of my religion that some of my participants chose not to practice. Moreover, some of my participants frequented the mosque more or less than I did. Also, my cultural experiences (e.g., born and lived in Non-Western society for an extended period in my life) informed my subjectivities and my interpretation of my participants' narratives and positionalities. Therefore, my interview notes were another facet through which I read and interpreted my participants' experiences and their body signals and how these inform the construction of their identities in mathematics classrooms. My notes were the spaces where I captured "transgressive data - emotional data, dream data, sensual data, and response data- that are out-of-category and not usually accounted for in qualitative research" (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 180). They helped me think with and within the data while I interrogated my research process, data, methods with a postcolonial underpinning as well as my biases and subjectivities. For example, on multiple occasions, I fell into the trap of using the binary us/them during my conversations with my participants to refer to Muslims (us) and non-Muslim (they). This signaled an identification of the Muslim identity as being external to being American that I was exploring and examining within my participants' narratives. Also, occasionally, I made gestures or statements agreeing or disagreeing with the participant's view of her/himself that

appeared to be judgmental of the narrated event or story. On one occasion when Hani's mom joined the conversation, she talked about Hani's obsession with video games that she felt was taking most of his time when it could have been used more effectively working on school assignments. Subconsciously, I was positioned as a parent and without much thinking, I agreed with her as I made a remark confirming her idea of the negative influence of the video games. When I turned to Hani, his facial expressions reflected a sense of embarrassment and victimhood where I am sure he felt that both of us as adults clamored to tell him that he was not in line with the normative views of a good student. Furthermore, as I interviewed and visited with my participants, I jotted down certain feelings and remarks with which I interrogated my practices, questioning, and remarks.

Third meeting: Ways of knowing and world views. My motivation to (un)settle the Western tradition of interviewing research also draws on Stonebanks' (2008) argument that theory and methodology must embrace Muslims' way of knowing and experiences. He clarifies that

> if the desire is to truly develop counternarratives that are authentic to the richness, oneness, and diversity of Islam, before examining this quandary that faces our classrooms, theory and methodology must be considered in relation to the Muslim experience and knowledge— specifically carrying out research that is ethically just and following the way of the Prophet Muhammad, beneficial to the Ummah (as a global Muslim community and collective consciousness, including those Muslims living in diaspora) (p. 295).

Therefore, researching Muslim Americans, I am aware that Muslim ways of knowing are deeply rooted and guided by Islam and its teachings. These epistemologies are historical, contextual,

and diverse. As such, they must be examined within the "continually changing and emergent collective consciousness"(Stonebanks, 2008, p. 285). The Muslim ways of knowing encompass references to the Qur'an (the holy book of Muslims) and the sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). For example, Muslims submit to God as being Almighty, the All-knowing, and in control. They believe their closeness to God (*Allah*) renders inner peace, confidence, and blessings; thus, they refer to *Allah* in their daily interactions often (e.g., *insha'Allah*[2], *alhamdulillah*[3]). They turn to God in times of atrocities and in times of joy to thank Him or ask for His help or guidance. They also understand that God asks them to work hard in life for their own benefit as well as the benefit of the whole community. Thus, they acknowledge that good deeds are rewarded in the hereafter. *Allah* (subhanahu wa ta'alla[4]) says in the Qur'an,

> Whoever comes [on the Day of Judgement] with a good deed will have better than it; and whoever comes with an evil deed - then those who did evil deeds will not be recompensed except [as much as] what they used to do (Qur'an, 28:84).

Additionally, I acknowledge that, because the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, Arabic references and expressions are integral to the practices of all Muslims regardless of their race or ethnicities. The bilingual references Muslims use in their narratives, mixing Arabic and English terminologies, are examples of how they narrate the world around them. These linguistic practices are distinctive of Muslims regardless of their racial or ethnic background and become

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[2] Trans. God willing

[3] Trans. Thank God

[4] Trans. Glory to Him and High is He.

an expression of the Muslim collective consciousness. For example, Muslims believe that *Allah* is the creator of the universe; hence, the universe, with its all awe-inspiring events and creations, is evidence for the existence of *Allah*. Their thinking of the events, phenomena, and the life dynamics always steer and guide them toward confirming *Allah*'s presence and His power over the universe. Hence, the Arabic phrases Muslim often use attest to the power and control of *Allah*. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that Muslims, in general, and my participants, in particular, may not exclusively draw from the Muslim ways of knowing considering their various levels of adherence to Islam.

My understanding of the Muslim ways of knowing guided how I structured and conducted my interview study. Thus, *Ziyyarah* interview afforded a space for my participants to draw from their Islamic, cultural, and linguistic ways of knowing and understanding during our conversational interviews. My visible Muslim identity as a head-covering woman, arguably, might have alleviated my participants' hesitation in sharing statements or expressions outside the English language; and they might have been forthcoming with framing their experiences within the contexts of religion and culture.

Within *Ziyyarah* interview, the participants' ways of knowing, culture, space, history, and beliefs and interrogation of the researcher/researched binary are evident and celebrated. It became an inclusive space for the nomadic subject and an informal, conversational methodological method that generated transgressive data that worked amongst the binaries alongside the spatial, cultural, and historical ways of knowing and beliefs. For example, the tea and the cookies the mother served my participant and me became data. The parent's participation in the interview while speaking in Arabic became data. The artifacts displayed at home became data. All became part of the participant's being, positionality, and cultural and social identities.

Therefore, *Ziyyarah* responded to the conceptualization of data as an assemblage and the subject as nomadic by opening the interview to the participants' interactions within home and with family members and cultural practices.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

In qualitative research, trustworthiness and ethics feature the researcher's effort to control potential bias and attend to reflexive work in the research design, implementation, and analysis. When conducting research with human subjects, researcher's practices endure the ethical principle of "do no harm" in which the researcher "must" show humility, respect, honesty, and goodwill toward the community she is exploring (Herrera, 2010 p. 123). As a researcher, my presence in the lives of my participants is fundamental to the research design and implementation. As such, it is prudent that the researcher builds trust and engages the participant in the research. Accordingly, before the interview, I explained the purpose of my research to my participants and provided them with information about the study and my role as researcher. I believe these communications and exchange of conversations might have alleviated any potential apprehension participants might have had in regard to their participation in the research. During the interview, I emphasized the participants' freedom to narrate and tell their stories in the way they desired, including the freedom to use quotes and idioms from their daily cultural practices and/or from the Arabic language. Also, I engaged my participants with the research through dialogue and conversations wherein they offered their feedback and input with respect to the research objectives. For example, I asked questions such as: What other questions do you think I should have asked? What advice do you have for me as a researcher working with Muslim youth? How do you think my research would help you as a Muslim American student in the U.S.? Moreover, my participants and I engaged in making sense of their experiences and their

narratives through interaction, conversations, and including family members within the interview space.

Situating my study in postcolonialism, I postulate that "knowledge is political and that the researchers are not neutral" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 118). Researcher's subjectivities, practices, and remarks are intrinsic to the research, inform how the research progresses, and cannot be bracketed. My participants and I engaged in co-constructing our identities within the interactions and the conversations. We also engaged in the sense-making process as we narrated the world around us. As a Muslim American myself, I did not claim access to the knowledge of the researched (i.e., Muslim Americans) as a whole; thus, my knowledge is limited and not complete. I am aware that within the postcolonial theoretical framing of my research, I am cautioned not to colonize the participant by imposing the researcher/researched binary which positions the researcher as the expert and the ultimate source of knowledge. Along the same line, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) interrogated Western intellectual claim to have the knowledge of the researched (i.e., indigenous people and the Other) that is constructed via ephemeral encounters that "appalls" and "angers" the researched. She writes from the perspective of someone who grew within the community of the other questioning the "absolute worthlessness" of the research to the community researched (p. 3). Being a Muslim American, my knowledge of Muslim Americans stemmed from my encounters with the Muslim community within the city and with the members of the Islamic school where I worked. Thus, it does not constitute knowledge of my Muslim American participants and their experiences.

Consequently, it is crucial to the trustworthiness and the ethics of the research to acknowledge perspectives of the researched Other and "[to] attempt to account for how, and why, such perspectives may have developed" (Smith, 1999, p. 3). This also entails being aware

of the power dynamics inscribed, through the research process, on the relationship between the researcher (as the orchestrator of the discussion) and the subjects who are on the receiving end of this power relationship. I am conscious of the adverse effects of any further colonization that might have been imposed on my participants, such as speaking on their behalf and/or essentializing their experiences (Burke, 2015). Therefore, the trustworthiness of the research was intertwined in every stage of my research: within the interview protocol, research methods employed, analysis, interpretation, and representation of the data.

Crystallization

Within postmodernism, validity and generalizability are interrogated and unsettled by many researchers. Laurel Richardson (1994) deconstructs the use of the triangulation process as being "rigid, fixed, two-dimensional." Instead, she proposes the concept of crystallization that is more fitting within the postmodernist paradigm. She states that "crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of 'validity' …and provides us with a deepened, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding of the topic" (p. 963). Crystallization as a methodology calls for the use of multiple forms and genres for analysis and representation, which cuts through the borderlines between science and art (Ellingson, 2009). It brings together "multiple, contrasting, even conflicting ways of knowing" and offers a deep, thick, and complex interpretation of participants' accounts (Ellingson, 2009, p. 30). Crystallization (re)negotiates, (un)settles, and (re)creates methodological spaces to make openings for multifaceted thinking and bricolage of research practices leading to rich and in-depth, though partial and incomplete, knowledge about a phenomenon.

Thinking of crystallization in this research study, I drew from multiple data sources such as interviews, journaling while thinking with theory, interview notes, and transgressive data from

the interview space (i.e., artifacts at home, body language, tea served, etc.). I maintained a reflexive journal in which I documented my thinking of the research, my participants, and how I conducted and analyzed the interviews. I also interrogated my positionalities particularly my researcher's power and privileges throughout the research and examined my research practices and communication with my participants. My interview notes encompassed data that were not reflected in the transcribed text, such as facial expressions, voice tone, and the participants' silences and pauses. Thus, the crystallization process was weaved into my research practice, which I detail in the following sections.

Ellingson (2009) offered a few guiding principles to using crystallization in research. As she developed Richardson's (1994) definition of crystallization, she proposed four principles for researchers employing crystallization within their research. These principles are manifested in the crystallization process with greater or lesser degree (Ellingson, 2009); and are intended to generate a deep and complex interpretations of the participants' narratives (Richardson, 1994).

First, Ellingson (2009) suggests that the process of writing researchs should deliver thick descriptions and multiple details of the topic or the phenomenon examined while supported by examples. Thus, my analysis endeavor avoided reducing the narratives into themes and categories; instead, I described individual experiences and the discourses that informed these experiences with details and examples from the participants' narratives and the interview notes. I rejected using themes and categories as they are reductive and subject to the Western discourses.

Second, Ellingson (2009) suggests that crystallization should utilize different ways of knowing and understanding participants' experiences. Hence, my study utilized a different approach to interviewing (i.e., *Ziyyarah*) as a method to consider diverse ways of knowing the subject within which I had access to the participants' cultural practices, familial connections, and

native language within their homes. “Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities *and* refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions" (Richardson, 1994, p. 522). *Ziyyarah* does that. In other words, *Ziyyarah* enabled me to view my participants’ narratives using the crystal metaphor suggested by Richardson (1994). It rendered an organic space for me to use different ways of knowing to analyze the narratives. For example, visiting Jenny, Hani, and Jasmine at their homes facilitated conversing with the parents and in some instances with the siblings who were part of making sense of my participants’ experiences. Moreover, Bethany’s art work became an expression of her interpretation of the world around us and an opening for me to get a glimpse into her experiences. The entanglement between space, text, and narratives became inevitable and created an assemblage of data that rendered my knowledge of the participants.

Third, crystallization eschews the postpositivist approach to research in which truth is regarded as singular, objective, and discoverable (Ellingson, 2009). Instead, within my research, I conducted my analysis on the foundation that knowledge is situated, multiple, partial, and never complete. Also, my researcher’s positionality is intrinsic to the research process, never neutral, and intersects with power and oppression (Ellingson, 2009). For that purpose, *Ziyyarah*, as my research method, was (re)constructed to alleviate the power relations and the oppression dynamics the conventional interviewing methods inscribe on research participants. Additionally, I maintained an interrogative stance with respect to my practices, remarks, and thinking of my interviews’ transcription and analysis. Arguably, with crystallization, multiple ways of knowing the participants and interpreting their experiences were possible outside the realm of postpositivist approaches. (Ellingson, 2009). It also opened up the space for multiple

representations of the participants' narratives such as using multiple writing genres (i.e., writing as a way of knowing and discovery).

Positionality Statement

As a Muslim American, graduate student, female, and *hijabi* (Arabic word to describe who wears headscarf or hijab), I found myself being the "other" for not conforming to mainstream culture and looking (i.e., wearing the hijab) and speaking differently (i.e., not a native speaker of English). Being visibly Muslim in the midst of anti-Islamic rhetoric that dominated the political and the social arenas, created for me an in-between culture or a liminal space that was constantly in negotiation and becoming. As a mother, a wife, a friend, and a neighbor I took on multiple identities and positionalities as I navigated different spaces and interactions. I am constantly cognizant of my Muslim identity as being the most salient aspect of my identity.

Conducting my research with Muslim students, I found myself, as a Western-trained researcher, an accomplice in positioning the other as "other" and further victimizing the victim by inscribing categories and methodological impositions (Barth, 2014). For example, I could not escape referring to my participants as non-Western participants to distinguish them from those who were from European descent. Subsequently, I enacted the dichotomy us/them Western/non-Western which postcolonial theory deconstructs and interrogates. As such, throughout my discussion and analysis of the interview, fragments of my positionalities were expressed in first person voice using the "I" throughout my writing. Jackson and Mazzei (2013) explained, "if the 'I' of the participant is always becoming in the process of telling, so too the 'I' of the researcher is always becoming in the process of researching, listening, and writing" (p. 266). Therefore, as my participants' experiences are always partial and never complete, so are my positionalities as

researcher. They are contextualized and historicized and cannot be reduced to essences. For that purpose, I was constantly exploring the power dynamics of researcher-researched by engaging in critical reflexivity to stimulate richer insight into the research process.

I acknowledge that the participants and I share the collective identity of being Muslims within the painful sociopolitical and sociohistorical context of Islamophobia in which we feel our religion has been hijacked by terrorists. Be it in the professional, personal, and social settings, we all strive to build a repertoire of connections, not to mention support and understanding. Both fragile and resilient, we are constantly searching for spaces in which we feel we belong, safe, predictive, and needed. However, I am also reminded that since Muslims vary in their commitment and adherence to the principles of Islam, so do their experiences and how they position themselves in the context they inhabit.

Working with my participants, some were students at the Islamic school where I served as the principal. It was a private parochial school that taught secular curriculum in addition to Arabic and Islamic Studies classes. The school was an K-8 school with a child care center. Two of my participants attended the Islamic school during the time I was the Principal. For that reason, my research with these participants, in particular, presented the opportunity of learning more about their high school and future aspirations, which I might not have had outside this research. I acknowledge that the possibility of working with my participants, who might have been former students of mine in elementary school, positioned me as a guardian and as a teacher who cared for her students as if they were her own children. I was inquisitive about their accomplishments and how the elementary school I worked at contributed to their academic success, if any. As such, engaging in critical reflexivity through journaling was essential to examine my positionalities before, during, and after the interviews.

Likewise, I acknowledge the apprehension or the uncertainty my teenage participants might have towards participating in research, in general, and participating in this study, in particular, as it might bring attention to some of their unfavorable experiences with Islamophobia or/and mathematics. Equally, they might question the researcher's intentions and may be intimidated by the researcher's positionality in research as the "expert" in the field. Smith (1999) articulates some of the questions participants from non-Western origins may have about researcher, "Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying?" (p. 10). Such questions also triggered an impetus for me to constantly examine my practices and positionalities against inscriptions of marginalization and othering of my participants. For example, Munir, who was my first interviewee, inquired about the purpose of my research and how I became interested in this topic. He asked questions about my research, course work, and my plan after graduation. His questions triggered my thinking of rendering this opportunity for my participants to gain some insight into my space within research and even outside the academia life. For that purpose, I was intentional in sharing such information with my participants and provided them with the opportunity to engage in a conversation about it.

Site Selection

This research study took place in a metropolitan city in the mid-southern region of the United States. According to the U.S. Census of 2018, the estimated total population of the city is 652,236 with African Americans making 63.9%, Whites 29.2%, Hispanics and Latinos 7%, Asians 1.6%, American Indians and Alaskan Natives 2%, and 1.6% two or more races. The median household income is $38,230, and the poverty rate is 26.9%. It should be noted here that the data on the Muslim population in the city is not collected officially by the U.S. Census on the state or the city level; therefore, the demographics of the Muslim population in the city is

estimated. However, Pew Research Center projects the total population of Muslims in the U.S. to be 3.45 million as of 2017 (Mohammed, 2018).

I asked my participants to choose the interview site they desired, in consultation with their parents, as some of them might not have had driver's license yet, to ensure that the space is familiar and convenient to them. Also, alongside postcolonial theory, having the participants choose the site engages the participants in the research process and troubles the binary researcher/researched in decision making. Framing my interviews as a *Ziyyarah*, which I defined earlier as the Arabic word for visiting with someone usually at his/her house, I offered to hold the meeting at their homes being that home is regarded as an intimate apace that houses other family members. Three of my participants welcomed the idea of holding the interview at their homes. Nonetheless, two of my participants chose not to invite me to their homes, and one invited me to the place she often frequented which was the mosque. To be invited to my participants' homes seemingly required some level of knowing each other, particularly from the parents' perspectives. Conducting the interview at home as opposed to at a public place such as a coffee shop, carried the risk of bringing the private to public. Because home is considered to many, if not all, to be an intimate and private space, it seemed invasive to some of my participants' privacy to invite a stranger into the realm of their private sphere. This holds implications for the importance of creating connections with the participants and potentially their parents prior to the *Ziyyarah* interview. I will discuss this further in chapter 5.

Participants

The participants in this study were recruited from the Muslim community through referrals by local acquaintances, peers, and fellow students and through contacting the local Islamic centers in the city where the majority of the Muslims congregate and meet. Using

purposeful criterion-based sampling (Patton, 1990), I initially contacted, through the Windson Islamic Center, a few students that met the following criteria: (1) currently attending public high school and completed at least one high school mathematics course; (2) self-identified as Muslims; (3) born and lived the largest part of their lives in the U.S.; and (4) are 13-18 years old. There will be no further criteria regarding language, race, or ethnicity. From the initial contacts, snowball sampling was used to recruit further participants who also met the previously mentioned criteria. A total of six participants were recruited for this qualitative study. Five of my participants were 17 years old and one participant was 15 years old. Hence, four of them were seniors in high school and one was a sophomore. The participants were two self-identified males and four self-identified females. They also varied with respect to their ethnicities; two of them were from South Asia (i.e., Pakistan and India); three were from the Middle East (i.e., Palestine); and one was from Africa (i.e., Gambia). The three participants who were from the Middle East spoke Arabic almost fluently and the other two spoke only phrases in Arabic. Two of my participants (Kate and Bethany) each lived for a year outside the U.S. in Gambia and Jordan, respectively. Table 1 provides information on my participants' ethnicity, self-identified gender, math courses, age, and the location of the interview. It is worth mentioning here that all my participants chose their pseudonym at the time of the interview. Only Muir and Hani chose a non-Western name. I found my participants' choice of Western pseudonyms to replace their non-Western names interesting. Was this choice an indirect way for the participants to construct a sense of belonging? How relevant is their choice to their views of their Muslim American identities and their schooling and learning?

Table 1

Participants' Demographics and Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Parents	Languages	Age	Math Courses	Place of Interview
Munir	Male	Pakistani	Immigrants	Urdu, Spanish**	17	AP, Honors	Coffee Shop
Jenny	Female*	Palestinian	Immigrants	Arabic	17	Standard	Home
Hani	Male	Palestinian	Immigrants	Arabic	15	Standard	Home
Bethany	Female	Iranian	Immigrants	Farsi	17	AP, Honors, IB	Coffee Shop
Kate	Female*	Gambian	Immigrants	Mandinka	16	AP, Honors	Mosque
Jasmine	Female	Palestinian	Immigrants	Arabic	17	Standard	Home

* Wore headscarf (*hijabi*).
**Munir learned Spanish by taking Spanish courses in middle and high school.

Analysis: Critical Discourse Analysis

Informed by postcolonial theory, I used critical discourse analysis to examine my participants' narratives produced through the unstructured conversational interviews. Building on Foucault's conceptualization, the term discourse is nicely explained by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2013) as:

> Discourse, as Foucault theorizes it, is a system of statements within which the world can be known. It is the system by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledges, disciplines, and values upon dominated groups. As a social formation, it works to constitute reality not only for the objects it appears to represent but also for the subjects who form the community on which it depends. (p. 42)

This definition illustrates the role of discourse in constituting the individual's reality, particularly with minorities and the marginalized. Notably, it aligns with the aim of this study, which is to

examine how the sociopolitical discourse informs how Muslim American students position themselves in society and in mathematics classrooms.

Critical discourse analysis is a qualitative analytical approach to critically examine and critique the interplay between the sociopolitical discourse and the construction of social inequalities (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Critical discourse analysis originated from the critical linguistics theory (Liu & Guo, 2016; Wodak & Meyer, 2009) following the Amsterdam symposium held in January 1991, where the CDA as a problem-oriented and a multidisciplinary approach emerged (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The critical linguistics studies expanded the purview of discourse analysis studies outside linguistics disciplines to become known later as critical discourse analysis (Liu & Guo, 2016). It became a "powerful tool for the study of ideological processes, which mediate relationships of power and control" (Fowler, Hodge, Kress, & Trew, 1979, p. 14). Critical discourse analysis witnessed its rapid growth in the late 1980s when the critical linguistic studies shifted focus from Halliday's Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach to accept broader analytic approaches and theoretical underpinnings (Liu & Guo, 2016). For example, Norman Fairclough, who is considered one of the founders of critical discourse analysis, turned into the sociological theory and the social semiotics in addition to Haliday's SFL to frame his studies and research expanding the field to encompass an interdisciplinary approach (Liu & Guo, 2016). In addition to Norman Fairclough, prominent scholars like Teun van Dijk, Theo van Leeuwen, and Ruth Wodak spearheaded the development of CDA as an analytical tool that is compatible with broad theoretical approaches within various disciplines including social sciences and educational research (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Liu & Guo, 2016). Van Dijk (2001) explains that critical discourse analysis (CDA) primarily deals with the discourse of power, dominance, and the injustices produced; as a result, CDA does not

contribute to a specific paradigm or discipline. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) argue that the "critical turn in studies of language is by no means restricted to any single approach that represents a more general process of (partial) convergence in theories and practices of research on language" (p. 447). Thus, CDA is a multidisciplinary approach that fits a proliferation of theories and paradigms, and its effectiveness is measured by the change it makes even when it may be marginal (van Dijk, 2015). Consequently, it is worth noting here that the difference this study aims to make is to contribute to the conversations surrounding mathematics identity construction processes and equity in schools by bringing to the fore Muslim American students' racialized experiences within the context of public schooling in the U.S.

Power and dominance. Critical discourse analysis undertakes a sociopolitical position to examine power relations, dominance, and access to reveal and/or critique social inequalities and injustices by "focusing on the role of discourse in the (re)production and the challenge of dominance" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 249). Van Dijk (1993) defines dominance as "the exercise of power by elites, institution or groups, that results in social inequalities" (p. 249-250). I found this definition of dominance helpful in clarifying the domain of discourse analysis relevant to my study. Being that my participant population is a marginalized minority, this study aims at revealing how the dominant discourse and the practices (i.e., dominance) inform their positionality and learning identities. It is worth noting here that van Dijk's approach to critical discourse analysis examined "top-down" relations of dominance; nonetheless, in this study, I also focused on the "'bottom-up' relations of resistance, compliance, and acceptance" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 250). Within these relations, I examined my participants' responses, attitudes, and actions within the dominance of Eurocentric education and Western culture manifested in the educational practices of the institutions.

I also found the work of van Dijk (1993) helpful where he outlined a broad framework to examine dominance, power-discourse relations, privileged access, and social cognition. The outlined framework helped me understand the dynamics of power-discourse analysis that illuminated my interpretation of my participants' narratives, attitudes, and actions. To clarify, van Dijk (1993) argues that the CDA central theoretical approach focuses on examining and analyzing the relationships between dominance and discourse with the purpose of making "change through critical understanding" (p. 252). Additionally, power and dominance manifest themselves in the privileged access to discourse and communication and participation in communicative events and contexts (van Dijk, 1993). Who is producing the discourses? Who is receiving the discourses? Who has access to such forums to produce discourses? What discourses are privileged? Individuals who possess social power (i.e., privileged access to discourse) such as educational officers, state representatives, and occasionally teachers are those who manipulate and control discourse. Therefore, they have "control over the minds of other people, that is, the management of social representations" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 257).

Arguably, and because of the purpose of CDA and its goal of exposing power abuse and dominance, the researcher within CDA is actively positioned and "cannot be an aloof, let alone a 'neutral'" (p. 252) researcher. Hence, interrogating my positionality and my research practices was crucial to the analysis and the interpretation phase of this research. Situating the study within postcolonialism entailed intentional thinking of the research practice particularly within Western and Eurocentric academia that can be an accomplice in colonizing the subject. My reconstruction of *Ziyyarah* as my interview methods was how I situated my study, research practices, and analyses within postcolonialism while I interrogated Western research traditions.

Critical Discourse Analysis in Education

Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (2009) explain that the purpose of critical discourse analysis (CDA) is to examine and analyze the "opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language" (p. 10). They add that CDA examines the social interactions manifested in linguistic forms, revealing the relationships between society and language and how language mediates social representations. Within education, which is a dynamic site for representation and identity formation, CDA brings attention to the institutional discourse, political discourse, media coverage, power relations, and ideology to stimulate a critical awareness of pedagogy and inclusive educational practices (Blommaert & Buclaen, 2000). In her edited book, Rebecca Rogers (2011) explains the commensurability of critical discourse analysis and the context of educational research. She argues that because instructional practices are communicative, critical discourse analysis, a problem-based and multidisciplinary approach, is widely used in educational practices to analyze texts, talk, and any other interactions. Therefore, the students' interaction with the teacher and with peers, classroom discourse, and student participation reveal how students understand the world around them and how the power relations within inform students' learning and identity construction process.

Rogers (2011) adds that critical discourse analysis is also compatible with the sociocultural perspective and is in tandem with the research exploring the meaning-making of the world and the issues of power and inequalities. Consequently, critical discourse analysis is a useful approach within educational research that explores the relationship between instructional practices (i.e. teaching practices, learning, and curriculum), social contexts (i.e. social and

political discourse, media discourse, and cultural representations), and students' identities (i.e. learning, cultural and social identities).

Critical Discourse Analysis and Postcolonialism

In addition to linguistic practices, discourse encompasses nonlinguistic and ideological assumptions that produce power hierarchy, racism, and differential social dynamics. It is through discursive sociopolitical practices that individuals are racialized and marginalized. In his seminal work, Edward Said (1978, 2003) interrogated the West's construction and representations of the Other as primitive, uneducated, and undeveloped by examining Western literary texts and the Western language used to describe the Orient (i.e., discourse). The variation of the theoretical and methodological underpinning of the discourse analysis is valuable as it makes it suitable to address problems that range from linguistic phenomenon to social issues such as racism (Tannen, Hamilton, & Schiffrin, 2001). It is also argued that postcolonial theory shares its postulations with critical theory as well as poststructuralist and postmodernist paradigms and other post-foundational schools of thoughts (Burke, 2015). Therefore, critical discourse analysis supports the overarching theoretical framework of postcolonialism.

For example, Lydia Burke (2015) employed postcolonial discourse analysis in her study that explored the discourse associated with the teaching and learning of high school science classrooms in a Caribbean location. Her study aimed at critiquing homogenized and value-free conceptions of science education. In addition to semi-structured interviews, she used 24 statement cards that her participants were requested to rank and describe their feelings concerning each statement. She used the cards and the semi-structured interviews to ellicit conversations and discussions as she sought to gather participants' perspectives. Then, she used critical discourse analysis to examine the interviews and the participants' responses to the

statement cards. She identified themes within postcolonial theory relevant to agency, representation, marginalization, and difference. Though Burke (2015) employed a different method for data collection, her purpose and aim for using critical discourse analysis is similar to my study's purpose (i.e., identifying discourse of power and dominance).

I also draw on Mullet's (2018) work in which she illustrated an analytic framework for CDA that integrates shared common approaches to CDA described by scholars and researchers such as Norman Fairclough, Kress van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak. Mullet (2018) states that the main characteristics of CDA theoretic approaches highlighted by the mentioned scholars include a problem-oriented focus, an emphasis on language, the view that power relations are discursive, the belief that discourses are situated in contexts, the idea that expressions of language are never neutral, and an analysis process that is systematic, interpretive, descriptive, and explanatory (p. 120).

Although Mullet (2018) used the framework for conducting a systematic literature review of CDA, I found the framework helpful in guiding my process of analyzing my data within the concepts of postcolonialism and the factors informing the construction of mathematics identities. Mullet (2018) outlined seven stages of the analysis within which she conducted and described the progression from one stage to another. I found this process reflective of a postpositivist research approach. Therefore, I adapted the framework to fit my research design where I employed four stages for my analysis. However, I detail the steps below with the postulate that my process of analysis was not linear nor prescribed by these stages; thus, I describe them as dimensions of the analysis. My analyses were fluctuations and entanglements of these dimensions. For example, I identified discourses pertaining to learning mathematics while I simultaneously examined discourses pertaining to postcolonialism such as othering and

belonging. The detail I provide below is intended to give the reader a focused description of my analysis and depict my thinking of the data. I used Figure 2 to represent my thinking of Mullet's (2018) analysis dimensions in my study while maintaining that all the dimensions might have occurred simultaneously within the analyses.

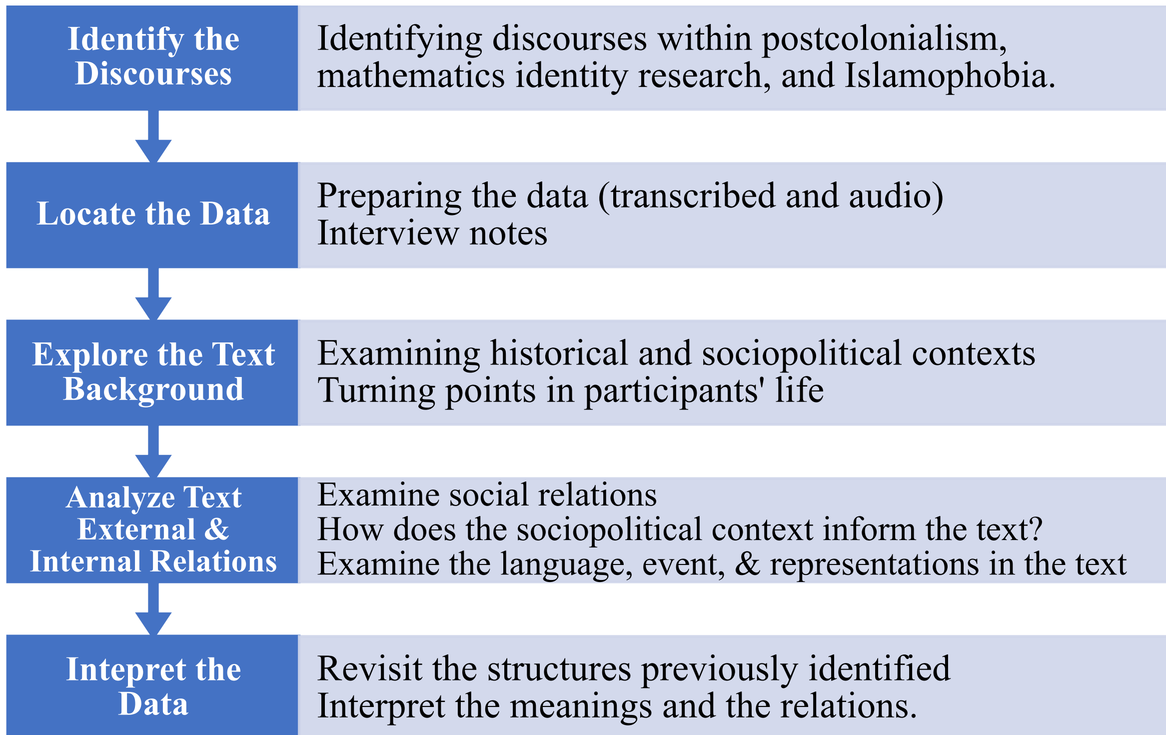

Figure 2. Analysis flow chart showing the process of examining and interpreting the text.

Each of the following phases took multiple readings and examinations of the transcribed interviews and multiple writings to complete. Nonetheless, the knowledge constructed about my participants remains partial and becoming. The analysis phases I worked through were:

Identify the discourses. Mullet (2018) indicated that the first stage in analysis encompasses identifying the discourses related to the concepts investigated. What are the discourses that will be examined in the study? How do these discourses inform the research question of identity construction? How does the postcolonial theory inform the analyses and

interpretation of the data? Therefore, this dimension entailed identifying the ideas within the postcolonial theory that relate to marginality, othering, agency, us/them dichotomy, and discourses of Islamophobia to reveal how my participants viewed themselves within the broader sociopolitical space. Moreover, within this dimension I identified discourses of power relations between peers, student-teacher, student-system, etc. and discourses related to resistance, struggle, and institutional discursive regimes to reveal how my participants navigate the Eurocentric educational spaces when these spaces place them in the margin. Also, I identified the discourses that relate to teaching and learning mathematics to illuminate how these processes informed how my participants see themselves as mathematics learners. Fragile or robust identity (McGee, 2015), "figured worlds" (Holland et al, 1998), "designated" and "actual" identity (Sfard and Prusak,2005) are examples of some of the discourses I identified. This dimension was defined and guided by the literature delineated in chapter 2 and the overarching theoretical and methodological orientation of the study.

Locate and prepare data sources. This phase was concerned with locating and preparing the data. In this study, the transcribed interviews, as well as my analytical memos and reflexive journals, were the data I analyzed. For example, I listened to the audio of the interviews alongside examining the transcription and making any relevant memos regarding the pauses, laughter, actions, intonations, etc. Also, it is worth mentioning here that the transcription process included transcribing the interview audio that encompassed conversations in both Arabic and English languages. Then, the Arabic conversations were translated into English while adding comments and references that contextualized these conversations. Alongside the interview notes, these events became openings into which I wrote with my participants' narratives and stories. Not only did I examine utterances, but I also examined silences, laughter, and facial expressions

that aided with portraying my participants' experiences. I made comments and wrote my thinking of the narratives on the transcribed texts.

Explore the background of the text. During this phase, Mullet (2018) calls for the "examination of the social and historical contexts and producers of the text" (p. 123). During this phase, knowledge of the participants, their narratives, emotions, and inclinations were contextualized. The contexts emerged as an influencing factor in the process of analysis and in examining my participants' narratives. Within the interview, conversations and stories about their lives and their parents' lives surfaced. For example, my participants shared stories of how and why their parents immigrated to the U.S., their extended families abroad, their relocation to their homeland, and most importantly, their stories transitioning from elementary to middle to high school. This data aided in identifying life events that informed their Muslim American identity construction as well as their mathematics identity construction. In addition, this data helped identify the factors that might have contributed to these turning events, such as Algebra teaching, moving to a new school, etc. I documented the background of the texts I examined by making a comment on the transcribed text that illuminated the context relevant to the text and aided with the process of interpretation.

Analyze the internal and external relations of the text. While I examined the text, I asked questions such as: What was the purpose of the speaker in this text? What was the positionality of the speaker in the text? How does the text relate to the larger social contexts? Within this phase, I examined word usage, participants' voice, pauses, fluency, and vocabulary usage. Thus, I identified participants' positionality with respect to confidence, articulation, and clarity of conceptualization of self and others. Additionally, I analyzed external relations in the text (i.e., interdiscursivity). Interdiscursivity, a term coined by Fairclough (1992), is defined as

“the presence or trace of one discourse with another” and is a crucial concept for connecting learning to language (Lewis & Ketter, 2004, p. 120). It is a notion that reveals how an individual positions her/himself within a new learning community when the community’s discursive practices may conflict with the individual’s values and practices (Wegner, 1999). Interdiscursivity helped me identify educational discourses that informed my participants’ learning and positionalities in public school by identifying a common thread of discourse that revealed the institutional power. Wegner (1999) postulates that any community has embedded notions of expectations or shared knowledge and practices that advance certain ways of thinking, actions, and speaking which place newcomers to this community on the boundary. Hence, this locality in the margin or at the periphery of the community is the place where new knowledge and identities are constructed (Wegner, 1999). As such, I examined the discourses of the six participants to locate and illuminate interdiscursive texts related to discourses of Islamophobia, Muslim identity, and mathematics identity. Within these interdiscursive texts, postcolonial concepts, power dynamics, and dominance are examined as well. This phase, in particular, informed my research implications with regard to educational spaces and how these spaces could be constructed to meet Muslim American students’ learning and social needs.

Interpret the data. Using writing as a method of inquiry, I wrote with and about my participants’ experiences. I visited the structures I identified in the previous phases and interpreted the meanings of the narratives. This phase encompassed multiple writings and thinking of my participants’ experiences as I avoided themes and categories that could have essentialized my participants. Within my interpretation of the data, I acknowledge that these experiences are unique, partial, and becoming. During this interpretation process, I am comforted

by Stonebanks' (2008) quote in which he calls on the researcher's humility against the tradition of Islam while humanizing the Muslims. He concedes that

> [f]or the Muslim and non-Muslim researcher alike, if humanizing voices of Islam are going to pierce the predominant collective consciousness of the West, then we must enter the dialogue showing humility to the experience and faith of the counternarrative rather than imposing knowledge (p. 304).

Hence, throughout my interpretation phase, I am reminded of the quote and the humility stance that researchers need to maintain when researching the other and the marginalized. In other words, the researcher needs to maintain an interrogative stance of her "own possible miseducation" and openness to the Other's way of knowing and sense-making processes (Stonebanks, 2008, p. 304). Rather than speaking on behalf of the researched, the researcher needs to approach the narratives with humility and the realization that knowledge is not neutral. References of the Qur'an or the prophet's sayings must not be used to fit certain theoretical orientation that serves the purpose of the researcher. Instead, the researcher should maintain the question of how her interpretations serve or not serve the Muslim community within her research.

Representation: Writing as a Process of Discovery and Knowing

Qualitative research is confronted with a problematic assumption that it "can no longer directly capture lived experiences" (Denzin, 1996, p. 3). The production of the text or narrative writing treats the author, the text, and the subject as separate entities, assuming that the truth is out there to be revealed and interpreted by a "knowing" author (Denzin, 1996). Moreover, traditional and postpositivist research renders the subject as a static and fixed entity whose lived experiences and narratives can be reduced to an "essence" or themes. Hence, within

postmodernism, considering theory minimization, where minimal interpretation and maximal display of the data is evident, makes the researcher closer to the participants' experiences and departs from reducing their narratives or stories to themes or categories (Grbich, 2007).

With doubt being a central entity within postmodernism, theory, method, discourse, and genres are equally interrogated and distrusted; hence, knowledge is positioned as always partial and never universal (Richardson, 1994). Though postmodernism does not reject conventional methods and ways of knowing, it opens up new possibilities and multiplicities for the traditional methods of inquiry. As researchers continue thinking outside traditional and postpositivist research methods, hybrid representations continue to develop and mature (Ellingson, 2009)

Specifically, appropriate for my research study was the use of experimental writing that took into account the researcher/researched power relations to create a multiplicity of subjects' tales as suggested by Richardson (1990). This type of writing is a useful model of reasoning and representation that make "individuals, cultures societies and historical epochs comprehensible as wholes; it humanizes time; it allows us to contemplate the effects of our actions, and to alter the directions of our lives" (p. 117). Within this writing, genre boundaries are blurred and prescribed writing convention boundaries are transgressed. Experimental writing takes into consideration the inter/intra action of the researcher/researchers' relationships in which both are active and engaged knowers of self and others. Interrogating the third-person and passive researcher's voice, postmodernist researchers, moreover, do not have to write "as disembodied omniscient narrators claiming universal, a temporal general knowledge" (Richardson, 1994, p. 518). Thus, the researcher's presence within the research is inescapable. The researcher is positioned both as a teller and as knower who displays and interrogates issues of power, reflexivity, subjectivity, and representational authority (Richardson, 1994). Moreover, the representational experimental

writing is always in the process creating a partial, situational, and local knowledge that is never complete.

Though the process of writing for representation might have appeared less than productive of knowledge, I found the following statement of Richardson (1994) assuring: “I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I didn’t know before I wrote it” (p. 517). Thus, writing became a method of inquiry, a tool to create new knowledge, and a mode for research. Accordingly, my writing about and with the participants’ narratives represented their experiences and how they negotiated the context of Islamophobia while learning mathematics. I wrote my interpretations and conceptualization of the events from my conversations with my participants within which we both engaged in making sense of the experiences. My writing translated my participants’ utterances, facial expressions, body language, family interactions, and the inter-action between the humans and the non-humans in the space into text. This text, though partial and incomplete, provided a glimpse and an insight on how my participants conceptualized their Muslim American and their mathematics identities within the context of Islamophobia.

Conclusion

My (re)conceptualization of the postcolonial interview study (i.e., Ziyyarah) countered the Eurocentric and Western research practices and centered the participants’ culture, language, and ways of knowing. Additionally, employing critical discourse analysis served the deconstruction endeavor that postcolonial theories embrace by identifying the discourses and the discursive practices that positioned my participants as different and outsiders to the mainstream educational systems. Lastly, building on the argument that writing is a method of inquiry, I

represented my participants' experiences and narratives into a text that is entangled and partial. These written representations are shared in chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Results

In this chapter, I share my analytical thinking of my interviews as well as my interpretation of my participants' narratives in relation to my research questions. I also share my participants' reflections, positionalities, and how they viewed themselves and their learning of mathematics. In doing so, I maintain an anti-essentialist stance for interpretations by realizing that my "ontological commitments are susceptible to an examination of value coding" (Spivak, 1993/2009, p. 18). Moreover, I examined my participants' narratives, actions, and embodied responses within postcolonial theory to locate the discourses available to them as well as the discourses imposed on them that inform their national, religious, and learning identities. I am aware that my participants' views of themselves as Muslim Americans and as mathematics learners and doers as well as their sociopolitical experiences are unique; thus, I chose to represent each participant individually while detailing the discourses within his/her storied experiences.

As I departed from traditional and postpositivist coding and categorizing, I acknowledge that using labels is a Western onto-epistemology that is grounded in the colonialist language (Koro-Ljunberg, 2015) and is a means of subtle essentialism. Therefore, my thinking was always incomplete and on "the verge of intelligibility" (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 176). Consequently, the headings I used were not categories or themes; instead, they served as navigating tools for my analyses that were intended to guide the audiences while exploring my participants' narratives. Hence, "…this chapter seeks to move—no, to grapple—through the [discourses that inform my participants' positionalities] not as a progression, but as an assemblage, an accumulation of offerings" (Tuck, 2005, p. 147). For that purpose, I am conceptualizing my participants'

narratives without focusing on one story of one event, with no fixed center and multiple ways of entry and entanglement (Deleuze & Guattari,1987).

The following six sections feature my participants' narratives and stories ordered according to the time I conducted the interview—oldest to most recent.

Munir[1]

Munir is a senior at Oakwood High School. Oakwood has an optional[2] program within the school that runs parallel to the standard or traditional program. The school is located in the northeast side of the city of Windson. Although the school is located outside his residence zone, students outside the zoned district with high scores on the state standardized tests may be able to secure admission to the school, competitively. The school is known for its high standards for academics and as a college preparatory school. Munir is in the optional program which means that he is recognized as a high-achieving student in all subjects, mainly mathematics and English. He is a first generation Muslim American whose parents immigrated from Pakistan to pursue education and career opportunity in the U.S. In addition to English, he speaks Urdu (the official language of Pakistan), Memoni (the language of the Memons group who settled in Karachi in Pakistan), and Spanish (he took Spanish courses at school).

At the time of the interview, Munir wore a black t-shirt with dark jeans and dark tennis shoes and was carrying a black light-weight backpack that I think had his laptop in it. Munir attended the *Al-Qalam* Islamic School where I worked as the principal. The school is a private school where the teachings and practices of Islam are taught and fostered alongside a secular

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[1] All names of participants, places, schools, cities, etc. are pseudonyms

[2] A subdivision of the public-school system that provides focused college preparation, international studies, and International Baccalaureate, Creative Arts, and health programs. Admission requirements vary by the school's program (adapted from the school district website).

curriculum. So, I knew him as a young child, and I knew his parents as well in my capacity as a principal. It was refreshing meeting him after almost eight years since our last interaction. During our conversations, he showed confidence, was well-articulated, focused, and was not hesitant to ask me questions about my study and what I did after I left the Islamic school. He is the only one of three siblings who went to public school. The other two siblings attended a well-known private school in the city. He mentioned that he went to public school when his siblings attended college so that his parents can afford the college tuition.

School and Learning Mathematics

Munir began his story by talking about the schools he attended in elementary and middle school till the current time where is attending Oakwood High School. He talked elaborately about his experience moving from *Al-Qalam* school to Sunville Elementary School. At *Al-Qalam* school, all his classmates were Muslims. The class sizes were small, with one section of each grade level and a total student population of 200. The school was a small close-knit community where parents and students knew each other. He mused about moving to Sunville Elementary School and leaving the Islamic school he attended from kindergarten to second grade,

> I noticed there was less Muslims, but it wasn't something that as a kid I noticed at first. I was like, "Oh, I don't have any friends at school anymore." But yeah, I noticed it, but it wasn't something that was like the most weird thing to me.

Moreover, moving from a small-sized school to a larger one, he felt a difference in the school's academics and instructional processes. He said,

> It just felt different because I felt like everybody was learning the same thing at the same time [referring to *Al-Qalam* school]. But when I went to public school, there was different teachers for the same subject. So, people were learning different things at the

same time, and it just felt different because everyone was either faster or shower than you.

Obviously, the transition from his Islamic school to Sunville was an experience in which he became aware of his Muslim and Pakistani identity. However, Munir talked about his feelings but did not reason or rationalize them beyond stating that the experience was "weird." He contributed this feeling to the difference he encountered when he left his elementary Islamic school where all students embraced the same practices of religion and the school reinforced it to a new school where religion practices are not embraced or encouraged.

Munir also spoke about his learning experiences in the mathematics classroom. During his elementary grades, he displayed a positive and robust mathematics identity. He viewed himself as "good in mathematics" and felt that his teachers and peers also viewed him as such. His positive mathematics identity was constructed and informed by his performance on mathematics exams, grades on his report card, and his grade on the accelerated program admission tests. He described his experience in third grade mathematics and why he liked science and math at that time:

> I think I just like made good grades and because my parents were like, "Oh, you should make good grades. You should study." And everyone was having problems with the same work that we were doing, and I was like, "Oh, maybe I am better in math than everyone." And like we took placement tests, I scored above average. So, I mean, I felt like I was "Oh, I am achieving something."

The school's discursive practices of grading the students hierarchically and according to established achievement scale determined enrollment in honors and advanced math courses, as such, informed Munir's positionality as a student who *likes* mathematics and is *good* at it. The

hierarchical grading system positioned him at a higher level and he perceived himself as a mathematics doer. Evidently, the intrinsic value of the grades as discursive texts contributed to how students perceived themselves as learners of mathematics.

Munir experienced a shift in his positionality as someone who was *good* in mathematics when he moved to high school. His performance on the placement tests was not up to par; thus, he could not be placed in honors Algebra. He explains disappointedly,

> When I transferred to Oakwood [High School] …, they put me—they made me take a placement test for math and that was the first time I realized I wasn't good because the advanced kids, the super advanced kids were taking pre-Algebra and then the normal classes were taking intro to pre-Algebra, I think. So, I thought I was going to score high enough to get into Algebra because I wanted to try to challenge myself as much. But after the placement test, they put me in pre-Algebra and I was upset.

Arguably, the institutional discursive practices of grading and tracking are informing the construction of students' mathematics identity despite students' self-motivation to learn and accept new challenges. Such practices impose a discourse of being *not good enough* to join the advanced mathematics courses, which adversely influence how students view themselves as learners of mathematics. Munir was upset because he was unable to achieve his goal of being in honors classes; however, he normalized this practice as being part of the educational system and thought of himself as not fit to be in advanced courses. He viewed his peers who were placed in honors classes as "better" and "smarter" than him; as such, they should be placed in honors. Rationalizing the placement of students, he said,

> I guess they [school system] are trying to kind of not isolate, but kind of divide the kids into where they're strongest. So, there are kids who are doing very well in math, they

> want to try to encourage them, kind of give them a challenge. Whereas if they're not as good at math and maybe they're better in reading, they'll have a definite clue in pre-Algebra.

Despite the fact that Munir was highly motivated, wanted to achieve more and seemed supported by family, he was unable to enroll in advanced mathematics courses. The tracking practices within the school system are posing a challenge to issues of equity and access, marginalizing student populations based on what I see as academic classism. In other words, I see students grouped into advanced courses and standard courses solely according to their grades on these subjects with total disregard to any academic potential the studnets may have that could not be measured through grades. Nonetheless, Munir persevered and maintained a high-grade point average (GPA). He successfully built on his academic strengths to push back on perceptions of difference and othering. His robust academic identity was the impetus for creating counternarratives that made space for a robust Muslim American identity.

As many people experience anxiety and tension when entering new social spaces, Munir was not any different. He shared his experience when entering the math classroom after he moved to his new high school. Unfamiliar with the space and people, he recalled,

> I think I felt nervous whenever I came to a math class because I felt like I was being judged. A lot of times people made jokes that were like, "Oh, Munir's really good at math." They would make jokes like, "Oh, if you need the homework ask Munir he's really good at math. And I felt kind of that pressure especially when I didn't get into Algebra I. Like Munir didn't get into Algebra I. Like, "I thought he was good at math."

His anxiety was due to feeling pressured, being identified as an Asian, to excel in mathematics because of the stereotype of Asians as exceptionally good in mathematics. This

designated identity of being *good* in mathematics hindered his participation and engagement in the mathematical discourse in class as he chose “not to talk much in class,” fearing being judged for not meeting his peers’ expectations.

Along the same lines, Munir acknowledged the role teachers played in shaping his learning experiences in school and informing his future career choices. Talking about his favorite teacher, he revealed that she was his seventh-grade teacher. He did exceptionally well in her pre-Algebra because she was “encouraging”. Munir also described his ninth-grade geometry teacher and his tenth-grade Algebra teacher as being “really nice” and “nice” respectively. He elaborated,

> So, those teachers were pretty encouraging. They didn’t kind of move too fast or move too slow. They’d kind of try to feel how the class was moving. They did their job making it seem more interesting while still kind of providing the subject matter. And if I needed help or anything, I could go to them. I didn’t feel uncomfortable going to them.

Obviously, Munir appreciated the teacher being approachable and motivating in addition to being competent in teaching the content. Classrooms that are socially-oriented and student-centered become intimate safe spaces that promote mathematical discourses and create learning opportunities through interactions and discussions. He also described the teaching practices his favorite teachers utilized in class by stating that they were project-based, games, and “far away from being boring” which ignited students’ creativity and engagement. In addition, Munir excitedly talked about his AP[3] Human Geography teacher as being one of his favorite teachers who made students feel comfortable in the class using humor and by making the subject

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[3] AP refers to Advanced Placement which describe an advanced-level course of the subject. There courses are highly regarded for university admission and are only available to students who score A previous course levels.

relatable. It appeared that Munir, like many of other teens, appreciated humor and found it a relevant technique to create connections and bring attention to the human aspect in teaching and learning.

Identities and Sociopolitical Discourses

Munir became aware of his identity as a Muslim when he attended middle school and after he left the *Al-Qalam* Islamic school. He mused,

> At first, I don't think people—it was weird because when you're in middle school you don't have a sense of self-identity. And when I—I felt like when people saw me, they didn't even see me as a Pakistani. They saw me as an Indian kid. They didn't see me as a Muslim. They just saw me as, "Oh, that Indian kid". So, it's not even about religion. It's kind of about your nationality, your sense of self-identity. But as I began to make friends with more and more Muslims, I felt kind of like that reduce----and I felt like—kind of like welcomed especially in middle school.

Munir's identity as a Muslim was invisible to his peers and teachers; whereas his national identity as Pakistani, that was often misidentified and essentialized, was the most visible to his peers and teachers. This association is, arguably, based on his skin color and the common public knowledge of Indians as opposed to Pakistanis; thus, his salient aspect of national identity was not associated with being "American." One more time, Munir rationalized and made sense of these assumptions by referring to these statements as a misunderstanding of who he is and lack of knowledge of the culture of his people. He reasoned,

> I guess it's like an alien idea in middle school. People don't think about other people's identities or how they feel. And they can just like make assumptions or preconceived notions. People don't have like the idea of empathy or sympathy. They can't really like

to understand other people's viewpoints. So, they're just like, "Oh, this person's different than me."

Such assumptions or perceived notions are a result of the dominant discourses and narratives of othering that mark and bound people to an insider/outsider dichotomy. As a person of color, he is assumed to be an outsider to the American society, despite the fact that he is born and raised into the American culture and fluently speaks its language. Moreover, the lack of empathy or sympathy is a personal stance of individuals that is also informed and shaped by the dominant narratives that marginalize some groups as unworthy of sympathy or empathy.

When navigating through the public high school system, Munir was designated multiple identities: good in math, Asian, and different. This thread of essentialism (i.e., "all Muslims are the same" "all Asians are excellent in math") was evident within these stereotypes and prejudices and imposed and designated a certain identity of the essentialized group that conflicted with the members' actual identities. However, Munir was also aware of his social capital that provided him access to learning and social opportunities during his school years. For example, through his father's professional connections as a medical doctor, he was able to obtain access to some hospitals in the city where he created internship opportunities for his high school classmates who are pursuing a career in the medical field. In addition to being a member of the soccer team and involved in multiple extracurricular activities, he founded the Volunteer Club, a subculture within his school, for the purpose of doing volunteer work and community service to foster a sense of belonging and to create alliances and support groups. His awareness of the limited access to internship opportunities that some students may encounter translated into a pragmatic and proactive action to meet this need. He is in constant communication with two of the major hospitals in the city to direct the club members towards internship and volunteer opportunities

that they may need to secure admission to a higher education institution or to obtain a scholarship. Notably, in his high school, he inaugurated the first Muslim Student Association (MSA) in the Windson public school system and made it into a space where all students, particularly Muslims, can join and congregate. With the mission of inclusion and community service, the MSA became a sub-community that renders support and visibility to Muslim students by reinforcing their membership in the American society. As the president of the MSA, Munir espoused a leadership stance to counter Islamophobia discourses and marginalization by constructing counternarratives that support an actual Muslim identity and affirm that Muslims are an integral part of the American society.

Munir alluded to how the media discourses are trickling down into educational spaces and constructing a parallel reality of who he is as an American Pakistani Muslim. He has encountered multiple situations wherein he was recognized as or called "Indian." In some instances, this misidentification was not merely based on his skin color, rather, it was loaded with prejudices and discourse of othering that dominates political and social arenas. He explains, I remember in middle school something that upset me was someone called me Indian. I was like, "No, I'm Pakistani." And they're like, "Oh, the only difference is Indians make things for America and Pakistanis blow them up." And I was like, "That's an awfully specific thing for you to say." Along the same lines, the dominant political narratives at the highest level of government and institutions, wherein certain groups are essentialized as "terrorists," "robbers," "smugglers," is constructing disconnected and fragmented identities of the youth. Munir could not escape such violent discourse notwithstanding his leadership, resilience, and proactive approach to counter narratives of othering and marginalization.

Navigating Cultural Difference

Munir talked about how he introduces himself at the first encounter with new people. He does not say his name as it should be said (i.e., pronouncing the letters that are distinctive of the Arabic language like ح, خ,ظ) rather, he Americanizes the letters to be pronounced ha, ka, and da. For example, names containing such letters are mispronounced most of the times. Munir explained, “and that’s like the first off-putting thing. It’s like, oh, I have to change my name, so they understand me instead of them trying to understand my name.” He believes that the difficulty in pronouncing his name forces people to focus on the name and not on the person. So, instead of taking the time to know him more, much time is spent on trying to pronounce the name correctly and less is spent on other conversations that he thinks would be more relevant. Evidently, he recognizes that his name renders certain positionalities and stereotypes, but he does not think that his name is recognized as being a Muslim name as knowledge of Muslims and Islam is not widespread.

Furthermore, Munir was mindful of the differences between his peers’ social practices and his. For example, he is not shy about sharing with them that he does not drink nor eat pork because of his religious beliefs. He was not overly concerned with people’s opinions of him. On the contrary, he feels strongly about constructing his “self-identity” as an American, Pakistani, and Muslim simultaneously. However, he embraces these differences and understands that Muslims’ practices might be positioned as inferior in comparison to the normalized social discourses. He expressed his gratitude to his former Islamic elementary school in which teachings of Islamic practices (e.g., prayer and fasting) and the Islamic history were part and parcel of the curriculum. Emphatically, he states,

> I know that Muslims—or people who say that they're Muslim—don't know how to pray. And I'm like, "Oh, where did I learn how to pray? *Al-Qalam* School." And I'm kind of thinking like, "Who would've taught me had I not gone to *Al-Qalam* School?" Maybe my parents would've. But I understand like a lot of these people who don't have that basic Islamic understanding of fasting, of praying, of *Zakat*[4] of going on *Hajj*[5]. I feel thankful, but I also feel like, "Oh, where would I have learned this?"

Munir regards his Islamic school as being the source of his knowledge of his religion and its practices as well as the history of Islam and Muslims. Had he not attended *Al-Qalam* School, he would not be the Muslim he is now. He feels that his Muslim identity was constructed and developed through attending the Islamic school and through being involved with the Muslim community socially.

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[4] Transl. Charity

[5] Transl. pilgrimage

Jenny

Jenny is a self-identified female from Palestinian origins. Her parents fled the Gaza strip in Palestine, which was and still is under Israeli siege, in pursuit of peace, happiness and a better life. She is the second daughter of five siblings, three girls and two boys. She is a senior at Riverwalk High school which is located in the northeastern part of the city in an affluent neighborhood. Although Jenney does not live in the proximity of the school, she was able to enroll at the school as a transfer student that the school district allowed based on availability. In the transfer process, students from other districts compete to get into the school, and the determining factor is their report card grades as well as their performance on the state standardized tests.

Jenny is an energetic, lively, and confident person. She engages her facial expressions and her hands when she talks. Her voice annotation, eye movement, and hand gestures are the door to her inner feelings, thoughts, and emotions. She draws a subtle wide smile on her face while she talks and occasionally rolls her eyes to the top when she attempts to ponder an idea or thought.

I have known Jenny socially, as our families met occasionally during events, parties, or what Jenny kept referring to during the interview as *Azooma*[6]. My family visited with her family a few times and gathered over food and conversations. Hence, it seemed natural for her to accept holding the interview at her house with her family present. Therefore, her interview was an example of my thinking of the *Ziyyarah* interview. I will discuss the methodological implications

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[6] Transl.: The event of inviting someone over food usually dinner.

of this interview and the other two interviews that took place at the participants' homes in chapter 5.

School and Learning Mathematics.

Jenny began talking about her school experiences by underscoring the fact that most of her friends at the school had graduated. Nostalgically, she recalled her graduated friends and came to realize that she was left with few friends. With all her friends graduated, she sits with a few friends who are juniors whom she occasionally socializes with outside school when time permits. Though she explained that she did not know them well, she called them "friends" and she hung out with them during school, especially during lunch period. Moreover, when she talked about her friends who were not Muslims, she referred to them as "my American friends." She described her interactions with her non-Muslim peers as "different."

> Well, you just relate. It's just like you just like are able to relate with them more. Like with my American friends, they're always like, "Oh, do you want to go to the football game?", or, "Oh, do you want to—" do this and that after school. And I'm like, "No, I can't." I'm like, "Oh, I don't have a car." And like Amira [her friend] doesn't have a car either. So, it's like—it's not even like the car issue. It's just that like they all go out like with boys and stuff like that. And I'm over here like, "I can't do that"

She was subconsciously relating Americanism with not being Muslim—holding the assumption that the American identity entails activities that are not compatible with the Muslim identity. Some of this discourse might have generated from her parents or community members and friends who immigrated to the U.S. and potentially used Americanism to describe non-Muslims.

I asked Jenny to tell me about learning mathematics in elementary and middle school years. She replied, “Am I supposed to remember?” Her response was alarming to me. I rephrased my inquiry saying, “Just tell me what you remember about learning mathematics.” I asked myself if my question might have been ill-articulated and whether she felt that I might have asked her to recall the mathematics she learned in early years, which she found unreasonable. When she attempted to recall her experiences in math, she had tried to remember the teacher. She remembered that she was “strict” and “hard.” She also described her middle school as “really easy school” and that “they didn’t really challenge you.” By “they” she is referring to the teacher, the school, and the system altogether while positioning herself as someone who welcomes the challenge and would have worked hard to achieve excellence. Evidently, she is signifying the event as a lost opportunity. She was also in honors classes because, as she put it, “the Honors was easy.”

Jenny elaborated on her learning experiences in Sunville Middle School transitioning to Riverwalk Middle School by revealing that she found middle school to be easy and that her grade point average (GPA) was 4.2. She felt positively about her ability to learn and do mathematics. Clearly, for Jenny, grades are deemed as a powerful discursive text that invokes positive positioning for high-achievers and negative positioning for low-achievers. However, her positive identity with respect to her grades shifted when she transferred to Riverwalk Middle School, which is regarded as a good school with high student scores on standardized testing. She added, “And then, for eighth grade I went to like a different school. We like transferred to Riverwalk Middle School and that’s where it like hit me. I was like, “Oh my God! I don’t know any of this.”

Some of the discourses she used to describe her learning of mathematics signaled that the school's teaching practices and school's membership were not suited for her and did not serve her well; thus, reifying her fragile mathematics identity. She is also referring to the transitioning event as "where" it hit her not "when" it hit her, underscoring the significance of the space not the time of the transition. She is not regarding the timely progression of learning mathematics as the reason for her realization of her fragile identity, rather she sees the place (the school) as being the cause for her negative mathematics identity. She reasoned and made sense of her transition experience by stating,

> It [referring Sunville Middle School] was like more African American. And then, River Walk[7] [her current high school] it's like there's barely an African American student in your class. And so, like all of these like rich white people. I'm just like, "Oh my God! Where am I? Where did these people come from?" And like I lived in Green Plains, and like Springville [two affluent districts in the city], and I used to like Sunville [her former middle school]. And like there was just a huge difference. So, like fitting into like that whole thing was also like an issue. And then, like I would walk into my math class. I remember like the first week or two when they're like, "Okay. So, you probably already know this" and I was like, "I've never seen that in my life". I'm like, "I don't know any of this". So, eighth grade was really, really hard for me. Well, I was trying to remember my math teacher from eighth grade.

Jenny is making connection between her school context and her challenges at the beginning of 8th grade. The challenge she is faced with was the difference in students' racial

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[7] Sunville High School student population is 86.8% African American, Hispanic, and Native American compared to Riverwalk High School student population of 18.8% African American, Hispanic, and Native American (State government website).

demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds between the two schools. Evidently, she felt apprehensive when she realized she was ill-prepared academically for her new school. Coupled with feeling uneasy about the changing demographics in student population, she felt different and not belonging.

Jenny, shamelessly and with a giggle, said that "math is not my subject at all." She is situating herself as someone who "hates" math, especially Algebra. "Algebra was a struggle," Jenny explained. She elaborated that she took Algebra honors in high school and ended up dropping it because she could not do it. Making sense of her experiences, she mentioned that she was unlucky and "ended up with the worst teacher–the teacher who everyone didn't like, and I wasn't the only one." The Algebra class cultivated a new academic challenge for Jenny when she changed class membership from honors to standard. It was then, at eighth grade, when she realized that she "hates" mathematics, and she constructed her identity as a non-mathematics person. She described her Algebra teacher in 8th grade as being "strict." The teacher taught lessons directly from the book but was not "thorough" in her teaching. Before 8th grade, Jenny viewed herself as someone who could and was able to do math. She asserted that she did well and made A's and B's on the math subject.

Evidently, Jenny measured her ability to do mathematics by how well she did on assessment and what final grade she received on the subject. She also believed that her teacher was not teaching her mathematics for understanding; rather, the teacher was planning and executing static lessons from the book with little regard for teaching conceptually and to her students' needs. However, Geometry stood in stark contrast with Algebra. Jenny expressed that she loved Geometry. She also found it "very easy" and described her male Geometry teacher as "very nice" and "thorough" in his teaching. Are her views of the math content and the math

teacher influenced by how well she understands the content and how well she performs on it? Or is it that she loved the Geometry because she was able to understand the content because the teacher was "nice" and "thorough?"

Identities and Sociopolitical Discourses

As a Muslim girl who chose to wear the hijab (i.e., the head scarf), Jenny was aware of her visible identity as a Muslim in and her minority membership in the educational spaces she attended. Not many Muslim girls who wore the headscarf attended her middle school, but there were more in her high school. Nonetheless, she tried to navigate the social cliques and potentially find a space where she is most comfortable. She explained her interactions with her peers when she transitioned to high school,

> So, it took like a couple of days for me to know like who's like okay and chill because like a lot of the people are kind of like stuck up. Like they don't like—even in high school. Like because they're —they think people who go from Sunville High to Riverwalk High—well, most of the same people—they stay in their cliques. They don't like to like take anyone in or anything. So, like I had to kind of like find my own way and see who was able to do that. And so, like I like became friends with them. Some people are like, "No, I don't know you. I'm not going to talk to you." But some people were like okay with like talking to people that they don't know. So, like I like got to know who those people were. So, like we became—like so, like I just started talking, and we like became friends, and stuff like that.

Jenny was intentional about building connections with her peers when she transitioned to her new school. She purposefully examined the individuals around her to identify who of them could be "okay and chill" or who is willing to consider expanding their "cliques" to include her.

When Jenny was explaining how she identified possibilities for new friendships, she also used humor and kept a lively smile on her face. Thus, her behavior implied her resistance to being left out without friends. She came across as being socially savvy smart and convivial. Aware of her visible identity as a Muslim signaled by her headscarf, she wanted people to know her personally not through her head scarf. Her *hijab* is just one aspect of who she is as an individual and is not the whole story. She refuses the negative narratives associated with the headscarf and does not accept the perception that the *hijab* hinders her aspiration and limits her choice. Her resistance to the "she is just a Muslim" discourse that reduces her identities into just being a Muslim, translated into an outgoing personality that is never hesitant to talk to anyone and make new connections and friendships.

When she talked about the Islamophobic narrative that trickled down to how some individuals treated her, she appeared disappointed and her voice tone went down a notch. Her smile faded into her talk. In some instances, she took a deep breath while she was talking. She told a story about one incident where she experienced differential treatment in the classroom. With abundant facial expressions and hand gestures, Jenny shares,

> I don't know why. Ughhh, that teacher! One time I don't know if she was like—I don't know if she was racist or if she was just like that. But like one time I asked to go to the restroom, like I raised my hand and I was like, "May I use the restroom?" And she was like, "No." I was like, "Okay." Well, she was like known to be like mean. Like I was like, Okay. Whatever." And then, this like white boy rose his hand and he was like, "May I use the restroom?" And she was like, "Yeah, go ahead." I looked, and I looked… My friend looked at me and we were like looking at each other. I'm just like,

"Well, I literally just asked you to use the restroom." And so, I got so angry, but I didn't say anything because I was like, "Whatever."

While the teacher's behavior might had been subconsciously enacted and was not premeditated, it obviously signaled a differential treatment that situated Jenny as different. This angered Jenny and made her visibly upset that she challenged the teacher. She described her emotions after the incident as "mad", "heated", and "confused." While she was telling the story, she could not contain the emotions that the story stirred in her. Her facial expressions and body language embodied her story into a theatric performance. Her face turned pink to red and her eyes teared a bit. The same theatric performance reoccurred when she told another story about a student cracking a joke about Muslims being terrorists not noticing that Jenny was sitting right behind him and his fellow students who laughed at his joke. When they realized that Jenny was sitting behind them, "they all looked at each other, and started like freaking out, and like were trying to like to walk away, and like pretend that nothing happened." Even though the student and his fellows related the context of terrorism to Muslims jokingly, they were aware of the fact that the joke is offensive and laden with racial implications. Nonetheless, Jenny indicated that she has not encountered an overt, strong, and violent behavior against her or her family thus far.

Navigating Cultural Differences

Because Jenny is a practicing Muslim who chose to wear the headscarf and is abiding by the practices of Islam, her concept of socializing and enjoying time outside school conflicted with the majority of teens' concept of having fun. For example, her interactions with boys is strictly professional and within the realm of schooling and learning; thus, she did not socialize with them outside school. Instead of telling her friends that she would not be able to join them because of certain religious restrictions pertaining to socializing with boys, she used the car as an

excuse. The car excuse appeared as a more fitting and relatable reason that did not require clarification and contextualizing. She also used other excuses such as my family has *Azooma* or *Sahra*[8] or my parents are strict and do not allow me to go out. She maintained that she could not join her peers due to scheduling issues, not because she was unable to participate. These excuses were the discourse that she availed and chose to share with her peers that, in her opinion, might have made her appear less different. Ironically, Jenny chuckled when she said how she used the car excuse to opt out of joining her friends as if this behavior was expected and not out of the ordinary. It was her way to make light of the situation through humor and laughter and to counter her feelings of difference. Her choice of participation in certain social interactions with her non-Muslim peers is driven by what is culturally and religiously acceptable. Jenny and her family built a social network of friends and families within their Muslim community with whom they often socialize and meet. For Jenny, who is outgoing, people-friendly, and enjoys being out with friends, her circle of Muslim friends was the space she enjoyed and found herself within. As she shared similar cultural practices with her Muslim peers, she felt relieved of the pressure of explaining the limitations of what she could do as a teenager to her fellow non-Muslim teens. Jenny portrayed a strong-willed personality with robust Muslim identity that does not seem to be in conflict with her identity as an American. She was able to find common ground in which both identities are visible and entangled. For example, her clothing was a modified modest version of what teens would wear (i.e., jeans, t-shirts, yoga pants, etc.) with a nicely-worn, fully covering headscarf. However, on many occasions, the binaries of us/them or Muslim/American were evident in her discourse when she described her non-Muslim friends. Instead of positioning them

[8] Transl.: Stay out late visiting friends

as non-Muslims in comparison to her as a Muslim, she used the word “Americans” to describe them. Subsequently, she is locating Muslims outside the American culture and foreign.

Jenny also revealed strong ties with her parents and siblings who share the responsibilities of the upkeep of the house and the care for the little children at home. Moreover, Jenny did not attend an Islamic school; therefore, her knowledge of Islam and its practices are the product of parental care and attention to this matter. In addition, Jenny frequents the Muslim community center in the city where she mingles with other teens and college students and attends seminars and lectures on various topics pertaining to religion. The community center also organizes an annual retreat for the teens to provide them with educational opportunities related to Islam and to build leadership and people-handling skills. These subcultures that Jenny has access to informed and shaped her Muslim identity and created a sense of belonging to the community she is inhabiting.

Hani

Hani is a self-identified male who attends Green Plains high school, which is recognized as an optional school with the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. The school is located within the zoning district of his residence. Hani does not attend the IB program and is enrolled in standard classes the semester I interviewed him. I have known Hani from my social interactions with his mother through community events and functions. Additionally, my children socialize with him and his siblings in the Muslim Community Center in the city during youth programs and events. He is the sixth child of seven siblings to immigrant parents of Palestinian origin. His parents speak Arabic at home, which reinforces the use of the Arabic language by him and his siblings. Nonetheless, Hani is unable to read and write Arabic fluently as the opportunities to learn reading and writing Arabic are limited and require additional time and effort outside the school and sports schedules.

Hani was wearing jeans and a dark tight t-shirt. He welcomed me by shaking my hand and smiling saying, “Hey.” We sat in the formal front room of his home where they usually receive guests. Hani sat comfortably slouching in his chair and resting one leg over the other. His mother joined us at the beginning of the interview, and the three of us exchanged informal talk about school grades and family. His mother and I spoke in Arabic and so did Hani. When Hani and I began talking about his experiences at school, he used Arabic and English simultaneously. During the conversation, he seemed to be grasping for words in Arabic as he is not as fluent in Arabic as in English. Even though he ultimately chose to continue the conversation in English, he frequently used Arabic terms in his talk.

School and Learning Mathematics

Hani began talking about school and his education by describing a regular day at his current high school while expanding on each event in isolation. He began his story in a chronological manner where he talked about his first period progressing in time till the last period. While telling me about each period, he provided details such as assignments, instructional practices, and how he felt about each class. He stated that he loves biology; thus, he talked extensively about the biology class and the "fun" activities and group projects they do in class. However, he expressed his dislike of the "roundup worksheet grading" that the teacher utilizes for assessment in which someone picks a number randomly to indicate the worksheet the teacher grades for that week out of the completed worksheets pile. Hani said,

> I haven't liked it because every time it's usually—so, she has like a box full of numbers and whatever number you pick is the worksheet they pick up. And it's only one person does it and like whatever number it is, the whole class gets picked up on the same worksheet. And every time it'd be the worksheet that I haven't fully completed. "Dang!", you know.

In contrast with his views of the biology class, Hani expressed his dislike to math generally and to the math class specifically. During the intervention period on the schedule, which is designed to provide students with academic support where they need it, Hani attends Math intervention. He explained that during this time, students work on their homework or any worksheet they need help with in math. Also, the intervention teacher may give students additional math problems as extra practice in addition to making sure that students completed their worksheets correctly. Hani explained that he understands mathematics when the teacher

explains the concepts in class; but he does not know how to solve problems on quizzes and tests. For example,

> right now, I never understood how, you know, like how it would be like the slope intercept form. You have to make it—like if it's standard intercept form and you have to make it slope intercept form? You have to get the Y to the left. So, it would be Y equals I mean, where it's supposed to be. I never understood what we had to subtract or add and put it—like subtract it or add on the other side as well. So, I never understood how to do that, but now I do understand because I went to the intervention.

His story with learning mathematics was indicative of teaching for procedural fluency without conceptual understanding. Thus, Hani was unable to explain how and why the process of reordering the equation was helpful with finding the intercept. However, with math intervention, he was able to distinguish between standard and non-standard form of the equation and elaborated that he just needed a little help, as he explained.

After taking a deep breath, indicating to me frustration and enormous effort, Hani explained that his negative views of mathematics ability emerged in eighth grade in middle school during Pre-algebra class "once [he] started getting bad grades." He seemed disconnected and spoke with incomplete and incoherent sentences as he attempted to explain why he found mathematics difficult. However, his face and body gestures displayed confidence and assertion despite his visible difficulty with articulating his thoughts and stories coherently. With the same straight face and eyes that kept fluctuating from directly looking at me and looking away, he said,

> My teacher, he was—he would—I don't know. I guess he would teach how he would like to be taught, so I never really got the lesson. Because of that I started getting like—

> because I didn't—you know, how if you start the—if you don't know the—lesson from the beginning, you won't know the rest.

The later part of the conversations revealed that he was trying to indicate that he was lacking some foundational skills in mathematics, which is the reason why he struggled and ultimately disliked math. The foundational skills he referred to encompassed understanding mathematical concepts conceptually or relationally within which connections across and between multiple concepts can be made. Lacking conceptual understanding and focusing on mathematical procedures or algorithms diminishes the student's ability to make and draw connections between concepts and decreases student's mathematical proficiency.

Further, Hani elaborated on mathematics class by mentioning the math homework, particularly ALEKS[9]. "I hate ALEKS!" Hani said shaking his head emphatically while raising his hand. Hani identified no value in working on ALEKS; hence, he procrastinated in completing one hour a day of ALEKS, which compiled the assignments till they became an insurmountable task. Hani was not motivated to work on ALEKS for the sake of the grades. His teacher used Starburst candy to reward students who completed an hour of ALEKS daily; but for Hani, this was not sufficient. He explains,

> I never liked it because in the beginning, it was very easy. I really liked it, but then it got to the point where it was too much. Like I'd get home and sometimes I wouldn't have enough time to do it. And I'd—it carries on. It adds up. And he [the teacher] would award us with starburst because he really like starburst. I don't know why. But I would sometimes get it.

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[9] ALEKS is the acronym of Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces which is a web-based program that uses artificial intelligence to assess student knowledge and to determine what the student know and does not know and devise questions accordingly. Advancement to the next level requires mastering the level before.

A culmination of instructional strategies that were incompatible with Hani's needs, teaching mathematics through practice and drill, and missing connections to real-life contexts informed his negative and fragile identity. Nonetheless, Hani, though he stated that he hates mathematics, positioned himself as someone who could understand mathematics and do well in it. Hence, he realizes that he is able to understand and do well in mathematics provided he is afforded the effective learning opportunities.

Identities and Sociopolitical Discourse

Multiple discourses informed Hani's positionalities and learning identities. Specifically, he viewed his grades as the determining factor of his ability to learn and do mathematics. His negative mathematics identity was constructed in eighth grade when he was "getting bad grades" which he attributed to his lack of understanding of mathematical concepts. To Hani, the grades were indicative of his lack of knowledge of the mathematical concepts and their operations. However, he recalled seventh grade mathematics class as being a positive experience where he liked his teacher and had an A in the class. With a tone of excitement, he talked about how enjoyed the group work in that class and how the teacher motivated them to do the work. He elaborated,

> I like working in groups. Like in seventh grade, it was Mr. Mat, I think. He was a good teacher. He taught really good my—how I—I had an A in that class, but then eighth grade I—I mean, I passed with a B. But that was hard. We did a lot of—group work. He awarded us a lot, which I liked a lot because he made me want to—get awarded, yeah. And he would have activities like—he would have the problem on the board and he would have like a game. And if our group gets the answer right, we would take a shot. Like a—he had like a—not a shot like a—He had a little mini-basketball hoop and he had

like a really—I don't know how he did it. It was like a paper ball, but it was like really dense. Like it was really like rock solid. He would make us shoot it and if we made it, we'd get extra points which would add on to like our grade—not like our grade, but like our group activity grade. And I just like that class. It was a fun class. I had good friends that would help me.

Hani expressed his preference of including some kinetic activities alongside solving abstract mathematical problems. He appreciated the reward system his teacher incorporated in the class where students are rewarded by giving the opportunity to shoot hoops. Obviously, the idea of playing basketball in the class appealed to Hani and motivated his group to work towards gaining this privilege. Within that class that he described as "not hard" and "fun", he emphasized how his "good friends" in the class were helpful and contributed to his success in the class. Though Hani did not like mathematics, he enjoyed a class that was active, student-oriented, and provided opportunities for discussions and team work. This reflected positively on his performance where he received a B grade and identified the class as being fun.

Being that Algebra seemed to him as a difficult and challenging subject, I became interested in what made Algebra hard for him. Thus, we diverted the discussion to include talking about specific mathematical topics that appealed to him or he found interesting. Though we talked about seventh and eighth grade mathematics, Hani was unable to provide details saying, "We did a—I forgot." Despite the fact that he described this class as being fun, he could not recall any mathematical concepts and dismissed the question claiming he forgot which was a response that did not invite judgement. Not recalling the math involved signaled to me that the fun he described in the class did not relate to the fun of learning mathematics. Rather, it was more like breaking from the monotonous traditional methods of teaching. Instead, he moved to

talking about a classmate whom he described as “smart” because he knew all the answers to the mathematics problems and challenged the teacher where his classmate appeared to know more than the teacher. He kept telling me about teachers and his friends and avoided talking about any mathematics. The only mathematical concept he talked about was the slope intercept which may have been because it is the topic he was learning at the time of the interview.

Navigating Cultural Difference

Like many students who move from one school to a new one, Hani was “nervous” when he left his elementary school and moved to the middle school. Nonetheless, his nervousness subsided when he met some of his friends and felt at ease during this transitional period. Hani recalls,

> I was nervous seeing new people, new school in general. And yeah, I was nervous in all the classes kind of. But then once I started seeing my friends and everything, it started getting like, "Oh okay. I have some friends here. I can be kind of chill now.”

As Hani stated before, in elementary school he viewed himself as someone who understood mathematics, was able to tackle problems successfully, and had good grades. Thus, the apprehension he had was not particular to mathematics class, but rather to the new unfamiliar space in general.

However, this transition from elementary to middle school engendered a mild sense of not belonging. Hani explained,

> mostly because of my last name and my first name. They used to call me [Arabic name][10] because they—like I never—I just—like they never—they pronounced it—I told them

[10] His last name in particular included letters that are specific to the Arabic language and have no letters in English that correspond with the same pronounciation.

> how to pronounce it like really, but they never really like took it in and like actually like said it right until like seventh grade. I was like, "You know what? I'm done with this."

Mispronouncing his name was annoying him and made him feel that he is different from the rest. His name was an indicator that he is not "American." For that purpose, Hani Americanized his last name by finding a phonetic alternative to pronouncing the name that can scaffold other's pronunciations. He would pronounce the first three letters of his last name and compare the last section with a familiar word and then ask them to combine the two syllables. In high school, however, his feeling of being different stemmed from being misidentified as Hispanic. He explained that it was

> kind of hard like in being a Muslim because nobody really like—people thought I was Mexican and they still do—in high school because they don't really know what a Muslim is like or they would always say like, "Are you Arabian?" I'm like—I start laughing. I'm like, "No, I'm Muslim. My religion is Muslim. My language is Arabic" and they went, "Oh okay." But they would still get it wrong.

Hani identified himself as a Muslim and then as an Arab next. Evidently, and due to the large population of Hispanics in the country compared to Arabs, it is common for people to meet Hispanics rather than Arabs. Hence, Arabs are misidentified as Hispanics and almost never as Muslims when their identity as Muslims is not visible.

Hani seemed more comfortable with bringing to the fore his Arab ethnicity and Muslim identity when a Jordanian student moved to the school and was in his class. Hani talks fondly about how they shared the Arabic language and spoke it in school, which was something that he never did before. The practice of bringing one's culture and language to the educational spaces

one's inhabits seems to foster a sense of belonging. It is signifying how one's own meaning making system has the potential of informing student's learning.

Hani, calmly and with almost no anguish, shared how some of the students contextualize the expression *Allahu Akbar* (which means God is great) in relation to terror when, in fact, it is a religious worship statement meant to glorify God. Hani told the story of how one student uttered the word *Allahu Akbar* to indicate Hani's association with terrorists not knowing the literal meaning of the word. This statement has become the face of perceived Islamic terrorism that is widely used in movies and series on TV. This is an example of how the Islamic narratives and contexts are being appropriated for political reasons and fear mongering. Using the statement discursively to make connection between *Allah* (God) and destruction is very offensive to Muslims and Islam. Although not permitted within schools, the students make these offensive remarks outside the knowledge and the supervision of the school officials. This makes it the responsibility of the student, who is on the receiving end of such remarks, to report it and risk being bullied.

Dealing with these aggressions, Hani believed that the best approach to counter such remarks or behaviors was to take on a dismissive and less confrontational approach where he said,

> I didn't care about it that much. I just minded my own business. If like they do say—I just—I don't know. I just ignore them. I never really cared about those people.

He also indicated that he tries to help his peers understand more about Islam to counter their negative views of Muslims; however, his voice tone and body language indicated a sense of frustration and uncertainty of the impact of his efforts.

The divisive political discourse between Trump's supporters and critics has trickled down to the classrooms. Though Hani does not follow the news headline closely, he is aware that Trump supporters are the individuals who would be in favor of marginalizing, othering, and deeming Muslims as non-Americans. He also indicated that most of his peers hold the views of their parents in regard to the presidential elections without examining the candidate's platform themselves.

Hani felt confident enough in the school to participate in class and ask questions. He is part of the school soccer team and is known to be a skillful player. He works on weekends and on the breaks in his father's store to establish partial independence and self-discipline. Nonetheless, I noticed that Hani's conversation was disconnected in some parts, mainly when I asked for details. For example, he could not give specifics on the mathematics topics and, despite the fact that he mentioned his peers a lot in his narrative, he was unable to name some of the friends whom he mentioned that he knew. This makes me wonder if his discourse about friends was to portray himself as someone who fits into the school culture and the overall norms of the society. All his narratives were associated with the acceptable narratives of a good student who is not different. This is someone who hates mathematics, has a lot of friends, is outspoken in class, is not hesitant to participate in class, and likes and participates in sports. Evidently, Hani is searching for middle ground between his school space and his cultural space.

Bethany

Bethany is a self-identified female who presented herself as a Shia Ismaeeli Muslim[11]. Bethany is a first generation Indian American whose parents immigrated to the U.S. to pursue educational advancement. She is currently a senior at Green Plains high school in the International Baccalaureate[12] (IB) Program where she is enrolled in honors and AP courses in math and science. She speaks Hindi, English, and French, which she learned at her current high school as part of the IB program.

Bethany walked in the coffee shop wearing white t-shirt and black running shorts with tennis shoes. She was holding her key chain, mobile phone, and a small wristlet wallet. She has a petite build, fair complexion, dark black eyes, and black straight hair that fell right below her shoulder. Bethany used a soft voice tone without much hand and facial gestures. She had a lively smile and low-key laugh that she put on occasionally during the talk.

School and Leaning Mathematics

Bethany began telling her story with mathematics by stating that she does not recall much about elementary mathematics, but she is "pretty sure that [she] struggled a lot when it came to multiplication and division." She elaborated that she never understood the "concept" of multiplication and how it relates to repeated addition. Additionally, "the teachers weren't helpful with it either." Though she stated her limitation with understanding mathematics conceptually, she is subtly implicating the teachers for being unable to scaffold learning of the concept. She added that in Middle school, Bethany encountered an honors mathematics teacher in sixth grade

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[11] A branch of Shia Muslims.

[12] Program within the public-school system that emphasizes academic rigor and the of students' personal development to prepare students for admission in high ranking universities and global engagement (Source: https//www. ibo.org).

who “had no passion” for teaching mathematics conceptually, which is why Bethany believed she struggled in mathematics from that point forward.

Her storyline of the teachers she had in middle school continued as she discussed seventh grade.

> Seventh grade we had a better teacher, but she wasn't that helpful either. She would just keep confusing things and she would always just say like, "Just substitute everything in." I’m like, "But you're not really teaching us the concepts of how to do anything." She wasn't that helpful either. So, we would just like—we'd usually do our own things and we would try to self-teach ourselves.

Obviously, Bethany’s statement signifies that the teachers’ methods of instruction did not afford her with conceptual learning of mathematics. Instead Bethany had to teach herself the concepts. Bethany used a discourse of “was not helpful” as opposed to the binary of good teacher/bad teacher that was consistent throughout her narratives. She also articulated her reasoning for thinking that the teachers were not helpful, saying that, “they never reinforced this foundation. They just expect us to carry it on more ourselves.” Hence, she positions the teacher as capable of teaching effectively but questions why they are not doing so. I think this signifies Bethany’s understanding of the complexity of the teaching and learning processes and what effective teaching entails, which makes it difficult to identify the reason for her struggle in mathematics. In later conversations, Bethany conceded that she also requires a relatively longer time to learn mathematical concepts than her peers, specifically when teachers make the statement that, “You should know this.” Thus, it adds to her struggle and frustration and constructs her views of mathematics as an arduous subject.

Nonetheless, Bethany is in honors math and her grades tell a story of a high-achieving student across all subjects. Bethany attributes her high grades to her personal effort and not to understanding the mathematical concepts. She rationalized her high grades,

> My grades are like all A's because I push myself. But if I didn't know the content on a test or on a quiz, usually—well, see the teachers even because they know it's so hard for us, they basically like hand us the test. They say like, "Okay. We're going to be tested over these examples in the book. So, you should know how to do that and how the process works." So, it doesn't really like help us with like how the exam's going to go because they're only going to tell us what examples are going to be on the exam. They want it to help us pass, but they're not really helping us learn.

She realized that her grades are the product of working hard and working the examples anticipated to be on the exam, where her grades becomes a measure how well she learns those examples not how well she understands the concepts. Obviously, mathematics in her class is being taught procedurally with emphasis on practice and drill examples to pass the exam. Hence, despite her high grades in mathematics that signify a positive designated mathematics identity, she constructed an actual negative mathematics identity when she evaluated her learning and her ability to make connections across mathematical concepts.

Bethany shared, with apparent disappointment, how academic competition is central to the interaction dynamics between classmates within the IB program. Although the students in the IB program (total of 80 students) know each other well and are enrolled in the same classes, "the entire class focus on is on competition in passing and not even learning in that way [depth in understanding the concepts]." Bethany describes this as "contradictory" as she believes that the group needs to be more helpful to and supportive of each other. Her narrative resonated with the

survivor-of-the-fittest discourse, wherein students compete for ACT scores, college admission, and IB admission to achieve higher ranks in education. Furthermore, being a student in the IB program, her class and assignment schedule is demanding. In addition, she realizes that her teachers' schedule and their teaching responsibilities provide little room for slower paced instruction and attending to individual student's needs. Consequently, Bethany feels that her teachers' schedule constraints coupled with large class size contribute to the fast-paced instruction and the minimal interaction between students and between teachers and students where, as Bethany said, "teachers really didn't talk to [students] individually because [they] had really big classes." Demanding schedule, challenging curriculum, competitive environment, and minimal peer support render a sense of isolation and feeling of being academically inadequate.

Identities and Sociopolitical Discourses

Bethany adopted the dominant discourse of who an exemplar mathematics student is. Aligned with the expectations of traditional and structured education, Bethany believes that an exemplar mathematics student is someone who attends class, completes homework on time, and take notes in class. Also, the exemplar student is smart with the "whole family lineage…all were valedictorians." Not to mention that the exemplar student is also "naturally good at [mathematics]." Her views signify how the dominant discourse of what a "good" student entails impacts individual's views of who is included and who is excluded of a certain group membership (i.e., good mathematics students in this case). Primarily, students who comply with the institutional system mandated rules and regulations are seen as "liberal subjects" and are given the opportunity for educational advancement. On the contrary, students who do not fit the system criteria and mandated rules are viewed as "impossible subjects" and are deprived of any

academic advancement, with the argument being their grades do not meet the criteria for IB or advanced courses.

Bethany considered herself as someone who finds learning mathematics challenging, despite the fact that her grades told another story of success. Although she is in the IB program, her grades are high, and she is advancing in her courses at an acceptable pace, her identity as a mathematics learner is fragile. She reasoned about her negative and fragile mathematics identity as being the culmination of multiple factors that constructed it over the period of multiple years beginning in middle school. The traditional teacher-led instruction that lacks connection to real-life contexts was not aligned with Bethany's learning needs, the fact that the teachers were not well-prepared to teach the content of mathematics conceptually, and the fast-paced instruction were the factors that informed her fragile mathematics identity. Bethany saw these factors external to her mathematics ability and internal to the teaching process in class. She was confident that she could do the mathematics, but believed she was not afforded access to the teaching process that could meet her learning needs. Furthermore, Bethany positioned herself as a quiet struggler who pretended to do the work in public, so she was perceived as "doing mathematics." She explained,

> I'm more of the quiet struggler. I don't really announce that I'm struggling. I'm more of the type that will pretend to do work instead of actually doing work because I don't understand how to do it. And like sometimes the teacher will be like, "Why are you talking?" I'm like, "Because I'm trying to ask what's going on." And then, I'm also the type of person to like leave the class and ask my classmates, "Do you understand what's going on because I don't."

Nonetheless, her resilience and perseverance were the factors what informed her

positionality as a successful and high-achieving student.

On the other hand, Bethany was aware of the adverse impact of the prevalent discourse of Islamophobia on her socially and personally. She revealed her views of the discourse if Islamophobia and its interplay with her life,

> Well, I try not to get involved in politics too much because first of all, I'm already really stressed about school. I don't want to be stressed about something else that's going on. But yeah, I feel like the majority thing that like—whenever I go to like Muslim camps or anything, the majority thing that they talk about is Islamophobia. And they talk about our politics, and our president, and how that works out. And I actually did an art piece that's about the travel ban and it's more abstract. It doesn't really make sense until you look at it.

Bethany saw the political debates and discourses as undue stressors in life; thus, she avoided involvement in politics and obviously distanced herself from any political discussions that occurred amongst her peers. Therefore, she rejected participation in such discussions despite her knowledge of the impact Islamophobia has on the majority of Muslims, including herself. Alternatively, she used abstract art to express her aversion to the Muslim travel ban that prevented individuals from seven Muslim countries from entering the U.S. (see Figure 3). Art expression to Bethany was a space she found refuge for expressing thoughts and making her voice heard. Bethany explained her art piece, “it was a yellow background with red and blue shapes. And it was like different abstract shapes. And the blue one was just central, and the red ones were trying to get to the blue ones. And the red ones were different.” Bethany identified the seven banned countries using the color red and the blue color is for the U.S. wherein the different seven shapes are trying to enter.

Figure 3. Bethany's abstract drawing she used to express her aversion to the Muslim travel ban

Along the same lines, she recognized that Muslims in the U.S. are faced with the stereotypes and the derogatory language but indicated she had not encountered one. Bethany illuminated how Islamophobia impacted her identity as a Muslim,

> Well, people would always use that [being Muslim] as like a derogatory aspect sometimes if they're like upset with me. They'd just be like—they would say terrorist. Well, that's not right. And then, like I didn't feel it that much.

To Bethany, her Muslim identity became a negative aspect of her being and has been used as context for derogatory and inflammatory comments. Nonetheless, such negative discourse did no immediate harm to her directly, as she explained that she "was not really get hit with it much because [she] didn't wear the hijab." Bethany is aware of her invisible Muslim identity, as she chose not to wear the *hijab* and to wear clothes that are within the acceptable and socially dominant norms and imposed discourse of what an American looks like. However, and because of her skin color, Bethany was mistakenly identified as Puerto Rican or Hindu. She responded to such inquiries by stating, "I am Indian. I am Muslim." She realizes that despite her

invisible Muslim identity, she continued to be identified as a non-American as her skin color became an exclusionary marker to the American identity.

Bethany recognizes the entanglement of her identifies and believes that she, as a person, is a multiplicity of these identities where no identity can be isolated. She explained how she conceptualizes her identities,

> I don't try to come off as like Muslim is my only identity. First, I come off like I am Bethany. I am 17-years old. Like I want them to know me for me and if it—if religion does—because I don't want religion to be like the main aspect, I try to like force out of somebody. I want them to know my personality first. So, if they do ask me about religion and religion does come up in the context, then I won't try to hide it. I'll be like, "I'm Muslim."

Clearly, Bethany positions her multiple identities as essential to aspects of her being and her positionalities in the spaces she occupies. Her statement attests to the role of stereotypes and prejudices in the society within which individuals are viewed within the external body markers (i.e., race, religion, ethnicity, gender, etc.).

Bethany also sees her school textbooks as being dismissive of the history and knowledge of the minority groups in the U.S. For example, History courses focus on the American history—predominantly the colonies, the Civil War, and early 90's. Bethany clarified, "The farthest they [the textbooks] go is the civil rights I think, but even like with racism and stuff, they don't talk about Muslims. They don't talk about other races." She also explained that the history of Islam in the U.S. appears in the textbooks in relation to 9/11 events which situates Islam as a religion of violence and terror and its followers as outsiders to the American society. Furthermore,

Bethany believes that World History textbooks also trivializes the history of the world outside the context of the U.S., Canada, and South America. She explained,

> It's not really World History. The only time we talk about the world is like world wars and stuff. So, it's not really that inclusive. But I mean, there's some parts of it that I'm kind of like, "Okay. That's cool." Definitely World History—AP World History goes into some a lot, but again it's just very general.

Obviously, the textbooks are discursive texts that seems to be dismissive of Bethany's identity as a Muslim American and Indian American. She is mindful that the lack of representation of Islam, its history, and its followers in her textbooks trivializes her Muslim identity and positions her as an outsider to the American society where she was born and raised. Interestingly, Bethany reasoned that the lack of representation of Muslims in the textbooks was related to the discourse of the separation between state and church, which is what the school systems use as an excuse to dismiss teaching about other religions in depth within the curriculum. Being that Christianity is the predominant religion in the U.S., it made sense to Bethany that the textbooks reflected more of the teachings and the history of Christianity. Hence, Bethany was accepting of the discourse that the curriculum needs to be neutral and not bearing any cultural, racial, or religious inclination.

Navigating Cultural Differences

Bethany feels like "Muslim Americans actually have a big cultural shock, sometimes." She is cognizant of the difference in her practices as a Muslim Ismailli Shia in comparison to her non-Muslim peers. She explains that her peers are inquisitive of her schedule after school in which she visits her mosque daily in the late afternoon for congregation and prayer. While this is something that Bethany never questions and has been doing it her entire life, she was faced with

doubts when her peers inquire about what she does, “Is this not normal?” Growing up, she was surrounded by family members and members of her Muslim Shia community whom she socialized with and met regularly through her parents’ social network; thus, she saw herself as “normal” as she behaved and looked like her peers. When she became a teenager and because of the demanding school schedule, this socialization became limited and her comprehension of her practices in relation to her non-Muslim friends became profound.

During our conversations, Bethany subconsciously used “Americans” to refer to her non-Muslim peers. This mirrors the Islamophobic discourse of othering Muslims and situating them as different. Although she views herself as an American at times, she could not escape the impact the media and the dominant discourse had on her narrative. I also believe that such narrative trickles down to teens from their immigrant parents, community members, and friends who became part of the American fabric after being outsiders to it.

Bethany wants to be an art director to “bring that Muslim perspective, female perspective, and the Indian American perspective” to art. Her statement signifies her realization of the complexity of her identity and how she views Art as a space to bring to the fore her intersectional identities. She is considering her career aspiration as a vehicle to counter narratives of othering of Muslims, Indians, and females in the field of Art and to divert the surrounding discourse to become inclusive of Muslims, Indians, and females.

Kate

Kate is a self-identified Muslim Gambian American female who is a senior in the optional program at Oakwood high school in the southeast of the city. She is the third of her siblings to attend the same school and the same optional program. She requested that I meet with her at the mosque which she frequented with her family and her friends. She wore a black shirt, black long skirt, and a mustard color long cardigan with a light beige scarf that was wrapped around her head with portion of it resting on her chest. She spoke softly and eloquently while maintaining a vibrant smile on her face that escalated to a laugh in some instances. Kate attended an Islamic school during her elementary and middle school years, where she was within a community of students and teachers who shared her religious beliefs and ideologies. However, her father transferred her, as he did with her older siblings, to a public school to "have the high school experience." This high school experience involves college preparation and social interactions with students and teachers outside the Muslim community they were used to. She stated that to her father, attending a public high school and not the Islamic school meant that Kate will be prepared to assume her place in the larger society as she navigates educational spaces as well as social spaces.

Schools and Learning Mathematics

Transferring to a large public high school, Kate was apprehensive of the unknown and she "didn't think [she] was going to make any friends. [She] didn't think [she] was going to just like fit into." Nonetheless, a few students approached her occasionally where they exchanged conversations. With time, she was able to make connections and build friendships. As a shy person, Kate did not initiate the conversations with other students. On the contrary, other students (Muslims and non-Muslims) approached her and talked to her and ultimately became

her friends. Her shyness extended to her classrooms where she located herself in the back of the class and avoided participation in class discussions and conversations. Particularly in mathematics class, she was conscious about speaking and participating as she feared giving the wrong answer; thus, she placed herself as an outsider to class activities and took on the role of inactive member. This lack of participation stemmed from her shyness and her perceptions of herself as someone who does not have a good grasp on the subject of mathematics. To her, “math is not [her] strongest subject, so [she] is scared [she] is going to be wrong.” Nonetheless, her apprehension and non-participatory position in the mathematics classroom constructed a figured world for Kate in which she was silent and almost non-existing. Within her figured world, she chose a non-responsive stance in class that she figured to have alleviated her fear of giving wrong answers. This figured world of hers was morphed by the teacher’s and peers’ practices of encouragement and inclusion. Kate, then, realized that the classroom space has a spot for her which made her more comfortable, responsive, and active participant in the class. Kate recollected,

> I think I got comfortable around like the students in that classroom and also the teacher was like very encouraging. And like, if you asked questions she was always like helpful and answered your questions. And then, like even if I was sitting in the back she'd like look at me, and she'd call on me, and stuff… When I sat in the back, there was two girls that sat next to me. And like, I'd always ask her to help me about stuff and she was like, "Yeah. Oh yeah". And then, she'd explain stuff to me if I didn't understand and—yeah. I think it was her. She helped me a lot in that class.

Her love/hate relationship with mathematics began in middle school where she attended *Al-Qalam* Islamic school; however, she was able to get one-on-one assistance, given that the

school's student population and class size were small. It seems that she felt that her space at *Al-Qalam* Islamic school was safe enough for to ask for help. When Kate moved to high school, where the teachers and students were not familiar to her, she hesitated to ask for help out of fear that she would be perceived as a less than smart student.

In addition to the unfamiliar space and individuals, the instructional strategies mathematics teachers employed in class were not suited to Kate's needs. The teacher-led instruction accompanied by lengthy practice and drill homework were not helpful for Kate to develop positive mathematics identity. Algebra I and Algebra II were her most difficult subjects. Geometry on the other hand was "fun and easy." For Kate, making mathematics fun entailed using contextual problem-based instruction that relates to students' real-life experiences. It also includes involving "the whole class in the process of learning."

Kate described her transition to high school as being "uncomfortable" wherein she felt apprehensive about being able to "fit in" at the school. Being that her two older sisters attended the same school, Kate was known to some of her teachers and known to members of the Muslim Student Association (MSA) that her sister started when she was in high school. As such, she was able to build on these networks to find her space and her circle of peers. Kate is currently serving on the MSA as the Vice President. Kate's MSA membership alleviated the apprehension and anxiety she experienced by creating a subculture for her to be around other Muslim students within the school where she felt represented and supported.

Identities and Sociopolitical Discourses

Kate expressed her anger with the current sociopolitical context in the U.S. in which Muslims are marginalized and othered. "As a Muslim, it [the news] makes me feel like sort of attacked." The news and the political narratives brought attention to the Islamic identity in public

places and stamped it with the rhetoric of violence and terror. "[Y]ou are just walking the down the hall you think people are like looking at you a certain way even though they might not. But it just makes you feel watched all the time and makes you feel like you're talked about all the time."

Kate's Muslim identity is visible to the public through her headscarf (i.e., the *hijab*), which leaves her little room to negotiate her visible Muslim identity. Wearing the headscarf was not the only factor that informed her positionality in the classroom. Kates "thinks it depends on your personality more and they're like if you are outgoing." She realized that being shy and indifferent played a major role on how uncomfortable she felt and in how she views herself and how others view her. Nonetheless, Kate found solidarity and support from the senior class at the school. Her senior group membership alleviated feelings of alienation and extended a sense of belonging, not to mention that she is a high-achieving student at the school which places her in high regards by her teachers and fellow students.

After overcoming her shyness and indifference, she constructed her figured world by making room for political discussions and interfaith work that created more network and new alliances for her. For example, she actively participated in discussions during Advanced Placement Government Class where

> Every single day [students] come in [to] talk about what's on the news. Sometimes [students] watch the news in class and everyone will make their comments about it. And it's like a pretty like diverse and also like pretty liberal class.

Kate used the word "liberal" to describe her class within which students were encouraged to be forward and critical thinkers. Obviously, her choice of the word is consistent with the political discourse usage of it to describe someone who is not in favor of the dominant rhetoric

and someone who is “open to new behavior or opinions and willing to discard traditional values” (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). Evidently, liberal became a word to describe opposition to colonial practices and ideologies in an effort to make room for new ideas and practices.

Another example was her participation in the interfaith opportunity through her school. Kate told the story of how she and a few other students visited the synagogue in the city after the synagogue shooting that happened in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania,

> At the mosque here, we went to—it's Temple Israel. It's one of their synagogues and we went there as a group. And we were just like—some of my friends go there and we just like talked about it. We were like just part of the process for helping them heal and stuff.

Kate felt particularly represented in politics as a Muslim woman after the midterm elections in which a Palestinian Muslim American and a Somalian Muslim American were elected to the congress. Kate excitedly recalled the day when she knew about the elections results,

> It [the elections of two Muslim women] makes me feel very proud I think because when I came back home that night from work, I was so tired. I was so ready to go to sleep, but I stayed up to wait for the results because I wanted to know who was going to win. And I know the Palestinian woman won and the Somalian woman won. And then, it was like I was supposed to get on Instagram and Snapchat. And I was like *Masha'Allah* (giggling in happiness and excitement) —"Congratulations" and stuff. Yeah. And it was just—I think it just makes me feel very proud and it makes me feel represented. Maybe if I want something passed it'll happen." And so, yeah. I would say yeah, very proud.

Representation informs the construction of the Muslim American identity. In this case, the elections of two Muslim American women disrupted the Western white nationalist narratives

and the White male domination in politics and opened up the space for the Other's participation. In her figured world, Kate (re)constructed her Muslim American identity by actively (re)creating counternarratives that position Muslims as active and constructive participants in the community and counter discourses of violence and terror as being associated with Islam.

Navigating Cultural Differences

Kate navigated the two cultures (i.e., school and home) she inhabited with grace and peace. Her understanding of the difference between her practices as a Muslim and the dominant school culture illuminated the path for her to find common grounds within the space of liminality. She actively participated in school and social activities that met her religious principles and beliefs and abandoned those that were not in line with her identity as a Muslim. She carved her Muslim Identity by engaging in community services outside school and within her Muslim community while excelling academically. Her non-Muslim peers were her allies and support system in school who she spoke fondly of and consistently referred to as "my friends at school." Additionally, she preserved her ties with her Muslim community socially and religiously by regularly attending the mosque and the social events that her family and friends held within the community. She found her parents' support and her older siblings' footsteps to be the guiding compass in her cultural navigation.

Kate talked about having to explain some of her religious practices to her peers at school (i.e., praying five times, wearing the headscarf, and fasting). Though she is often faced with these questions, she is not bothered with them as she finds them as an opportunity to explain Islam and counter Islamophobia. Many times, she smartly uses a context that is familiar to non-Muslim to explain an idea or tell her peers where her parents from. Kate said,

> Like sometimes I'll explain that. But if it's just like, "Where are you from?" I'll say, "I'm from West Africa and from Gambia." And like I know a lot of people understand if I say—if I mention Kunta Kinte because that was like a really big name in this when—for African Americans and the slave community because he came from Gambia in the south.

Despite the fact that Kate was born and raised in Windson her entire life, in her figured world, she is from Gambia. She still holds and maintains ties to her cultural heritage through her parents who are immigrants who found home in the U.S. What if she was not wearing a headscarf? Would she have responded by stating that she is from Gambia? As I asked Kate, she pondered,

> I think it's because like I wear a hijab and like my skin color's like a bit darker and stuff. So, I just assume. Maybe one day I'll just say Windson and see if they're like—Or I were African— I don't know. I've never thought of it like that. If I wasn't covered, I think I might say Windson.

Obviously, she was mindful of the dominant narratives surrounding race and religion, accepting that she will not be identified as an American because of her headscarf and skin color. Nonetheless, she maintained a lively smile throughout the discussion of this matter. I felt that it did not trouble her; on the contrary, she used mild humor and laughter to make light of the situation.

Jasmine

I met Jasmine almost six years ago in Jordan when I relocated there for one year with my family. I met her and her mother at the home of a mutual friend by coincidence. I was picking up my daughter who was invited to a party that Jasmine was also attending. To meet someone who you know in one country in another country is quite fascinating and served as point of discussion when we met for the interview. While we talked about the first time we met, I was setting up my recorder which was my phone. I found the phone to be less distracting as a recording device and maybe less intimidating to participants. While Jasmine and I were situating ourselves in the formal room of her home, her mother moved to the kitchen, where I was confident that she was preparing something to offer us, as she views me as their guest.

We both sat at the opposite ends of the same couch in the formal living room, which is a distinguishable feature of the homes of many Muslims. The reason for having two rooms is to be able to host large gatherings, where naturally women and men separate to have more privacy and intimate space. This separation is preferable to some as it gives them a comfortable space to exchange talk, laughter, and giggles.

Jasmine wore a dark shirt with a drawing of a heart shape on it, jeans, and socks. She let her long brown hair rest on her shoulders and below effortlessly with no tie or hair clip. She had a beautiful innocent smile that she maintained during our conversation. She was holding her mobile phone in her left hand though she was not attending to the notifications on it.

School and Learning Mathematics

Jasmine identified herself as a Jordanian Muslim American female who is currently a senior in Yellowstone high school in the northern suburbs of Windson. Jasmine is a student who was in multiple school contexts: public, private, homeschool, and international school in Jordan.

She had moved from one school to another looking for a good fit academically and socially. She went to Sunville Elementary school in the district of her residence in Windson. She appeared dissatisfied with the school's environment which led to her asking her mom to be homeschooled after fourth grade. Jasmine explained,

> We grew up in a different part of Windson and it was actually a really good environment until I got into fourth grade [referring to Sunville neighborhood]. Everyone started to get a little rough with one another and a lot of drama. Stuff started happening like the brain, you know, it starts developing during that time. So, I saw that, and I was going to fifth grade. I told my mom I wanted to do homeschooling because I didn't like the environment.

Because the social atmosphere of the school encompassed a high level of students' behavioral infractions, which she is attributing to the immaturity of the brain, she reasoned that homeschooling might have been a better fit for her. After a few years of being homeschooled, Jasmine went to Sunville Middle School with her twin brother who maintained his enrollment in the elementary school after Jasmine was homeschooled. Jasmine explained her experience in middle school with abundance of facial expressions and hands gestures. As she rolled her eyes multiple times, signifying exaggeration, and used a high voice volume to indicate confirmation and shock, she narrated,

> So, I did homeschooling and my twin brother still went to Sunville Elementary. And then, we went to Sunville Middle sixth grade. It was really, really bad. It was like a huge difference between elementary and middle school. Everyone—it was basically a time where like everyone just became really blunt with racism and things like that. Like they wouldn't hold back on anything they would say

When she initially mentioned that the environment was "bad", I was under the impression that she was relating this to behavioral infractions and not racism. Her elaboration highlights racism as being the mainly identified issue that relates to "bad" school. Obviously, as Jasmine was an average student, she was not afforded the opportunity and access to higher performing schools. She lived in the neighborhood where the school was zoned. Evidently, in Windson, well-funded and resourceful schools are located in affluent neighborhoods with expensive housing options. Hence, zoning is regarded as a discursive practice that informs' access to quality education. Zoning operates as an inequitable school practice. Jasmine moved to Cedar Middle School, her neighborhood's zoned school, where she was a bit happier as she described the school's environment as "way different…everyone was family…and everything was good."

She is currently at Yellowstone High School where she enrolled when she was in 9th grade and she is very pleased and content with the school socially and academically. She "really, really loves it" because students in 9th grade were housed in a separate building from the rest of the high school. In Jasmine's view, this created a communal space for freshmen and created bonds between the students. However, on her first day of 9th grade, Jasmine remembered feeling "nervous" after she had attended *Al-Qalam* Islamic school in the previous two years. Jasmine's immediate thought was to look for someone who is a Muslim. She recounted, "I was trying to look for a Muslim student because that was the first thing to go to like where I fit in, you know." Jasmine does not wear the headscarf (*hijab*) to be instantly identified as a Muslim, yet she could not escape feeling different and not from within. Moreover, the discursive practices of assigned seats and limited interaction in some of her classes restricted social interactions and elongated the process of fitting in within the school as a freshman.

Jasmine's knowledge of high school is based on what she saw on television (Hollywood and Disney movies). Within this narrative, it is important to look cool and fashionable to be accepted and popular in high school. That's why Jasmine made sure she wore a "really nice shirt, nice pants and [she] went all out." Her nervousness on the first day dissipated when a girl approached her to tell her "Oh, hi. You're really pretty!" Drawing a smile of content, Jasmine said to herself, "oh, it's not so bad here."

Jasmine began her story with learning mathematics stating that she "does not like Math" and how she felt nervous going to AP[13]statistics class because she is "bad at math." She recalled that her dislike of Math began in first grade when she was assigned an incomplete classwork as homework in the topic of Fractions. Her twin brother, who was with her in first grade, was able to finish his work in class; thus, he was not given math homework that night. That night, her family was invited to a friend's house for dinner. Jasmine used the Arabic word عزومة to denote the dinner invitation. With pestered facial expressions, she recalled,

> So, I was doing it in the car and I was like, "Oh my god! This is so hard!" It's like, "How do you do it?" Like it was like fractions and like that. I remember they were like, "It's so easy" and all that stuff. And I was like, "No, it's not. It's hard." Like how—like I was like focusing. Like I had the light on. It was like nighttime. I had the light on, and I was just like, "Like how do you do this?" Like, "How are you doing it?" And he was just like, "Well, it's not my fault you don't get it." I remember the conversation and I was just like, "Ugh!" For the whole ride I was still on that one problem and it was a packet.

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[13] AP: Advanced Placement course which requires high grades in identified are (mathematics in this case) for enrollment.

Her hate of math escalated “when they all of the sudden put the alphabet in the math. That just ruined everything.” Her remark indicated lack of mathematical proficiency that might have been the result of teaching mathematics for procedural fluency as opposed teaching it conceptually. It also signaled that the mathematical problems presented in class were not contextual; thus, she was unable to make connections between the alphabets and the numbers.

She was signifying her undeveloped conceptual understanding of mathematics which began as early as first grade. Potentially, her learning needs called for methods of instruction that extend beyond traditional and the teacher-led instruction. However, Jasmine had no access to this type of instruction. Nonetheless, she was able to pass math courses with grades like B and C. However, Jasmine recalled fondly one mathematics teacher she had in *Al-Qalam* Islamic school who was “easy to communicate with…and he would always respond even if it was the dumbest question in the world.” He was relatable, non-judgmental, and dedicated to motivating students to learn mathematics.

She turns to online websites such as Google, YouTube, thattutorguy.com, and Khan Academy for academic support in mathematics. Occasionally, she might ask her twin brother whom she described, “He is really smart in math.” Noticeably, the Internet has become a multifaceted space for teenagers and adults alike to know and understand the world around them wherein they search for answers to their queries and research.

Jasmine excitedly recalled her favorite math teacher who was her third-grade teacher. Jasmine regarded her as “a really awesome lady [who] would help you [and] would not make you feel dumb.” Also, the teacher was devoted to teaching and used multiple teaching strategies to meet her students’ learning needs. Jasmine loved her class and enjoyed learning mathematics at that age. However, Jasmine was unable to recall any mathematical topics she learned at that

time. Her memory of mathematics was blurred, which made me think that she recalled the process of teaching rather than the content of what had been taught.

The institutional discursive practices within the school system excluded the social and cultural practices of Jasmine. For example, Jasmine told the story of how her one-day absence from school to celebrate *Eid*[14]caused her undue academic challenge as she was forced to make up "a whole bunch of work" including a test. The attendance office marked Jasmine's absence as excused; however, her teacher told her justifying the amount of work Jasmine had to do, "You shouldn't have been absent." Clearly, Jasmine showed her frustration with the teacher's response and felt penalized for celebrating her holiday and for being Muslim. Moreover, she was unable to join the cheerleading squad or the basketball team because of the uniform requirement of wearing short skirts and shorts. Despite the fact that she does not cover hear head (i.e.; wears the hijab), she still dresses in modest clothes which excludes shorts and short skirts. Nonetheless, she did not ask for any uniform provision to meet her needs as a Muslim student in cheerleading or basketball. She reasoned about not requesting any special accommodations saying, "Sometimes I feel bad for even asking and be like, Oh, I'm making them not have the uniform that they want. *Khalas*[15], that's their way. I can't do anything." Obviously, she realizes that she is a member of the minority population and views her agency and voice as being trivial and irrelevant. Hence, she submits to the dominant discursive practices as she sees herself an outside to the American society social norms and acceptable behavior.

Identities and Sociopolitical Discourses

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[14] The Muslim religious holiday.

[15] An Arabic word that means "enough". People use it to indicate that there is no other alternative.

Despite her expressive and outspoken stance regarding American politics, she displayed a passive and indifferent demeanor pertaining to political discussions and activism. In contrast to her participation in the political discussions with her peers at the *Al-Qalam* Islamic school, she adopted an inactive position when she was in Sunville school. She explained that, unlike Sunville High School, her peers at her former Islamic school shared the same position pertaining to the political discourses and news; thus, there was little room for disagreements and challenging points. At Sunville High School, there are ample opportunities for counter discussions and disputes. She seeks to avoid such occurrences. Consequently, she referenced little to no incidents where she challenged or disagreed with a political discussion or argument. Nonetheless, she expressed her fear, embarrassment, and disappointment with the political events and narratives in the U.S. For example, every year on 9/11, Jasmine does not want to go to school because she is the only Muslim and Middle Eastern girl in some of her classes which makes her uncomfortable as she feels she is different from her peers. She narrated her experience with this past 9/11,

> Like you're the only person in class that's Muslim, you know. And they're just saying like—they're just like, "Oh my god. These terrorists—"Like, "What are we going to do?" and all that stuff. And it all started because of 9/11 and things like that. And literally we were talking about it in Economics class and I'm the only Muslim/Middle Eastern girl in the class. And I just like laid my head on the desk and I was like, "Okay. Tell me when the conversation's over." Like, "I don't want to be a part of this."

Eighteen years after 9/11, anger and intolerance towards Muslim and middle Easterners is still circulating even among teenagers who were born after the 9/11 attack. This underscores how the discourse is being disseminated by the media and/or by the parents to further marginalize these communities within the U.S. Consequently, this informs how Jasmine positioned herself as

an outsider to the American society, where she perceived that she was blamed for the attack and for being a Muslim Middle Easterner. After lending a closer eye to the political narratives and discourse and informed by the broader discourses of racism and inequality, Jasmine's national identity became disconnected and fragile. Jasmine mentioned that two years ago, she bragged about being an American and being a member of the free world that stood up for fairness and equality. Her views of the American sociopolitical discourse and practices were shattered as she learned more about the prevalence of racism and intolerance, she said,

> When I started looking at the news, the shootings, what Trump had to say and just what—everyone had a say about terrorism and how they just put it into one box of—one culture which isn't fair at all. So, ever since I saw that I just—shocked to see that this wasn't what I thought America was and it's all thanks to the media. So, I got a big eye-opener—big awakening, ughh and it's not the nicest things. Yeah. I see videos like black people yelling at white people. They're—like everyone's yelling at each other like—they're like one cube, like one thing. Like everyone's against one another and I—the thing that is happening in America and I used to feel so happy about the place.

The recent domestic events in the U.S. and the multiple shootings of schools, clubs, and places of worship distorted and shifted Jasmine's views of America and its call for freedom and equality. Evidently, her fear of backlash and possible hate crimes against Muslims dominated her narratives when she talked about herself being American. Although she is not visibly identified as a Muslim, she fears for her mother (who wears the hijab) when she leaves the house.

Navigating Cultural Differences

Jasmine used the word "cultural shock" to describe her experience moving to high school, as she was unfamiliar with the acceptable social norms. Gaining her knowledge from TV

and movies, she attended to fashion and looking cool and pretty to be within one acceptable dimension of social behavior known to her. When a girl complimented her saying that Jasmine looked pretty, she felt a sense of belonging which eased her nervousness on the first day of high school. Furthermore, Jasmine felt oblivious of the school's cultural and social norms. She explained, "Because I kept going from different school to different school, it's like, 'Is this okay?' 'How come they do that?' and I am also not used to guys talking about girls the way they do." Her statement implies that Jasmine was not an insider nor an outsider to the space. Her sense of fitting in fluctuated as with the various narratives her peers used. She was confused about some of her peers' remarks or comments, especially made by the boys, as she was not accustomed to the discourse or the accompanied body language. Jasmine elucidated,

> So, the guys have a lot to say about everything—like every single topic. They are very kind of—like blunt? They're very blunt with everything. Like if they don't like what a girl is wearing, or they don't like how she—like anything about her like even if it's modest or not modest they have something to say.

Obviously, she finds the discourse used by the boys in her school addressing the girls to be inconsiderate and unfavorable which made her uncomfortable. Being that her family is a practicing Muslim family whose actions reflect a visible adherence to the teachings of Islam, Jasmine found the boys' discourse in conflict with her views of the proper interactions between boys and girls within which boys are encouraged to be more respectful to girls.

Searching for a better cultural fit, Jasmine and her family contemplated moving overseas to Jordan where schools, arguably, may be a better fit for Jasmine. Mainly, Jasmine believes that her parents view the public-school system in the U.S. as indifferent to culture and with the potential to adversely inform the construction of their children's Muslim identity. The parents

were looking for a space in which their identity as Muslims and their culture are not seen foreign to the mainstream culture and the dominant social discourses and norms. Jasmine recalled,

> Then our parents surprised us and went to Jordan for 10th grade. And they were planning on letting us stay in Jordan over there in that environment because they liked it because it was like all Muslims and like we wouldn't come home saying, "Oh, this person said that" or "That person said this". And it was just like a—the best environment our parents could ask for. Like they weren't worried as much as they were here. So, we were planning on staying there for 11th grade, but some things happened, and we had to come back. And so, I came back.

I am aware of many Muslim American families who took on this option to move to their home country looking for a compatible environment where the dominant narratives align with their Muslim and cultural identities. In most cases, such moves do not last more than a few years due to the financial burden as well as the emotional stress result from the separation of the family as the father usually remains back in the U.S. to secure financial stability.

In addition to cultural discourses pertaining to her positionality as an American Muslim, Jasmine struggled with the dominant teenage culture that she tried to fit in by appearing and behaving “cool.” Jasmine felt pressured to behave in a manner that was not compatible with her principles and ideologies to maintain the company of her peers and the membership of her social circle. Though she rejected the discourse of misbehaving or acting out which is coined with being cool and popular in high school, she lacked the agency to counter it or stand up for her principles. Jasmine shared one of the stories of her struggle. She talked about her peers intentionally littering in the school without any consequences or being held accountable and

watching “the janitors…cleaning after them”. Although Jasmine rejected the behavior and “felt bad” for doing it, she publicly condoned and accepted it. Jasmine said,

> I can't tell her [Jasmine’s girlfriend], "Oh, you know—"So, I'll be like, "That's cool." I'm like, "Oh okay. That's cool." I won't do it, but like I feel kind of bad for supporting or putting it on. But like that's something I struggle with like trying to tell them, "You're not supposed to do that", you know. So, I just like—when the girl leaves, I silently pick it up and like I put it away. I'm just like, "You're not supposed to do that" in my head.

Jasmine longed for this sense of belonging and for fitting in within the school culture. Her desire to secure belonging and group membership subdued her agency and trivialized her principles and ideologies. She did not want to risk being perceived as “uncool” and, as such, being excluded from her peers’ social circle. This produced undue stress and an inner struggle that she could not escape that might have crippled her socially and academically.

Conclusion

My participants experiences varied across the contexts they inhabited. Their awareness of the prevalence of the Islamophobic discourses within these contexts was evident. They sensed and experienced the rhetoric of difference and not belonging in different ways. Hence, they negotiated this difference drawing from their social and personal capital. Not to mention that their experiences were gendered as well. The female participants attended and impacted by discourses that related to their looks and their visible identity as Muslims. However, the prevalence of traditional teaching and Eurocentric education can be read through their narratives as shared discourses that impacted their learning of mathematics. In the following chapter, I provide an interpretation of their experiences, negotiation processes, and how they constructed their mathematics identities within these contexts.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In this study, I explored how Muslim American youth conceptualized, narrated, and negotiated their Muslim American identities and their mathematics identity while navigating the sociopolitical context that is fueled with Islamophobia. Within the theory of postcolonialism, I delineated the construct of Islamophobia as a historicized postcolonial concept and described how Islamophobia, mediated by the present political discourses and institutional practices, racialized the experiences of Muslim American youth in the U.S. I also detailed how I conceptualized identity as a dynamic and malleable concept that is never complete and always becoming (Hall, 1991). Within this conceptualization, I built on relevant mathematics identity research pertaining to minority and marginalized student populations particularly relevant to how the dominant and institutionalized postcolonial and Western discourses inform the construction of my participants' identities. Lastly, I examined my participants' narratives by analyzing the interviews within three overarching discourses: school and learning, sociopolitical, and cultural.

In this chapter, I discuss my findings in relation to the three research questions I detailed in chapter one while interrogating my research practices that imposed Western-oriented discourse and tradition. Moreover, I discuss the methodological implications of the *Ziyyarah* interview and how it informed my analysis and contributed to how we (my participants and I) made sense of our experiences and how we constructed the knowledge of the world around us. Lastly, I conclude this chapter by identifying my study's contribution to current research and recommendations for future research.

Findings

Although I present my findings with respect to the three outlined research questions, I recognize that each participant's identities and positionalities are intertwined, entangled, and incomplete. Hence, I acknowledge that while I am discussing and elaborating on my research findings, I am *taking the risk of essentialism*. Therefore, findings provide a glimpse into some of the experiences of Muslim American youth and are not meant to be a theoretical framework for constructing knowledge about Muslim American youth in the U.S., especially about their learning of mathematics. Spivak (1993) concedes that substantive theoretical essentialism can become politically offensive as a tool which she calls a "differentiating oppressive behavior" (p. 17). In other words, differentiating populations into categories ascribes sameness to all members of those categories which becomes oppressive and reductionist in nature. Despite this risk of essentialism, the relative invisibility of this population in the existing research literature points to the importance of this glimpse into their experiences. Hence, their intersectionality of religion, race, gender, ethnicity, and social class and how they attend and negotiate the plethora of discourses they are faced with are multiple and cannot be reduced to summative narratives and experiences. In addition, the same claim with respect to identity holds validity because the identity formation and construction processes are contextualized and historical; thus, they are dynamic and in progress.

The three main research questions that guided my study were: (1) How do Muslim American teens conceptualize their Muslim American identity when dominant narratives deem them inferior to Western society? (2) How do Muslim American teens navigate and negotiate the cultural difference between school and home against a backdrop of Islamophobia, othering, and

marginalization? (3) How do Muslim American teens conceptualize their positionality in mathematics classrooms and their identity as doers of mathematics?

How do Muslim American teens conceptualize their Muslim American identity when dominant narratives of Islamophobia deem them inferior to Western society?

Sirin et al. (2007) assert that, because of the diverse backgrounds and the multiple paths to being Muslim, the label "Muslim-American" is a complex label that "resists simplistic definition" (p. 261). Additionally, the label "Muslim-American" is socially constructed; thus, studying the Muslim-American identity not only involves examination of the religiosity or the ethnicity of the Muslim population. Rather, examining the Muslim-American identity entails interrogating the emerged collective Muslim identity that is constructed by the shared meaning-making system and traditions and informed by the social, cultural, and political practices. Sirin et al. (2007) argue that this collective identity, though fragile, emerged as a result of the Islamophobic sociopolitical and historical context that fueled hate and fear against Muslims.

Although all my participants realized that being Muslim and being American are essential to their being and integral to their identity, they acknowledged different levels of perceptions of discrimination and differential treatment that was motivated mainly by the media narratives and dominant political discourse. The impact of these perceptions was informed by the intersection of race, culture, gender, and ethnicity and varied their experiences. For example, despite the fact that Munir recognized the existence of prejudices and stereotypes, his narratives and stories signaled to me a verbally dismissive stance of these stereotypes (i.e., was unemotional and unmoved when he spoke about these prejudices). Instead, he opted for an action-oriented perspective as an activist and leader. Within this stance, he created a subculture within his high school by availing the school system to serve his needs of fostering a strong sense of belonging

(i.e., Muslim Student Association). Jasmine, however, constructed her sense of belonging at her high school through bracketing her agency and accepting her peers' practices despite the conflict these practices held with her beliefs and principles. Munir's, Hani's, Jasmine's, and Bethany's Muslim identity (Munir and Hani as males and Jasmine and Bethany as females who do not wear the *hijab*) remained invisible until they chose to reveal it by identifying themselves as Muslims or behaving in a matter that displays their Muslim identity. The choice of concealing or revealing the Muslim identity was not afforded to Jenny or Kate, who were both females who chose to wear the *hijab*. For Munir, Hani, Jasmine, and Bethany, this choice to conceal their Muslim identity presented them with less confrontation with suspicion and fear from people around them.

Because none of my participants were identified by their peers as Whites or from European descent, they were often presented with the question, "Where are you from?" As my participants recognized the purpose of the question (i.e., they sounded "American" but did not look "American"), they answered by revealing their ethnicity or origin as Pakistani, Iranian, Palestinian, or Gambian. My Arab, Pakistani, and Iranian participants realized the ambiguous position they occupy within the U.S. racial formation categories that include White, African American, Asian, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic, as they do not fit the perceptions each category carries. Therefore, Middle Easterners, notwithstanding their classification as White per the U.S. racial formation, are less likely to be perceived as White, as they are not of European descent (El-Haj, 2015). Additionally, my participants from Pakistan were more likely to be identified as Asian even though they are not identified as such per the U.S. racial formation categories. Arguably, my participants' responses reflected what Sirin et. al. (2007) coined as hyphenated identities in which Muslim American youth view their Muslim and American identities as parallel, integrated, or separated. In this case, their responses reflected a parallel identification of

their Muslim and their American identities. They arguably held stronger identification with the Muslim identity while adding another dimension to their hyphenated identities (i.e., their ethnic identity). Even though Sirin et al, (2007) did not identify the Muslim American youth ethnic identity as part of the hyphenated identities, my participants clearly identified with their ethnic identity whenever they were signaled as *non-Americans* by their peers.

Additionally, the participants' narratives revealed their awareness of their racialized Muslim identity in the public spaces they inhabited in general and in their schools in particular. Jasmine felt anxious and perturbed every year during the commemoration of 9/11. She "hated" going to school on 9/11. When the 9/11 event was discussed in class, she chose to disengage and hide by putting her head down on her desk. She believed that commemorating 9/11 beckons accusations of Muslims as the perpetrators of the attack. Hence, as a Muslim American, the commemoration of 9/11 became a "differentiating oppressive behavior" (Spivak, 1993/2009, p. 17) that subjugated Jasmine to the colonial discourse of binaries of them/us within which she became the other, the foreign, and the outsider in that space. Such differentiating oppressive behavior was also manifested in the name calling Hani was faced with and the association of Islam and its beliefs with terrorism. Hani shared one incident where one of his peers reacted to the altercation that occurred between the two by shouting "*Allahu Akbar*[1]." Hani believed that his peer was indirectly calling him terrorist. Pairing *Allahu Akbar,* which is central to Muslim's beliefs, with practices of terrorists. This discourse is manifested in Hollywood movies and media outlets that consequently seeped into social and educational spaces.

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[1] Transl. God is great.

Furthermore, with increased Islamophobic discourse in the public and in the media, Eurocentric colonialism constructed inferior, backward, and objectified views of Muslims and informed what Du Bois (1903) termed as *double consciousness* (Bazian, 2013). Within this concept, individuals view themselves through the eyes of other individuals within their society including teachers, politicians, and media. My participants understood their identity as Americans yet recognized themselves as a minority and subordinated population. Jenny realized that she was the only *hijabi* at her high school which created this double identification or double consciousness. In the eyes of her peers, she was different. Along the same lines, Bethany bracketed her Muslim identity as she wanted to be identified as "Bethany the person" first and as her other positionalities next. Though she is an American, she could not escape the difference her Muslim identity brought onto her and the sense of not belonging, as such. Kate, though an American, could not participate in the school social functions where boys and girls partied and mingled. She maintained, out of modesty and in line with her religious beliefs, professional relationships with the other gender. She chose not to go to the prom and considered going to the Winter formal but felt out of place; thus, she ended up not going.

How do Muslim American teens navigate and negotiate the cultural difference between school and home against a backdrop of Islamophobia, othering and marginalization?

"Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems," my participants' narratives encompassed an overt and covert "struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 100). I found the quote from Anzaldúa to be reflective of the experiences my participants shared with respect to the cultural differences they encountered. Sandwiched between two cultures, they were faced with the

challenge to fit in, belong, and assume membership in the social circles around them. The discursive practices of the Eurocentric institution of schools and the discourse of colonialism constructed Muslim American teens as different and as outsiders to the space. For example, proms and sports uniforms are well suited to the Eurocentric and Christian majority, but not the Muslim minority. It is through these practices that schools and educational institutions identified and displaced Muslim American youth to the margins. Hence, their value system collided with the mainstream cultural and social practices to render an inner struggle, an inner war.

My participants responded to these challenges and negotiated these struggles differently. Their awareness of being between cultures resonated with what Said (2001) described as his "strongest continuous memory as a child…of being a misfit… terribly anxious and nervous about [his] relations with others" (p. 234). Their awareness of their misfit status manifested differently in their relationships with peers and with their school system. For example, for some of them (Munir, Kate, and Hani), creating subcultures within their educational institutions constructed a sense of belonging by membership (Zine, 2000). These subcultures were examples of what Zine (2000) termed as formalized resistance strategies. These strategies emphasize "organizing dissent" using the system in place to uncover practices of racism, discrimination, and marginalization and to counter hegemonic opposition to cultural and religious subordination (p. 300). For Munir, the MSA was his way of rallying allies and creating a support system for him to fit in and secure societal membership. Kate availed activism and community service opportunities created by her school to construct and build a sense of belonging in her spaces. Through sharing a common goal with other participants in these opportunities, she constructed networks and group memberships that alleviated her feelings of difference and not belonging. As for Hani, his soccer team associated him with legitimate group membership that was

recognized and approved by the institution. Zine (2000) argues that the process of developing these subcultures involves an *ideological substructure* which, in this case, is based on Islamic beliefs and practices and *social infrastructure* in which students plan their social events and provide peer support. Ultimately, such Islamic substructure requires unique institutional support to consider the practices of Muslim students. Munir, Kate, and Hani found these supports within their schools, but Jasmine and Jenny did not. Within this subculture, Munir, Kate, and Hani were able to perform prayer together, support each other academically, and create opportunities for internships and activism in collaboration with other subcultures and groups within the school.

My participants constructed these subcultures differently. In addition to subcultures that are viewed as formalized resistance to the Eurocentric narratives (Zine, 2000), other forms of these subcultures were evident. For example, less formal subcultures included: a subculture of Muslim peers and friends in which the Muslim identity is shared (Jenny), a subculture of non-Muslim friends in which the Muslim identity is bracketed (Jasmine), and two separate subcultures within the school (Muslim identity is bracketed) and outside the school (Muslim identity is shared) as the case with Jasmine. These less formal subcultures fostered a sense of belonging and underscored how Muslim American teens navigated and negotiated the imposed difference and othering. Obviously, some of the participants negotiated their Muslim identity as they chose the conceal or reveal their Muslim identity depending on the context. Yet, with their visible Muslim identity, *hijabi* females constructed certain spaces within which they could reveal their Muslim identity without engendering a sense of othering (e.g., social circles of Muslim friends).

Not only did the politics of belonging construct boundaries of participation that were maintained and reproduced. It also established the centralization (inclusion) and the

marginalization (exclusion) of particular people and groups (Yuval-Davis, 2001). The process of constructing and reconstructing these boundaries encompasses discursive practices and dominant discourses that deem specific people and groups inferior. Within educational spaces, the Eurocentric institutional practices and discourses displaced my participants to the margin and deemed them outsiders and "marginal" (Spivak, 1993/2009). For example, Muslims' *Eid* holidays are not recognized by the state as an official holiday; thus, schools remain in session and Muslims are granted an unexcused absence, as such. Muslim American teens were faced with the dilemma of missing school to celebrate *Eid,* which necessitated missing instructional time and completing make-up work in addition to the regularly scheduled assignments. On multiple occasions, my participants opted to dismiss *Eid* celebration for continued school attendance and less make-up work or put up with making up work to celebrate *Eid*. Arguably, "what is being negotiated here is not even a 'race or a social type'…but an economic principle of identification through separation" (Spivak, 1993/2009, p. 61). In other words, my participants were excluded from the center not based on race or religion, but through institutionalized practices that identified them as marginals and different. For example, the *Eid* holidays were not perceived as a holiday practice that is worthy of occupying the center; thus, they are dismissed and silenced in contrast to the voices or other groups (e.g., Christians) who are "celebrated." This discursive practice of dismissing the *Eid* holiday indicated that Muslims were different and foreign to the educational system; thus, they are not "celebrated."

Furthermore, my female participants negotiated their dress code to appear more compatible with the dominant Western tradition and as such "normal." Jenny paired her *hijab* with jeans and shirts that appealed to the Western traditions while maintaining modesty. Kate maintained a reserved stance where she incorporated bright colors with loose clothing that also

appealed to the Western norms while she maintained the practice of wearing *hijab*. Nevertheless, Jasmine and Bethany chose not to wear the *hijab,* and their clothes favored the normative Western views of dress, so their appearance did not identify them as Muslims. Jasmine made sure that she looked "pretty" on the first day of high school because she "learned" from TV that this was the culture of high school in which looking pretty could secure friendships and popularity. As for my male participants, their Muslim identity was covert as their appearance appealed to the dominant Western norms. They were never identified as Muslims but were instead associated with other ethnicities such as Indians (Munir) and Mexicans (Hani).

Notably, though Jasmine's dress was Westernized, her opportunity to participate in sports (cheer) was eliminated because the required dress code of the cheerleaders' uniform was in conflict with her views and ideologies of the appropriate dress code. Though she did not cover her head, she adhered to certain modesty standards within which wearing shorts and revealing clothes was unacceptable. Participating in these sports requires individuals either to bracket their Muslim identity or cultural identity in order to assimilate or to miss the opportunity of joining and participating in the sports team (e.g., cheer, gymnastics, etc.). The fact that students are forced to make such choices raises the question of equity and access in our educational institutions.

As first-generation Americans, my participants forged connections with their homeland through frequent visits. Out of nostalgia, their immigrant parents attempted to maintain such connections with their homeland and culture; thus, they made long and costly trips overseas. Nonetheless, the frequency of these trips dissipated upon the passing of the close family members (i.e., mother and father) whom my participants' parents visited. For Jasmine, relocating to Jordan was how her parents attempted to find a compatible space for their children's education

where they can be unapologetically Muslim. Jasmine was able to feel at ease when her family moved to Jordan as her school and her peers were familiar and she was not singled out as "different." Nonetheless, due to financial constraints and the undue stress resulting from the separation of the family, the relocation did not extend beyond one year. Kate's experience with her homeland was similar to Jasmine's. Kate's family moved to Gambia for one year for the purpose of learning the language and maintaining cultural connections. Ironically, Kate does not speak her parents' language, nor does she understand it.

How do Muslim American teens conceptualize their positionality in mathematics classrooms and their identity as doers of mathematics?

Nasir (2012) argues that students can successfully do mathematics and master mathematical strategies without viewing themselves as "math people" (p. 19). Boaler and Greeno (2000) made this distinction between the processes of learning mathematics and mathematics identity construction. My participants' narratives encompassed stories of their actual state of affairs (i.e., their *actual identity*) (Sfard & Prusak, 2005) in which they did not view themselves as "math people." Despite the access to AP and honors mathematics courses and having high grades in mathematics subjects (i.e., their *designated identity*) (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), my participants did not view themselves as "math people" and preferred a career outside the field of mathematics (e.g., Munir, Bethany, and Kate). Kate, who also scored high in mathematics and is currently enrolled in an Honors mathematics course, shared the same views, as she declared that mathematics "is not her strongest subject." Nonetheless, grades, as a discursive text, played an integral role that categorized and grouped particular students together. Hani strived to make "good" grades in mathematics because, for him, grades told the story of how smart he was in mathematics. These grades also controlled opportunity and access to advanced mathematics

courses. Bethany did not believe that her grades were reflective of her ability in mathematics despite the fact that she scored high in mathematics. This gap between student's designated and actual identities is found to be closely related to students' mathematical fluency in tackling mathematical problems and challenging contexts (Sfard and Prusak, 2005). Students' mathematical fluency or proficiency constructs an actual identity (how students view themselves in mathematics) that is consistent with their designated identity (how others view them in mathematics). My participants' narratives reflected lack of mathematical fluency; thus, the inconsistency between their designated and actual identities.

Being that learning is crucial to identity construction, Boaler (2002) suggests that mathematics teaching practices that focus on textbook exercises and drill and practice produce different mathematical knowledge and proficiency that students will be unable to extend to new situations. Within this traditional approach to teaching, students' agency and authority are almost absent. Students are positioned as passive learners who are a tasked with receiving and applying the information presented in class. Therefore, my participants reported fragile mathematics identities upon transitioning from hands-on experiences in elementary school to a more abstract fast-paced instruction in middle and high school. After viewing mathematics as being "fun" and thinking of themselves as "good" in mathematics, many of them reported that mathematics after middle school seemed to be ill-contextualized and disconnected from their real-life experiences. Notwithstanding the recent mathematics reform efforts that call for conceptual understanding, contextualized content of mathematics, and project-based learning, my participants in both standards and honors mathematics classes reported a traditional, static, and content-focused teaching of mathematics. Most of my participants developed a sense of dislike or hate for mathematics after leaving elementary school when the focus of teaching mathematics was on the

content rather than on the process. Most of them conceded that Algebra played a role in creating their disconnected and fragile identity as previous mathematics teaching did not prepare them for the abstract conceptualization of the Algebra topics. Moreover, those who did not express a dislike for mathematics (i.e., Munir) rejected mathematics as a discipline for their future career aspiration. This rejection stemmed from the "conflict between the practices in which [students] engaged, and their developing identities as people" (Boaler, 2002, p. 44). This conflict presented mathematics to the students as a discipline that was irrelevant and invaluable to their daily lives. My participants viewed the discipline of mathematics as an isolated subject that is required for certain career choices such as engineering but not as a discipline that has the potential of contributing to the betterment of our lives. Coupled with the encountered difficulty of the subject, mathematics was rejected by my participants as a career choice.

Within the sociocultural theory, identity is viewed as informed by the social context within which student collaboration, discussions, and participation become integral components of learning mathematics (Ogbu, 1987; Wenger, 1998). Arguably, the means and techniques of how students participate in mathematics classrooms influenced their mathematics identities (Boaler, 2002; Boaler & Greeno, 2000). For the Muslim American students in my study, the transition between schools (elementary to middle or middle to high) sometimes engendered a sense of disengagement and anxiety. Fearing being judged paired with being unfamiliar with the students and the teachers, some of my participants (Bethany, Kate, and Jasmine) chose to remain in the margin and not participate in mathematics class. Consequently, their disengagement within the class adversely impacted their learning of mathematics. They hesitated to ask clarifying questions and relied on themselves or different sources of learning the mathematical concepts they did not understand in class (e.g., Khan Academy). In contrast, Jenny, Munir, and Hani

showed less hesitation to engage and participate in classroom discussions despite feeling anxious about the new place. Having familiar faces from their former schools, my participants felt less nervous and more included in the new environment on their first day of high school. Moreover, students' positionality in the classroom and the ways they carried themselves as students are influenced by the microculture and norms of the mathematics classroom (Cobb, Gresalfi, & Hodge, 2009). Thus, the way the teacher constructed classroom discussion and conducted teaching informed students' positionalities and how they view themselves as people and as learners. Consequently, the teens in my study felt engaged and relevant in the spaces where their agency and authority were centered. Students reported feeling excited and motivated about learning mathematics whenever the teachers facilitated collaborative and group projects or discussions. Additionally, they recounted that the teachers who made mathematics class collaborative and relevant to students' lives were their "favorite" teachers. Nonetheless, this was not evident in most of their mathematics classrooms in high school and middle school, which contributed to their fragile and negative mathematics identity.

Historically, the educational institutions in the U.S. were constructed on the premise of centering the Western and Eurocentric knowledge and thought despite the substantial contributions of the Arabi-Islamic culture (Said, 2005). This colonial discourse becomes "an apparatus of power . . . an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences." (Bhabha, 1983, 23). As a result, Muslim American students realized that they are not represented in mathematics education and are marginalized with respect to their ancestors' contributions to the field. Not only did they not see themselves represented in the mathematics curricula, but they also believed that they were ill-represented in Social Studies and World History disciplines where some sort of references to Muslims were

evident. The history of Islam in the U.S. is negatively connected to the terror attack on 9/11 masking history and contributions of the Islamic civilization. Moreover, my participants surrendered to the colonial thought that mathematics is an abstract discipline and as such should be culture-free. Within this perspective, it was acceptable to them not to have Muslims represented in the curriculum as mathematics is all about numbers, not people. They also accepted the separation between church and state in which their religion had no room in the educational institutions they inhabited. This marginalization was reflected in how the schools' holidays were mirrored with Christians' religious holidays and not with the Muslims' holidays. This resonated with Sandoval's (2000) argument that Western consciousness disperses rhetoric that is "called on to tempt, inhabit, and shape not only the most obedient and deserving citizen-subject, but also the most rebellious agent of social change" (p. 118). The rhetoric of a law or a rule is a manifestation of power that becomes a discourse of domination and renders obedience and surrender, as such (Foucault, 1990). Therefore, it was accepted by my participants that it was the law that separated their religious celebration of *Eid* from the center as being against established rules. They also accepted the law of the sports dress code for the uniform as being widely-accepted discourse and *cannot* be changed for a few.

Significance of the Study

When I embarked on writing my research, the news of stereotypical and prejudice treatments of Muslims in general and Muslim women wearing the *hijab* dominated media outlets and went viral on social media. Moreover, aggressions against certain bodies that were imagined and mistaken for Muslims occurred often which indicated hate and resentment towards Muslims in the U.S. I recalled a shocking video of a man who viciously attacked a *hijabi* teen in a U.S. hospital in Michigan, stripping her agency and illegitimatizing her freedom of expression. How

was her head scarf threatening to him? What signaled terror and/or hate? Do Muslim teens and women need to give up their choice of wearing the headscarf to ensure their safety?

With the emerging divisive political discourse constructed and circulated by the president of the U.S., the alienation, othering, and trivialization of Muslims in the country became a normalized discourse that was widely institutionalized. These discourses trickled down to educational spaces impacting our youth and young adults. Teens in my study shared their fear, sense of not belonging, and struggle of inhabiting a hybrid or in-between space within which they felt threatened and marginalized According to Bhabha (1990), "all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity…[that] is the third space which enables other positions to emerge…, sets up new structures of authority,… [and] a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (p. 207). They also shared how the sociopolitical discourse of the media marginalized and alienated them in their own country. While my participants shared various experiences with respect to their struggle to fit into a society that deemed them inferior, their stories, power struggles, and their positionalities varied. Therefore, educational research must interrogate the Western educational discourses and institutionalized practices marginalizing minorities and bring to the forth the experiences and the voices of the Other.

It is crucial to mathematics education research to illuminate the experiences of Muslim American youth in our public high schools to construct and create spaces for them that are inclusive and nurturing. This study contributes to the educational research by bringing attention to the marginalized experiences of the Muslim American Students in the educational spaces and how these experiences inform their learning of mathematics. Thinking of Islamophobia as a postcolonial concept that raced the religion of Islam, this *anti-Islam racism* racialized the experiences of Muslims in general and Muslim youths particular. Thus, it is prudent to lend an

observant eye to their positionalities in schools and how the discourse of Islamophobia informs their learning and socialization. In addition, the study highlights the need for textbooks, curricula, and contextual learning to be inclusive of Muslim American students' ways of knowing and how they make sense of the world around them. Being that identity is regarded as an important tool for understanding students' learning in school, the study contributes to current identity research to include Muslim Americans as a minority student population that is missing from mathematics identity research.

Limitations

During the process of conducting research with my participants within the framing of postcolonialism, I was constantly cognizant of my word choice as I wrote about my participants. My positionality as the researcher who is transcribing, analyzing and writing about my participants, entailed a powerful position as I interpreted my participants' experiences and wrote about them. As I attempted to interrogate the Western and traditional research thoughts within the postcolonial theoretical framework, I could not escape using the methodological language and labels that were regarded as tools to "legitimize one's scholarship" (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015, p. 12). Such labels and language are part and parcel of the colonizer's language and discourses. Attending to the requirements for dissertation writing, using headings and titles to describe my participants, and adhering to some methodological conventions that are accepted as a reflection of *good* research somehow invoked the colonizer's language and practice. Despite my efforts to (un)settle Western practices, the process was incomplete and fell short of perfection. Being trained within Western academia, I was complicit in inscribing the discourses and the dichotomy of the colonizer that postcolonialism interrogates. I fell into the trap of the signifying machine within which my research practices encompassed using signifiers to refer to the subject or the

signified such as the Other, the marginal, and the non-Western. Therefore, it is evident throughout that my writing could not "entirely escape the reductionist use of the dichotomies and the essence" (Clifford, 2003, pp. 122-123).

Furthermore, I employed Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze my participants' narratives and texts as I attempted to identify the discourses of Islamophobia and Western's discursive practices that informed my participants' positionality. Rooted in the colonist language as a "historicized, Eurocentric-Orientalist implicit program of action and an analytical tool", CDA views language as a social practice (Azeez, 2015, p.115). Examining CDA within postcolonialism "functions as a manual that assists the colonial apparatus in surveilling, gauging, ranking and subjectifying Oriental subjectivity and resistance according to imperial exigencies" (p. 119) within which the resistance of the subject is not considered. Hence, I argue that it was not inclusive of my participants' languages and cultural practices. How does CDA evolve with non-Western linguistic practices? Consequently, my analysis might have aided the (re)inscription of what postcolonialism interrogates. I am also aware that theories of language are rooted in the humanist school of thought within which much of the work has been done to define and identify the essence of things (St. Pierre, 2000). Thus, language has been used within humanism to construct binaries, categories, and grids that postcolonial theories critique and deconstruct. Nonetheless, I am comforted by St. Pierre's (2000) statement,

> One of the most significant effects of deconstruction is that it foregrounds the idea that language does not simply point to preexisting things and ideas but rather helps to construct them and, by extension, the world as we know it. In other words, we word the world. The ''way it is'' is not ''natural.'' We have constructed the world as it is through language and cultural practice, and we can also deconstruct and reconstruct it (p. 483).

The process of deconstruction will never be complete and to accept these failures is to continue to ask questions, think, and use language differently (St. Pierre, 2000).

Implications of *Ziyyarah*

The precarious worlds we simultaneously inhabit are constantly changing and "have never been uncertain [and] fragmentary" (Cheek, 2007). Therefore, we are constantly wrestling with the impact of our research and how it contributes to the change in social and educational spaces. As I wrote this section, I could not escape thinking of the uncertainty of how the *Ziyyarah* might have contributed to the research practices, to creating new knowledge, and to unsettle colonial and Western tradition of research. Despite the deliverance from prescribed methods that I experienced with *Ziyyarah* practice, the uncertainty tensions loomed over my writing and thinking of *Ziyyarah*. How did *Ziyyarah*, conversing with my participants in a naturalistic and unprescribed manner, contribute to creating new knowledge? What were the moral and pedagogical interpretive associated with the *Ziyyarah* as an inquiry approach? What did my participants feel about this research practice? While I might not be able to render the answer to these questions in this section, instead, I offer how my conceptualization of the *Ziyyarah* interview rendered my knowledge about my participants.

First, it is essential to emphasize that I (re)constructed the *Ziyyarah* interview as a participatory mode of knowing within which the researcher and the researched were engaged in making sense of the experiences. The researcher was not an objective body nor an outsider to the research. Therefore, *Ziyyarah* "privilege[d] subjectivity, personal knowledge, and the specialized knowledge of oppressed people and groups" (Denzin & Giardina, 2007); thus, it interrogated and unsettled the Western inscribed interviewing methods that privilege Eurocentric knowledge. *Ziyyarah* decentered the narratives of my participants as being the only mode of knowledge to

engage in the materiality of the space and encompassed my participants' cultural practices, language, and family value and structure. Hence, it was guided by the ethical imperative of making my participants present in the research as their interest, subjectivities, and knowledge were included and respected (Smith, 1999). Hence, the space (i.e., participant's home) was entangled with the subject and was an important aspect of the participant's social life (Smith, 1999). The way people arranged their homes and displayed artifacts and cultural objects along with the subject and his/her family formed an assemblage of data that aided the creation of new knowledge. The *Ziyyarah* empowered the participants and their family members (i.e., the mother and sometimes siblings) to assume an active role in the research practice. In other words, my participants and their family steered the process of the interview as they coordinated the seating arrangement, the time, and who was given access to the interview. The parent participated in the conversations and so did any of the siblings who were present. Laughter, side discussions, and having tea and desserts were all part of the transgressive data that contributed to the sense-making process of the experiences. Thus, the interview was an engagement in conversations as opposed to passive responding to a predetermined set of questions. This was liberating! The pedagogies of oppression and colonization are turned into pedagogies of hope and freedom (Smith, 1999).

Second, drawing from the indigenous projects that Smith (1999) delineated to resist colonialism, *Ziyyarah* responds to the decolonizing methodologies that "create, name, restore, democratize, reclaim, protect, and celebrate lost histories and cultural practices" (Denzin & Giardina, 2007). The *Ziyyarah* interview undertook a postcolonial undergirding that involved "specify[ing] and reinforce[ing] particular form of resistance to dominant social hierarchy" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 68) focusing on issues of power and subjectivities. Within the *Ziyyarah,* the

binary of researcher/researched was interrogated and, to an extent, dissipated on the premise of conversational, intra-active, and naturalistic interview. This form of interview transformed the power intensities between the researcher and the researched to become more of a dynamical flow of power instead of the static and one-directional form seemingly evident in traditional interviews where the researcher assumed all power and control. While "[d]iscourse transmits and produces power…[it] also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault, 1990, p. 101). The dynamics of discourses evident in *Ziyyarah* (i.e., conversational and interactional) *thwarted* the one-directional power relations within the space. The power relations, though never absent and always in presence, undertook a multidimensional flow as opposed to the hierarchical vertical level wherein the researcher is at the top level and the researched is at the receiving end of the power relation. Instead, power relations in the *Ziyyarah* were figured as "force[s] that [circulate] horizontally, on a lateral and flattened plane" wherein the "identities-as-positions" are equally accessed (Sandoval, 2000, p. 72). In other words, the subject intersectionality of race, gender, ethnicity, and social class could be expressed, and positionalities could be undertaken without the pressure of opposing forces of prescribed methods. These power relations made space for horizontal metaphors such as insider/outsider and center/margin that marked the in-between experiences and describe the positionalities (Smith, 1999) of my participants.

Third, *Ziyyarah* interview came with certain challenges that I encountered at the time of conducting my interviews. First and foremost, *Ziyyarah* blurred the boundaries between the private and public sphere of the participants. The individuals who accepted to participate in the *Ziyyarah* interview, where the researcher as a strange individual was invited to the participant's intimate space, risked bringing the private to the public. Bringing to the fore such private

intimate experiences of family and home practices could have potentially made my participants vulnerable. For that reason, three of my participants opted to meet with me at a café instead of inviting me to their homes. One of the two participants, Munir, was a student at the school I worked at as a Principal where he was in first grade. However, I was not in social contact with his parents within the Muslim community in the city; thus, even though they knew me from previous interactions, this was not enough for me to be invited to their home. Bethany was the other participant who chose not to meet with me at home. Because I had never met before the interview, it was taken for granted that she would not invite me to her home. Furthermore, though Kate did not invite me to her house, she invited me to another intimate place she frequented (i.e., the mosque) which was how she compromised my request to come to her house.

The *Ziyyarah* underscored an essential element of conducting research with the Other, which was establishing connections and trust with the participants to ensure their participation in this methodological practice. Reflecting on how I (re)constructed the *Ziyyarah* interview, I would have made plans to create such connections by informally meeting the participants and their parents before the scheduled interview. Relationships of trust and familiarity need to be constructed within a relatively short period of time within which the researcher and the researched exchange roles and establish personal connections. Moreover, establishing connections and trust with the participants requires doing the same with the parents, considering that my participants were minors. Arguably, parents might have been more receptive to the *Ziyyarah* concept had I contacted them in person before the interview. Thus, for future consideration of employing the *Ziyyarah* as a mode of inquiry, I would consider (re)thinking of inclusive practices of both the participant and the parent that have the potential of building trust and familiarity (e.g., informal meeting in a coffee shop).

Lastly, I am reminded of the incomplete process of decolonizing research in which the refinement of the methodological practices is not enough in the transformation of educational practices and in constructing spaces that are inclusive of the Other. Thus,

> [d]ecolonizing research is not simply about challenging or making refinements to qualitative research. It is much a broader but still purposeful agenda for transforming the institutions of research, the deep underlying structures and taken for granted ways of organizing, conducting and disseminating research and knowledge. (Smith, 2005, p. 6)

Though *Ziyyarah* was inclusive of the non-Western cultural practices of my participants, the process of using the method in decolonizing research is becoming and still in progress.

Future Research

"If identity does not proceed, in a straight unbroken line, from some fixed origin, how are we to understand its formation?" (Hall, 1994, p. 395). This question calls for opening up research to examine and conceptualize the identity of marginalized communities, particularly in education. Because of the complexities and the multiplicities of Muslim identity and mathematics identity, future research needs to consider non-essentialist qualitative approaches to research that encompass the Other's sense-making systems and beliefs outside the Western and Eurocentric thought. Methods like the *Ziyyarah* have the potential to include the Other and to open up the research tradition to other thoughts and ways of knowing. Moreover, the examination of the compounded forms of oppression, using the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), offers an opportunity to analyze the complexity of these forms of racism and oppression and provides an insightful tool towards understanding identity in education (Bullock, 2018). Examining the learning of mathematics for Muslim American students at the intersection of race, gender, ethnicity, and class renders an understanding of this population within critical

mathematics education. It also opens the space for educational research to "include non-Eurocentric cultures and communities whose mathematics are not granted legitimacy within academic mathematics discourse." (Bullock, 2018, p. 125). Further, educational research within the field of mathematics identity and conceptualization of belonging and citizenship needs to expand on the deconstruction methods of critical discourse analysis to examine how these subtle and seemingly innocent structures of educational institutions and curricula contribute to the othering of non-Western and non-Eurocentric communities such as Muslim Americans.

While this study examined Macro-sociopolitical discourses and their influence on Muslim American students' identities, there is a need to examine the micro level of the discourses that occur in classrooms and inform Muslim American students' learning and positionalities. A closer examination of the interactions in classrooms, mathematics discourse, and teachers' practices has the potential of contributing to understanding how Muslim American students learn mathematics in the classroom. Teachers' views of Muslim American students can be solicited through interviews and observations which could contribute to understanding the micro discourses that inform their identity construction in public schools.

Furthermore, future research may also examine the interplay of space or geographic location in the construction and negotiation of the Muslim American Muslim identity and mathematics learning. The space becomes "a particular, unique, point of intersection" as "it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular place" (Massy, 1994, p. 154). It is widely accepted that the larger sociopolitical contexts inform the construction of social and learning identities; thus, the context, including the space and the location, informs the process of the negotiation of these identities. Although the study moved to consider the cultural space of the participants through employing the *Ziyyarah*

method, the larger geolocation and space was not taken into consideration (i.e., the context of the city in relation to the larger U.S.). As the Muslim population differs from one city to another, it is predicted that their experiences may not be similar. Hence, the future research agenda with Muslim American students should take into consideration how the place or the geographic location contribute to our understanding of the process of their identity construction and learning of mathematics.

Conclusion

> "[O]n the general level, the possibility of explanation carries the presupposition of an explainable (even if not fully) universe and an explaining (even if imperfectly) subject. These presuppositions assure our being. Explaining, we exclude the possibility of the *radically* heterogeneous" (Spivak, 1998/2006, p. 143).

While I shared my interpretations of my participants' experiences, I could not escape simplifying what is complex and entangled by reducing my participants' experiences and positionality into text. I felt a sense of failure "with every text in existence, no sovereign individual writes in full control" (Spivak, 1998/2006, p. 147). I could not escape inserting my subjectivities as I shared their marginality while explaining and elaborating on their experiences. Hence, "every explanation must secure and assure a certain kind of being-in-the world, which might as well be called our politics" (Spivak, 1998/2006, p. 143). Therefore, my research built on the engagement of the research and the researched in understanding and constructing knowledge about self and the world around us. Though I am unable to bracket my subjectivities, I built on them to co-construct and co-create knowledge about my participants.

This study brings attention to the Muslim American communities in general and to the youth in particular as a racialized population within the post-9/11 and Trump era. By examining

how Muslim American students conceptualized their Muslim American identity and how they conceptualized their mathematics identity and their learning in school, I attempted to stir further discussion and deconstructive research practices to interrogate the Western tradition for education in the U.S. particularly in mathematics. Western thought constructed mathematics as a culture and value-free subject that excluded non-Western communities and cultures and reinforced the postcolonial dichotomies and discourses. Moreover, it has been argued that mathematics education in the U.S. is rooted in the Eurocentric thought and is constructed to serve the White majority, thereby marginalizing racialized and non-Western minorities. However, it is important to note that the Eurocentric traditional teaching and teacher-led mathematics instruction described in this study is not reflective of current recommendations for mathematics instruction (NCTM, 2000). Thus, while it is apparent that traditional mathematics instruction does not meet the needs of the racialized and non-Western minorities, it can be argued that such instruction fails to meet the needs of any student groups.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Guide

The purpose of this unstructured interview is to examine how Muslim American youth conceptualize their Muslim American identity as well as mathematics identity.

Entry point: Tell me about your school from early elementary grades to current grade. You can begin from whenever you desire.

Possible guiding questions:

1. What does it mean to be a Muslim and American?
2. How do you display your Muslim identity?
3. What do you think of the news about Muslims, Muslim travel ban, and the recent presidential remarks about Muslims?
4. Where and with who do you socialize in school and outside school?
5. How do you feel about learning mathematics, mathematics classroom, peers, and teacher?
6. How do you participate in class discussion? Activities? Any related events?
7. How do your peers participate in the mathematics classroom?
8. Describe to me your feelings and thoughts as you walked into your new mathematics classroom when you were a freshman in high school?
9. What do you think a "good" math student looks like? How do you view yourself as a mathematics learner?
10. How do you think your math teacher views you as a math student? Your parents? Your peers?
11. Tell me about a mathematics classroom in which you considered yourself "a good" or a "struggling" mathematics learner.

Appendix B: IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board
Office of Sponsored Programs
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

June 8, 2018

PI Name: Wesam Salem
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Celia Anderson
Submission Type: Initial
Title: Learning Mathematics While Muslim: Conceptualizing Muslim American Students' Mathematics Identities in the Context of Islamophobia
IRB ID: #PRO-FY2018-657

Expedited Approval: June 8, 2018
Expiration: June 8, 2019

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. This IRB approval has an expiration date, an approved renewal must be in effect to continue the project prior to that date. If approval is not obtained, the human consent form(s) and recruiting material(s) are no longer valid and any research activities involving human subjects must stop.

2. When the project is finished or terminated, a completion form must be submitted.

3. No change may be made in the approved protocol without prior board approval.

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis.