From Bubbles to the Pond: High School Transitions of Muslim Adolescents from American Private K-8 Islamic Schools to Secular Public High Schools

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This dissertation is dedicated to the Muslim and other observant youths who choose to uphold their identity and values in a secular setting despite the many challenges they encounter as a result.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

FROM BUBBLES TO THE POND: HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITIONS OF MUSLIM ADOLESCENTS FROM AMERICAN PRIVATE K-8 ISLAMIC SCHOOLS TO SECULAR PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

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The transition from middle school to high school disrupts continuity in adolescents' lives and forces them to make various adjustments. Research spanning the past thirty years consistently shows that students' academic, personal, and interpersonal functioning suffers after making such a transition. The research further highlights that some combination of three sets of factors shapes such transitions for various groups of students: (a) magnitude of changes between the feeder and receiving schools, (b) adolescents' personal and background characteristics, and (c) their positioning in the national socio-political discourse. This study extends high school transition research to a rapidly growing, but largely overlooked, private feeder school and the student population whose identity has emerged as the new "other" in the current national political discourse.

What changes and challenges do Muslim adolescents encounter in their high school transitions when they move from American K-8 Islamic schools to secular public

high schools? What adjustments do they make as a result? What difficulties, if any, do they face in maintaining and supporting their Islamic identity and religio-cultural lifestyle in such schools? If they experience anti-Muslim/Islam prejudices and discrimination, how do those affect their academic, personal, and social functioning during their high school years? In an attempt to answer these questions, this study explored the process involved in high school transitions, specifically, when Muslim youths move from American K-8 Islamic to secular public high schools. A qualitative "grounded" theory design involving multiple in-depth interviews and follow-up phone calls and emails was used to investigate the transition process.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The move to a high school disrupts continuity in adolescents' lives and forces them to make various adjustments. Research spanning the past thirty years consistently shows that students' academic, personal, and interpersonal functioning suffers after making such a school transition (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Benner, 2011). The research further highlights that some combination of three sets of factors shapes the transition outcomes for various groups of students: (a) magnitude of changes between the feeder and receiving schools, (b) adolescents' personal and background characteristics, and (c) their positioning in the national socio-political discourse. While private religious K-8 Islamic schools and Muslim communities across America have seen a rapid growth in numbers during the past two decades (Merry & Driessen, 2005), and both Islam and Muslims have emerged as the new "other" in post-9/11 national political discourse (Jackson, 2010), not a single study existed in the current research literature at the onset of this study that investigated high school transitions of the Muslim adolescents when they move from K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools.

What changes and challenges do Muslim adolescents encounter in their high school transitions when they move from private K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools in the United States? What kinds of adjustments do they make as a result? What difficulties, if any, do they face in maintaining and supporting their Islamic identity and religio-cultural lifestyle in such schools? If they experience anti-Muslim/Islam

prejudices and discrimination, how do those affect their personal, academic, and social functioning during their 9-12 school years? These are some of the questions that are the underlying foundation for this study. In an attempt to answer these questions, this study explores the process involved in Muslim adolescents' transitions when they move from K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools. The following sections provide the context of the study, the statement of the problem, purpose and the research questions, and significance of the study.

Context of the Study

Challenges of High School Transitions

Adolescents negotiate a variety of complex developmental and societal transitions as they move from childhood to adulthood (e.g., pubertal onset, changes in peer networks, etc.). It is within this backdrop that they must navigate their transition from junior high or middle school, to high school. Contrary to the developmental transitions however, which are continuous and gradual, high school transitions are abrupt, and interrupt the continuity of life (Rice, 2001). They subject adolescents to various organizational and social discontinuities (Anderson, Jacobson, Schramm, & Splittgerber, 2000). As adolescents move to a high school, they often encounter a larger and more bureaucratic organization with increased student population sizes and heterogeneity; changes in the structure of the school day; more teachers with varying teaching styles, rules, and expectations; more choices in curricular and extracurricular activities; stricter school policies; anonymity and role loss; and a more complex social system (Anderson et al.; Barber & Olsen, 2004). For many, entry into ninth grade also marks their first

exposure to a fully departmentalized curriculum, near universal academic tracking, and high-stakes grading (Benner & Graham, 2007). In such an environment, their academic, personal, and interpersonal functioning suffers (Barber & Olsen). It is no coincidence, therefore, that the student attrition between grades 9 and 10 has tripled in the past 30 years nationwide, from 4% to 13% (Abrams & Haney, 2004).

High school transitions affect virtually all adolescents in some way. Many, for example, initially experience some declines in their average grades (Rice, 2001; Barber & Olsen, 2004). Even those who have been labeled "gifted" or "high-achieving" in their middle schools, find transition into high school to be an unpleasant experience (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998). Declines in school support, satisfaction, and sense of belonging; less positive attitudes toward subjects; decrease in self-concept and self-esteem; declines in parental support; experiences of stereotypical encounters, prejudice, racism, and discrimination; and more negative reactions to teachers and peers have also been documented (see Barber & Olsen; Benner & Graham, 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Nieto, 2005). Fortunately, for most adolescents, when adequate preparedness and support are present in their lives, these changes are fairly small and short-lived. There are many students however, who experience large changes in one or more of the above-mentioned areas. Their gender, prior problematic schooling experiences, the combination of socio-economic status and race/ethnicity, school location (e.g. rural, inner-city or urban), and beyond-control concurrent stressful life events (e.g., parental divorce, house move, etc.) contribute to "the greatest difficulty" in making successful transitions (Anderson et al., 2000). As a result, they are far more likely to feel "stressed" or "being

left out," to be retained in ninth grade, channeled into lower academic tracks, or dropout altogether (Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Roderick & Camburn, 1999; Smith, 2006).

In essence, "systemic" school transitions, such as entering a new high school, in conjunction with myriad changes in adolescents themselves, are unique in their nature and process (Rice, 2001). Inherently, such transitions involve substantial changes in the new environment in which adolescents find themselves, which require adaptation, for example, in roles and behavior (Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, & Sanchez, 2000). How students adjust to those changes is shaped by their interactions with the new environment (Rice). One factor in the adjustment equation is the characteristics of the new setting, and the extent to which they differ from that of the pre-transition setting (Kelly, Ryan, Altman, & Stelzner, 2000). Additionally, the personal and background characteristics that adolescents bring to the transition affect their response to the new environment, and contribute to their adjustment (Benner & Graham, 2007; Kelly et al.; Rice). For minorities, residual effects of racism, i.e., stereotypes and prejudices, and their manifestations in daily schooling experiences, and social stratification perpetuated, albeit unintentionally, by macro-level education policies, structures, and processes, comprise a third factor that influences their interactions with the new environment and their adjustment outcomes (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Nieto, 2005). Ultimately, some combination of these three factors shapes adolescents' post-transition adjustment outcomes, which are either positive, and enhance adolescents' resilience against stress and increase their chances of engagement; or negative, and compromise their chances of integration and academic success (Benner & Graham; Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Rice).

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Muslim-Americans, Islamic Schooling, and Transitions to Public High Schools

In the absence of an official census, estimates of the rapidly growing Muslim-American population vary widely from 2 million to 7 million (U.S. Department of State, 2009). The Pew Research Center (2007) provides a more conservative estimate of the Muslim population to be around 2.35 million, with approximately 850,000 below the age of 18. Regardless of estimates, the Muslim youth's presence in the American K-12 education system is significant. Although a vast majority of the Muslim parents send their children to public schools (Merry & Driessen, 2005), the number of parents who send their children to private Islamic schools is growing rapidly (Badawi, 2006; Joseph & Riedel, 2008). In addition to their children's academic well-being, Muslim parents choose Islamic schools for religious education, Islamic environment, and preservation of their children's religion and identity (Badawi, 2006). Moreover, in the post-9/11 national and geo-political environment, fears of prejudice, discrimination, and safety are forcing more parents to choose Islamic schools for their children (Joseph & Riedel). This shift is evident from the rapid increase in the number of full-time Islamic schools in the past two decades, i.e., 50 in 1988-89, 250 in 1999-2000, and 370 to 400 in 2001-2002 (see Badawi, 2005; Maughan, 2003, as cited in Merry & Driessen).

Despite the rapid growth in number of full-time Islamic schools, an overwhelming majority of these schools still offer only primary or K-8 classes, and very few are high schools or K-12 schools (Merry & Driessen, 2005). "This trend is likely to continue due to the Islamic schools' lack of facilities and resources, and the lack of programs and services" (Badawi, 2006, p. 28). Islamic schools are unable to provide, either completely

or at a satisfactory level, amenities such as fully equipped science labs, physical education facilities and/or equipment, and libraries for the higher grades (Merry & Driessen). The lack of finances also affects these schools' ability to offer competitive salaries to hire and retain a highly qualified teaching staff (Badawi). Even the well-established Islamic schools do not offer additional programs and services that resource-rich public high schools offer, such as gifted and talented programs, special education classes, ESL and other remedial programs, extracurricular activities, and elective courses (Merry & Driessen). As a result, Muslim youths from these schools typically move to public high schools (Alghorani, 2003; Zine, 2007).

Magnitude of institutional changes. American K-8 Islamic schools are educational institutions, funded and administered by American Muslim communities, and are designed to teach their children some variation of the core curriculum taught in public schools along with Arabic language (the language of Quran) and Islam (Badawi, 2006). Additionally, such schools are typically structured to facilitate Islamic practices and development of Muslim identity (Alghorani, 2003). Additionally, they "…provide a culturally congruent space and a more seamless transition between the values, beliefs, and practices of the home and school environment. They also provide a space free from racism and religious discrimination that many [Muslim] students encounter within public schools" (Zine, 2007, p.1).

K-8 Islamic schools are different from public high schools in several organizational, social, and cultural aspects. For example, they: (a) are generally home-like and smaller in size, with smaller student populations, low student-teacher ratios, and

a majority of female teachers (Badawi, 2006); (b) offer Islamic education and religious practices as a core part of their academic programs, which also offers positive assessment of Islamic teachings, practices, and historical personalities (Alghorani, 2003; Badawi); (c) are guided by Muslim cultural values and norms in dress code, personal, and interpersonal conduct (Zine, 2007); (d) follow daily routines, academic practices, and rules regarding time-off for prayers, modified schedule in Ramadan, and extended school closings for the two Muslim holidays of Eid, and thus providing an "identity-safe" environment for the Muslim youths (Zine); (e) actively involve parents and local Muslim communities in school governance and their children's education (Alghorani; Badawi); (f) provide familiar faces among peers, teachers, and other school adults due to the direct parental and community involvement (Badawi; Zine); and (g) seek to neutralize social differences based on race, ethnicity, class, language or nationality because Islamic teachings ban such distinctions (see Al-Romi, 2000). In addition to the organizational culture, the youth culture in these schools also conforms to Muslim cultural values and norms (Alghorani; Badawi).

On the other hand, American public high schools: (a) are large and bureaucratic in nature, with higher perceived anonymity and safety risks for youths (Mizelle, 2005; Rice, 2001); (b) are guided by secular and Judeo-Christian cultural values and norms (Hodge, 2002; Sabry & Bruna, 2006); (c) follow somewhat different routines, academic practices, and rules in their day-to-day functioning, some of which conflict with the personal and interpersonal conduct required by Muslim religious identity (see Hodge; Sabry & Bruna; Zine, 2007); (d) use secular curriculum and many different instructional approaches,

some of which can be biased against Muslims or conflict with Muslim norms (see Hodge, Sabry & Bruna); (e) discourage active or more meaningful parental involvement in their children's education (Newman, Newman, Griffen, O'Connor, & Spas, 2007); (f) are new settings for the adolescents, which bring new teachers and support staff as well as peers from various feeder schools (Mizelle); and (g) have different attitudes about social differences, i.e., race and other social categorizations are part of their daily functioning (Nieto, 2005). Above all, the prevalent youth culture in public high schools, with its culturally permissive norms of consuming alcohol and drugs, partying, dating, and premarital sexual relations, also contradicts Islamic teachings on personal and inter-personal conduct (Hodge; Sabry & Bruna; Zine).

As a result, high school transitions of Muslim youths, from K-8 Islamic schools to public high schools, involve confronting and adjusting to a much greater magnitude of simultaneous institutional changes i.e., organizational, social, and cultural, than their peers from public middle, junior high, or K-8 schools.

Personal and background characteristics. Muslim adolescents, who attend American K-8 Islamic schools, also possess many distinct personal and background characteristics that can greatly influence their transitions. Those who attend Islamic schools for many years, tend to adopt an Islamic lifestyle and identity, and develop a strong sense of belonging to the Muslim community (Alghorani, 2003; Badawi, 2006). Adopting an Islamic lifestyle and Muslim identity in a public school, both at the personal and interpersonal level, can be particularly challenging for observant Muslim youths (Hodge, 2002; Sabry & Bruna, 2006; Zine, 2001, 2007). Moreover, they also possess

additional social identities based on gender, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, some or all of which can also be a source of conflicts in social settings of public schools (Zine, 2001). Finally, two-thirds of American Muslims are first generation immigrants, and African Americans constitute the bulk of the remaining one-third (Pew Research Center, 2007). Parents from both groups may prefer a passive role in their children's school life due to either a personal lack of understanding of the American public school system or lack of trust based on a history of racism (see Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Nieto, 2005; Sabry & Bruna). As a result, in both cases, Muslim children can be deprived of parental support during their transitions to public high schools.

On the personal level, compliance with two of the five basic tenants of Islam, i.e., *Salat* or five daily prayers (at least one of which falls during normal school hours) and month-long fasting during *Ramadan*, become mandatory for Muslim adolescents when they reach puberty (Hodge, 2002). However, observation of the prayers and fasting have been found to be difficult (Carter & El Hindi, 1999; Hodge). For example, if the lunar month of Ramadan falls during the academic year, students who are fasting may not have the physical stamina to complete rigorous tasks, such as those that might be required of them in physical education classes (Hodge). Moreover, attempts to follow Islamic injunctions in the area of modesty can also be difficult in public schools. For example, Muslim youths, especially girls, may prefer to wear sweat pants and long-sleeved T-shirts instead of shorts and tank tops in physical education classes (Hodge; Shaikh, 1995). Finally, taking time-off for the two religious holidays of *Eid* (which follow the lunar calendar), can also be challenging and stressful if those fall during a school year. It can

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result in missed homework or tests, and added workload and stress (Sabry & Bruna, 2006). Perhaps most important, a lack of understanding on the part of public schools regarding accommodation can, in such situations, contribute to a decline in Muslim students' self-esteem, sense of school belonging, and increase the likelihood of their disengagement (see Sabry & Bruna; Zine, 2001).

At the interpersonal level, physical contact between members of the opposite sex is limited within Islamic tradition (Hodge, 2002). Mixing, even with limited physical contact, can be challenging for Muslim adolescents in a culture, where inadvertent touching and casual hugs, as well as partying and dances, are common occurrences (Hodge; Zine, 2007). The wearing of a *Hijab* (Muslim headscarf), although often misunderstood, helps the Muslim student relay a message, and regulate social distance. However, it also invites ridicule or misperceptions of being "oppressed" (Zine, 2001). Similarly, traditional adolescent dating habits, which may include sexual relations, are incompatible with Islamic values (Hodge). Although Muslim boys can simply refrain from asking girls out, Muslim girls who are asked out may have difficulty providing an acceptable explanation for choosing not to date, and may invite peer stereotypes and jokes (Haddad & Smith, 1996). Such conflicts can create isolation and a significant degree of peer pressure, and cause anxiety, loneliness, and depression (Zine, 2001, 2007).

Muslim adolescents also possess other, sometimes conflicting identities based on their race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Zine, 2001). These additional identities can further add to their adjustment challenges in public schools (see Zine). For example, the experiences of a Muslim female African-American,

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who wears a Hijab on a largely white campus, is likely to be compounded by the fact that she belongs to "multiple stigmatized groups" (Nasir & Al-Amin), which can lead to feelings of loneliness and depression (Zine). Moreover, as the following account by a female Muslim African American student reported in Zine suggests, it can also be difficult for them to gain acceptance among peers, even from the same race, because of their multiple social identities.

It was really really hard because of my religion somehow they [the other

black students] wouldn't know how to react to me. For example, I didn't

date, I wouldn't take drugs. Even going out, I remember they would talk

about going to all these parties and I would feel so out of place. (p. 405)

Such forced choices can lead to feelings of alienation and marginality (Zine).

It is important to note that two-thirds of Muslim parents living in the United States are new immigrants (Pew Research Center, 2007). They tend to have little or no first-hand public school exposure, except perhaps from popular television shows or movies (Joseph & Riedel, 2008). Their perceptions of public schools as places of temptations and a source of problematic behavior, coupled with their perceptions or personal experiences of prejudice and discrimination, make them naturally anxious and fearful about their children's physical and emotional safety (see Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Sabry & Bruna). Moreover, parental lack of first-hand public high school exposure, or history of stereotypes and discrimination, and the likely non-inviting characteristics of public high schools, can also deprive Muslim youths of much needed parental support (Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Sabry & Bruna). Finally, many Muslim immigrants tend to settle

in major urban areas, at least initially (see Shlay, 2003). Similarly, a majority of African

Americans also tend to live in major urban areas. As a result, in many cases, the only

choice available to Muslim children is an urban or inner city high school, and school

transitions involving inner-city high schools have been shown to be much more difficult

(see Benner & Graham, 2009; Cooper & Liou, 2007). Essentially, some or all of these

distinct personal and background characteristics can make adolescent Muslim children's

transition from K-8 Islamic schools to public high schools much more challenging.

Negative manifestations of their portrayal as the new "other". With the end of

the Cold War in 1989, Islam and Muslims have been posited as the new "other," inimical

to "Western values" and "culture" (see Huntington, 1996; and for critique, see Said,

2001). In many ways, since the tragic events of 9/11, there has been a redrawing of the

symbolic boundaries of the United States *nation* to include (if partially and conditionally)

African Americans, Latinos, and East Asians, while positioning Muslims, Arabs, and

South Asians as true outsiders (Agathangelou & Ling, 2005; Murray, 2004; Nayak, 2006;

Volpp, 2002). The speed with which Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities

across the U.S. were attacked and harassed after September 11, 2001, and the fact that the

situation continues to deteriorate, reveals the consequences of such positioning and the

vulnerable place these communities occupy in the public's imagination of the nation

(Akram & Johnson, 2004; Murray; Volpp). A recent national poll, conducted by Gallup,

reveals that 53 percent of Americans have misgivings about Islam, and 63 percent of the

population knows little about the faith (Gallup, 2009). In another survey, six-in-ten

American adults think Muslims are subjected to a lot of discrimination (Pew Research

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Center, 2009). Media and many politicians have also played a major role in shaping such negative public discourse about Islam and Muslims (Akram & Johnson; Ibish, 2003). According to Gallup (2009), the research by Media Tenor, a research firm that monitors and analyzes media coverage of key issues, shows that the percentage of negative media reporting on Islam has increased from 60 percent in the beginning of 2007 to 90 percent near the end of 2009. It is within this national environment, that the Muslim adolescents make their transition from K-8 Islamic schools to public high schools.

Public institutions, such as schools, often reflect the relationships and tensions that exist in society at large (Abu El-Haj, 2007; Zine, 2001, 2007). For Muslim youths in public school environments, school is the primary site within which these young people confront their status as national "outsiders" and "enemies" (Abu El-Haj).   September 11th was a major turning point for them, in both their academic and social lives, because of the ways in which they have been verbally (and sometimes physically) attacked and ostracized by peers, and occasionally even by teachers (Sirin & Fine, 2007). Many have experienced: (a) name calling, taunts, and teasing from peers; (b) fights; (c) pulling of their headscarves by peers; and (d) having things thrown at them (see Ghaffari, 2009; McBrien, 2005; Zine, 2007). In some cases, teachers and counselors have also displayed: (a) racism and phobia against their Muslim students, particularly female, whom they considered "oppressed"; (b) unwillingness and inability to include Muslims' historical and contemporary contributions and perspectives into the existing school curricula; (c) lowering of expectations about their Muslim students and channeling them into lower academic tracks; (d) cultural and religious insensitivity; and (e) an overall lack of

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knowledge about Islam and Muslims (see Abukhattala, 2004; Douglass & Dunn, 2001; McCreery, Jones, & Holmes, 2007; Niyazov & Pluim, 2009; Zine, 2001). Such outcomes can compromise a Muslim youth's self-esteem, emotional well-being, school engagement, and ultimate academic success (Sabry & Burna, 2006; Zine, 2001).

Putting it all together—Transitions from K-8 Islamic schools to public high schools. In sum, Muslim adolescents who attend American K-8 Islamic schools and adopt visible Muslim identity, are likely to experience more complex and difficult transitions to public high schools than their mainstream or other minority peers. Figure 1.1 represents the three main sets of factors that can shape those transitions. Muslim adolescents may be confronted with, and adjust to, a higher degree of institutional (organizational, social, and cultural) discontinuities or changes during their transitions than their public school peers. Moreover, their background and distinct religious identity (in addition to other, sometimes marginalized, social identities based on gender, race, ethnicity, etc.), may make it much more challenging for them to adapt to a new institutional setup without some understanding and school support. Finally, their portrayal as the new "other" or "enemy" in the current national discourse may affect their perceptions and support resources, their attitudes towards and interactions with their new schools and vice versa, and their overall academic and social well-being.

(c)
Manifestations of
Portrayal as the "Other"
- National "outsiders/enemies"
  o Negative media portrayal
  o Stereotypes and prejudices
  o Discrimination and harassment
- School peers
  o Taunts/ostracized
  o Attacks (verbal and physical)
- Teachers and counselors (some)
  o Racism and phobia
  o Unwillingness to accommodate
  o Lower expectations
  o Cultural/religious insensitivity
  o Lack of knowledge

(a)
Magnitude of Institutional
Discontinuities or Changes
- Organizational
  o Environmental
  o Procedural
  o Academic
- Social
  o Diversity and role loss
  o New peers
  o New teachers
- Cultural
  o Secular and Judeo-
    Christian
  o New Youth Culture

High school
Transitions of
Muslim Adolescents
from American K-8
Islamic to Public
High schools

(b)
Personal and Background
Characteristics
- Multiple social identities
  (based on ethnicity, race,
  gender, SES, and religion)
  o Distinct religious lifestyle
  o Conservative interpersonal conduct
  o Seemingly conflicting identities
- Background
  o Two-thirds Immigrant parents
  o 30 percent African Americans
  o Compromised parental support
  o Majority in urban schools

Figure 1.0. Factors involved in the high school transitions of Muslim adolescents

Statement of the Problem

Transition to a high school is one of the defining parameters of development in

the second decade of life (Barber & Olsen, 2004). Such a transition has tremendous

implications for students' self-concept and identity development, academic success,

career choices, and long-term social well-being (see Fuligni & Hardway, 2004). It is no

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coincidence that 9th grade has been called a critical "make-or-break" year for many students by the National High School Center, and "necessitates support from, and collaboration among, teachers, parents, counselors, and administrators at both educational [school] levels" (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007, p. ii). Over the past three decades, high school transitions have been studied in great detail, in various contexts and for various student populations (see Barber & Olsen, 2004; Benner & Graham, 2007, 2009; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Mizelle, 2005; Reyes et al., 2000; Rice, 2001; Roderick & Camburn, 1999; Scott, Rock, Pollack, & Ingels, 1995; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Those studies have led to important findings and policy formulations, and helped delineate a number of important factors affecting high school transitions of different student groups. However, at the onset of this study, not a single study existed in the available literature that investigated high school transitions of Muslim adolescents who attend American K-8 Islamic schools, and later move to public high schools. This is a major gap in the education literature regarding a rapidly growing segment of our nation's school population. This current study is a modest effort toward filling that gap.

Purpose of the Study and Guiding Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore high school transitions of Muslim adolescents from American K-8 Islamic schools to public high schools. It focused on the process and challenges involved in their transitions and their adjustments to the new institutional (organizational, social, and cultural) setup of public high schools in general, and adaptation of their Muslim identity and religio-cultural lifestyle in particular. The study was guided by the overarching question:

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What is the process involved in high school transitions of the Muslim adolescents, and adaptation of their religio-cultural identity and lifestyle in the new institutional setup, when they move from American K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools?

Furthermore, it focused on seeking definitive answers to the following sub-questions:

1) What are some salient characteristics that distinguish K-8 Islamic schools from secular public high schools? How do such characteristics influence students' personal and interpersonal conduct? How do the youths self-identify prior to high school transitions?

2) What kinds of transition mentoring and support do they receive from their families and friends, Islamic schools, and public high schools? Which of those do they find helpful? How can such efforts be improved?

3) What are some key changes and challenges they encounter in their new schools during transitions? How do those affect their personal, academic, and social adjustments?

4) What additional factors related to their personal and family backgrounds, Islamic schools, and public high schools do they find helpful during their adjustment efforts?

Significance of the Study

The recent "visibility" of Islam in the United States, both in the number of its adherents and negative media coverage, should have prompted a flurry of empirical studies and scholarly research focusing on Muslims, their emerging institutions, and the

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challenges they face as they negotiate social and civic integration. However, this has not been the case (Hodge, 2002). Instead, our understanding of this community has been based more on stereotypical media images (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Although there is some emerging literature (published and mainly non-published doctoral dissertations) on Islamic schools and identity development among Muslim youths (see Alghorani, 2003; Badawi, 2006; Peek, 2005; Zine, 2001, 2007), schooling experiences of Muslim youths in the public schools (see Carter & El Hindi, 1999; Sabry & Bruna, 2006; Shaikh, 1995; Zine, 2001), counseling Muslim youths in public schools (see Carter & El Hindi; Hodge), or status of Muslims in the broader national environment (see Agathangelou & Ling, 2005; Murray, 2004; Nayak, 2006; Volpp, 2002); at the onset of this current study, not a single study existed in the available literature, that investigated high school transitions of Muslim adolescents, who attend rapidly growing American K-8 Islamic schools, and later move to public high schools. This is an important gap in the education literature on a rapidly growing segment of the Muslim youth. This current study is a modest effort towards remedying that gap.

Theoretical Significance

Over the past three decades, many theories have emerged to explain why high school transitions have been difficult for adolescents. Over those years, the theoretical foci gradually shifted, from viewing the transition challenges as a result of adolescence and related stressors, to the role of some personal and contextual factors (see Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Fenzel, 1989; Felner & Adan, 1988; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). However, none adequately explained the higher, and persistently increasing, attrition rates among

some minorities. A second set of theories, although originally proposed to explain the "minority achievement gap," were used to explain higher attrition rates among minorities (see Nieto, 2005; Steele, 1997). These theories illuminated how social differences (based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, and nationality) and the broader socio-political context manifest in stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and discrimination against minorities (Nasir & Hand, 2006; Nieto); and contribute to their higher attrition rates (Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Neither of the two sets of theories account for the role of the additional institutional differences (organizational, social, and cultural) between K-8 Islamic schools and secular public high schools, and a distinct religious identity (which influences the adolescents' personal and interpersonal conduct), in such systemic transitions. The work done in social and cross-cultural psychology; i.e., identity formation and the concept of "identity salience" (Stryker, 1980, as cited in Peek, 2005; Vryan, Adler, & Adler, 2003), and acculturation and cross-cultural adaptation models (see Berry, 2003; Ward, 1996) offers some important additional perspectives that can be used to explain such deficiencies in the earlier two sets of theories. Moreover, although there has been some work done that explored and explained the reasons behind anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-South Asian prejudices and rising Islamophobia in the United States and the western world (see Agathangelou & Ling, 2005; Nayak, 2006; Said, 1978; Volpp, 2002), to date, no study has explored the role of increasing Islamophobia and neo-orientalism in the post-9/11 national environment in regard to Muslim adolescents' transitions from K-8 Islamic schools to public high schools.

On the theoretical level, this study attempted to integrate some of the important

concepts put forward in these multiple sets of theoretical perspectives, along with the

Muslim adolescents' own perspectives examined in this current study, to develop a

unified "grounded" theory or empirically supported transition process model that can

adequately explain the process and challenges involved in the Muslin adolescents'

transition to public high school and their adjustments to the new institutional

(organizational, social, and cultural) setup of public high schools in general, and

adaptation of their Muslim identity in particular.

Practical Significance

In order for school adults to work with, teach, and counsel students

effectively, they must be aware of how cultural, family, and social

backgrounds affect the transition experiences of students entering the

ninth grade. (Cooper & Liou, 2007, pp. 53-54)

At the practical level, this study provides an in-depth account of the Muslim

adolescents' transition process and some of its outcomes. The results of this study inform

and assist parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, and others who work with

children and youth, in both American K-8 Islamic schools and public high schools, to

help Muslim parents and their children build bridges between their homes and their

schools and between the two distinct school systems that serve their children.

The first and foremost beneficiaries of the findings of this study are the parents of

Muslim adolescents. As parents gain insights into the transition processes, they should

be better prepared to help their children, both before and during their transitions; and

interact with their children's public high schools to ensure a smooth transition, and ultimate integration (Anderson et al., 2000). Second, the findings of this study can also enable educators in K-8 Islamic schools to put together transition-mentoring programs for their students, and engage in collaborative efforts with local public high schools to facilitate their students' successful transition.

For public high schools, the findings of this study provide valuable guidance for educators' efforts to create optimal school environments for increasingly diverse populations. This study should broaden their understanding of how Muslim adolescents negotiate their transitions across the two school systems, and maintain their culturally divergent religious identity. Public school educators already understand that "modulating to individual difference appropriately has always been a major challenge in both counseling and instruction" (Phelan et al., 1998, p. 22). However, the findings of this study make particular dimensions of the Muslim adolescents' cultural background, Islamic identity, and individual differences more comprehensible, "thus adding to the base of frameworks that are available for selecting counseling and educational strategies" (Phelan et al., p. 23). Finally, the findings of this study can also help clear up, "… hidden assumptions by teachers about the ways and whys of student behavior, and vice versa" (Phelan et al., p. ix), which will improve communication between them, and ultimately teaching and learning. Educators in various colleges and universities may also discover that the findings of this study can be an important addition to their classes, particularly in counseling and teacher training programs, as well as in a wide variety of courses dealing with socio-cultural processes in education.

Personal Significance

Finally, on a personal level, the findings of this proposed study had direct implications for my own role as a parent of children who attend Islamic schools. As a parent, the findings of this study help me understand the likely transition experiences of my own children who attend one such Islamic school, particularly in the current national and geo-political environment, where the negative stereotypes, hostility, and discrimination against them are on the rise; and do not seem to abate soon. I want them to achieve their K-8 education, in an "identity safe" environment, and learn and practice their religion. I also want them to be ready for their transitions into the "mainstream" high schools when their time comes, and have a successful academic career while practicing their religion. Therefore, I wanted to understand the process involved in their likely transitions, and the associated challenges or lack thereof, in order to offer any help they would need from me as a parent.

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Organization of the Study

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While this chapter provided the study context, and made a case for exploring the process involved in Muslim youths' transitions from K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools, the next four chapters detail other important aspects of this study:

- Chapter two provides a synthesis of the literature reviewed throughout the course of this study as per the guidelines of grounded theory methodology. The synthesis is organized into: (a) the literature relevant to school transitions in public school systems, (b) the literature pertaining to high school transitions of the

Muslim youths from K-8 Islamic schools, and (c) the conceptual framework that guided the study.

- Chapter three details the research methods used in the study. The chapter describes: (a) the role of researcher background and prior work in methodology selection; (b) types of grounded theory designs most frequently used and the rationale for the approach taken for this study; and (c) various aspects of the research process, i.e., participant and site selections, research relations and ethical considerations, data collection and analysis procedures, issues of trustworthiness and transferability, and etc.

- Chapter four presents detailed findings in a narrative form, weaving participant quotes throughout the narrative. The chapter offers: (a) a summary of participants' personal background and school characteristics; (b) participants' Islamic schooling, personal and family lives, and self-identification prior to their high school transitions; (c) various phases involved in the transition process; (d) some of the personal, background, and school related factors participants find helpful during the process; and (e) participant advice for various stakeholders.

- Chapter five provides synthesis and implication of the study. The chapter presents: (a) answers to the research questions; (b) a general discussion of major findings and study contributions to the existing literature; (c) study limitations; and (d) implications for school districts and policy, education practitioners (including education leaders, teachers, and counselors), educator training programs, and suggestions for the future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND STUDY FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this study was to explore the process involved in the high school transition of Muslim adolescents from K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools. Specifically, the study examines the mentoring and transition preparation support they receive, the changes and challenges they encounter during their transitions, the adjustments they make in order to adapt to secular public high schools, and the effects such transitions have on their ability to negotiate and maintain their Muslim identity and religio-cultural lifestyle.

Specific focus in this study on *exploring* the transition *process* was not coincidental. Instead, the choice was a result of several important factors. Among them, absence of any prior research on high school transition of Muslim youth from private K-8 Islamic schools, or for that matter, from any private religious school—Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish—to secular public high schools was the single most important factor. The researcher's deep personal interest (highlighted in chapter one) and prior work (discussed later in this and the following chapter) were the second important factor. Finally, the growing calls by many researchers for a multidimensional process-oriented approach towards conceptualizing high school transitions were the third important factor in focusing on the transition process (see Benner, 2011; Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007).

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Such a choice narrowed the available research methodology options however (see chapter three), which in turn, shaped every aspect of this study including the approach taken towards the review and synthesis of the existing literature. Instead of segmented approach commonly taken in quantitative research, a more integrated approach was taken that is in line with qualitative research, and best expressed by Benner (2011):

> What is lacking in the growing literature, however, is coordination—we have accumulated a large base of information that now needs to be organized into a coherent body of knowledge. Such organization efforts are necessary to make meaning of sometimes disparate research findings, to inform high school support and intervention efforts, and to identify existing gaps in our knowledge of students' high school transition experiences in order to identify directions for future research endeavors. (p. 299)

This chapter presents a brief synthesis of the relevant literature that was reviewed from multiple domains throughout the course of this study in order to: (a) explore the current state of knowledge (Creswell, 2005), (b) help develop the study framework for understanding the issue at hand (Maxwell, 2005), and (c) triangulate emerging findings against the existing literature throughout the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The synthesis is divided into three sections. The first two sections cover two main bodies of literature relevant to the issue: the literature on, or related to, challenging high school transitions in public schools, and the literature pertaining to the transitions of Muslim youth from K-8 Islamic to secular public high schools. The third section provides a brief summary and a visual diagram that served as the framework for this study.

The Challenge of High School Transitions in Public School Systems

Adolescents negotiate a variety of complex developmental and societal transitions as they move from childhood to adulthood (e.g., pubertal onset, changes in social roles, etc.). Within this backdrop, they must also navigate transitions that are "systemic" and systematically built into the typical structure of public school systems (Rice, 2001). As students progress through a typical American public school system, they make many shifts. Some are frequent and within school (e.g., from one class to the next or one grade to the next) and others unprecedented and across schools (e.g., from one school to the next or one level of education to the next). Such shifts constitute transitions that they must negotiate as they move their way through the system. Contrary to developmental transitions which are continuous and gradual, the systemic transitions can be abrupt, and interrupt "the continuity of life" (Anderson et al., 2000). They involve a cluster of changes to which the students must adapt (Barber & Olsen, 2004). For instance, high school students who move from one class to another in a single day experience changes in subject matter, teachers, instructional methods, and classmates. Likewise, the move from one level of education to the next involves major changes in organizational (school climate and educational practices) and social structures (Rice). The consensus from anecdotal, theoretical, and empirical studies of varying designs is that academic, personal, and interpersonal functioning of students suffers after making transition across the education levels, i.e., pre-high school to a high school (Barber & Olsen).

High School Transitions—Some Negative Outcomes

The literature over the last three decades suggests that high school transitions affect virtually all adolescents in some way. Most ninth graders, for example, initially experience some declines in their average grades (Roderick, 1994; Smith, 2006). They also frequently experience declines in school support, satisfaction, engagement, and sense of belonging; less positive attitudes toward subjects; decrease in self-concept and self-esteem; difficulties in making new friends and loneliness; bullying; experiences of stereotypical encounters, prejudice, racism, and discrimination; difficulties in time management; increased stress levels and anxiety; declines in parental support; and more negative reactions to teachers and peers. (see Barber & Olsen, 2004; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Holcomb McCoy, 2007; Rice, 2001; Seidman, Larue, Aber, & Feinman, 1994; Smith). There is even evidence that many students who have been identified as "gifted" or "high-achieving" during middle school, show huge declines in GPA and rate their transitions as more stressful than their peers (Phelan et al., 1994; Smith). Fortunately, for the majority of children these changes are fairly small and short-lived. There are others however, who experience large changes in one or more of the above-mentioned areas (Anderson et al., 2000). As a result, they are far more likely than their peers to feel "stressed" or "left out," channeled into lower academic tracks, retained in the ninth grade, or dropout altogether (Barber & Olsen; Heck & Mahoe; Roderick & Camburn, 1999).

The role played by difficult high school transitions in students ultimately dropping out concerns educators and policy-makers (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008). With the increasing research on high school transitions, it is becoming evident that the negative effects persist into late high school and beyond for many (Barber &

Olsen, 2004). There is an emerging consensus among researchers and economists that students' entrance into adult life without successful high school completion carries severe economic, occupational, and social disadvantages (Neild et al.). Therefore, it is no coincidence that the following trends, generally attributed to or mitigated by transition related difficulties, have caught the attention of many educators and policy-makers:

- Student attrition between grades nine and ten (both due to retention and dropping out) has tripled in the past 30 years nationwide from 4% to 13% (Abrams & Haney, 2004). The attrition rates are as high as a 20% for some states (Wheelock and Miao, 2005).

- The attrition rates among some minorities, e.g., Latinos and African Americans, continuously increased between 1992-93 and 2000-01 to 17 and 20 percent respectively, while it has remained stable around 7% among whites (Wheelock & Miao, 2005).

- Dropout rates in large cities sometimes exceed 50% (Education Week, 2007). Forty percent of ninth grade students in cities with the highest dropout rates repeat the ninth grade, but only 10–15% of those repeaters go on to graduate (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004).

- School districts requiring two transitions (to middle and high school) experience higher dropout rates than the districts with one transition (K-8 to high school) (Alspaugh, 1998).

- Most high school dropouts fail at least 25% of their ninth grade courses, while 8% of high school completers experienced the same difficulty (Letgers & Kerr, 2001).

- More than one semester grade of "F" in core subjects and fewer than five full course credits by the end of freshman year are the key indicators of dropping out (Allensworth & Easton, 2005).
- Low attendance during the first 30 days of the ninth grade year is a stronger indicator that a student will drop out than any eighth grade predictor, including test scores, other indicators of academic achievement, and age (Jerald, 2006).

Delineating the Factors—What Makes High School Transitions Challenging?

"Systemic" school transitions, such as entering a new high school, in conjunction with myriad changes in adolescents themselves, are unique in their nature and processes (Rice, 2001). Inherently, during such transitions adolescents encounter substantial changes in the new setting, that require adaptation (Reyes et al., 2000). How they adapt to those changes is shaped by the interaction between students and the new setting (Benner & Graham, 2007; Rice). One factor in the adjustment equation is the characteristics of the new setting, and the extent to which it differs from that of the pre-transition setting (Kelly et al.). On the other hand, the personal and background characteristics that adolescents bring to the transition affect their responses to the new situation, and contribute to their adjustment (Benner & Graham; Kelly et al.; Rice). For minorities, residual effects of racism, i.e., stereotypes and prejudices, and their manifestations in daily schooling experiences, and social stratification perpetuated, albeit unintentionally, by macro-level education policies, structures, and processes, comprise a third factor that influences their interactions with the new environment and their adjustment outcomes (Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Nieto, 2005).

Ultimately, some combination of these three factors shapes adolescents' adjustment outcomes; which are either positive, and increase adolescents' school engagement and sense of belonging; or negative, and compromise their academic success and chances of integration (Benner & Graham; Heck & Mahoe; Rice).

      Institutional changes. As adolescents move to a high school in an American public school system, major organizational and social changes confront them (Anderson et al., 2000). The organizational changes include both changes in the school climate and changes in educational practices—procedures, pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment practices (Rice, 2001). Some organizational changes that confront adolescents in public high schools include: (a) increase in school and classroom sizes due to increased focus on "economies of scale" (Rice, 2001); (b) new grade configurations (Heck & Mahoe, 2006); (c) changes in the structure of the school day (Reyes et al., 2000); (d) new course scheduling and teacher assignment practices (Barber & Olsen, 2004); (e) fully departmentalized curriculum and near universal academic tracking (Benner & Graham, 2009); (f) greater freedom in course selection and extracurricular activities (Mizelle, 2005); (g) more rigid discipline or increased emphasis on "rules of behavior" and less tolerance for misbehavior (Scott et al., 1995); (h) greater emphasis on relative ability and competition (in contrast with effort and improvement) (Eccles & Midgley, 1989); (i) less classroom autonomy (Barber & Olsen); (j) more difficult courses (Mizelle); (k) gaps in curriculum (Anderson et al.); (l) omission from, or misrepresentation in, curriculum and history books (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Sabry & Bruna, 2006); and (m) increased use of high stakes grading and retention (Abrams & Haney, 2004).

Adolescents also encounter many changes and increased complexity in social setups in their new schools, both at the school and individual levels (Rice, 2001; Newman et al., 2007). At the school level, they encounter: (a) loss of previous teacher and adult support networks (Benner & Graham, 2009); (b) increased diversity among students (in terms of race, ethnicity, class, etc.) (Benner & Graham); (c) more teachers with a variety of teaching styles, rules, and expectations (Roderick & Camburn, 1999); (d) less personal attention and relations with teachers (Roderick & Camburn); and (e) diminishing parental support and school involvement due to potential school barriers (Rice). At the individual level, they also experience: (a) role loss (such as no longer being the most senior, top athletes or scholars) and anonymity (Newman et al.); (b) disruptions in peer and friendship networks (Mizelle, 2005); (c) difficulties in making friends due to grouping and tracking practices (Scott et al., 1995); (d) increased peer pressure emphasizing fitting in and belonging (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999); and (e) school personnel misperceptions, prejudice, and discrimination experienced by some racial and ethnic minorities (see Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Characteristics of the adolescent student. Adolescence is a stage in life where individuals go through tremendous psychological, physical, and emotional changes, and therefore, become extra sensitive to daily stressors (Lerner & Galambos, 1998). Not only do they feel differently about themselves, but others who interact with them also view them differently and expect more from them as they mature outwardly. Despite their adult-like outward appearance, however, they are still child-like emotionally and behaviorally (DaGiau, 1997). Because not all adolescents experience developmental

changes, particularly puberty, at the same age or to the same degree, each individual may experience daily stressors differently during high school transitions (Lerner & Galambos). Nonetheless, they all have some specific characteristics, as briefly described below, that play a role in their adjustment to new schools during transitions.

1. *Self-concept.* Self-concept is a combination of self-image (how one defines self) and self-esteem (how one evaluates self) (Marsh, 1989). Essentially, it is a multi-dimensional construct that refers to an individual's perception of "self" in relation to any number of characteristics, such as academics, gender roles and sexuality, social identities, etc. (Bong & Clark, 1999). Positive self-concept is essential for adolescents to successfully adjust in new schools (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007). However, the role loss during high school transitions may lead to anxiety, self-doubt, and a decline in self-concept, which in turn, may lead to adjustment difficulties and achievement loss (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Girls tend to experience higher declines in self-esteem than boys (Hirsh & Rapkin, 1987).

2. *Aspirations and locus of control.* Adolescents' future aspirations and locus of control (individuals' belief about what causes the good or bad outcomes in life) are two additional important characteristics that help them stay on task and deal with adjustment stress during their transitions (Barber & Olson, 2004; Cooper & Liou, 2007). Students who have future goals and aspirations and plans for reaching them tend to have a more internal locus of control—they believe that they control an outcome (Cooper & Liou). They are able to work independently and stay on-task, and are more likely to adjust successfully (Barber & Olson). In

contrast, students with external locus of control—when they believe that their behavior cannot create success in school and that success is out of their control, tend to feel alienated and find their transitions difficult, and in many cases start to disengage or leave school early (Lan & Lanthier, 2003).

3. *Preparedness*. To make successful transitions, adolescents must be prepared to understand the nuances of academic and organizational differences between a pre-high and a high school (Anderson et al., 2000). They must also possess the knowledge and academic skills they need to succeed at the next level. Those who transition with lower prior GPAs tend to experience more adjustment problems (Roderick & Camburn, 1999; Newman et al., 2007). Lower prior GPAs and inadequate preparation affect ninth graders' curricular placements, the quality of their teachers, and their likelihood for successful high school transition and ultimately graduation (Roderick & Camburn).

4. *Prior behavioral problems.* Students with behavioral problems prior to high school tend to have more difficulty making transitions (Mizelle, 2005). For instance, African-American males are disproportionally placed in classes for learning-disabled students, a placement made in part on problem classroom behavior (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Once a student is placed outside the educational mainstream, learning opportunities are reduced, and standardized test scores are depressed (Anderson et al., 2000). In the end, that all plays into transition difficulties and disengagement (Heck & Mahoe, 2006).

5. *Coping skills*. Coping skills enable students to deal with the likely problems and

   difficulties they may encounter during transitions, for example, how to get needed

   information, keep track of multiple assignments, and resolve conflicts (see

   Constantine, Donnelly, & Myers, 2002). Coping strategies can be described as

   either active (such as problem solving) or passive (such as avoidance, denial,

   isolation, rationalization, seeking alternative rewards) (see Geisthardt & Munsch,

   1996). Students who use active coping strategies tend to adjust better during

   transitions than the ones who use passive coping (Constantine et al.). Females

   rely more on active and self-reliant types of coping strategies than males

   (Geisthardt & Munsch). Minority students generally use passive coping

   strategies, and seek alternative rewards outside of the school in response to

   stressful school events (Munsch & Wampler, 1993).

6. *Family background and support systems*. Family background affects

   adolescents' transition experiences and the level of support available to them in

   many ways (Anderson et al., 2000). For instance, race, ethnicity, gender, SES,

   task orientation (individualist vs. collectivist), patterns of language use,

   educational resources available at home, parental education level and exposure to

   public school systems, and stereotypes attached to their social groups are

   important background variables that help with adjustment (see Heck & Mahoe,

   2006; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Mizelle, 2005; Neild et al., 2008; Rice, 2001).

   Many of those variables also reflect the quality of parental support (i.e., their

   ability and willingness to support adolescents during their transitions) (Rice).

Negative national socio-political discourse. Adolescence is the stage of life in which individuals begin to look around them at their status among their peers, the clues they receive from adults, and even the larger society and media, for messages about who they are and what they could become (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). For minority adolescents, this task is particularly complicated given the complex and confusing messages they receive about their identity (Steele, 1997). They encounter many negative socio-cultural influences in schools that perpetuate the broader national socio-political discourse (Nieto, 2005). Many experience bias, stereotypes and prejudice, racism, and discrimination, which negatively affect their psychological, academic, and social functioning (Holcomb-McCoy). Frequent stereotyping of African American males has been heavily cited in the literature (see Holcomb-McCoy for a detailed review); such stereotyping leads to systematically different treatment by teachers and counselors, such as strict disciplining and increased suspension, and frequent placement in lower academic tracks that further increase academic and opportunity gaps for them (Holcomb-McCoy). Such negative stereotypes also discourage many minority parents in the support they offer their children during their transitions (see Rice, 2001; Sabry & Bruna, 2006).

Easing the High School Transition Difficulties—What Works?

It is evident from the importance of preparedness, highlighted earlier, that a high school transition does not start with the move to the new school. Instead, it is an extended process that is set in motion way before the actual school shift, and goes on long after the first few days or weeks for many students (Mizelle, 2005). In order to help ease transition-related difficulties, programs that challenge and support students

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throughout middle school, collaborative transition support programs between feeder and

receiving schools, and a healthy high school climate are important preconditions. Studies

have shown that a challenging and supportive middle school experience is crucial in

helping students make a smooth transition to a high school (see Anderson et al., 2000;

Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Although middle schools may not be able to eliminate some of

the background-related risks factors highlighted earlier, they can help students develop

strong academic, coping, and social skills which in turn lead to a strong self-concept,

high aspirations, and fewer prior problems, all necessary personal traits required to

successfully adjust in a high school (Mizelle).

Additionally, helping students make a successful transition to high school requires

programs that specifically address the transition period (Mizelle, 2005). Some of the

transition mentoring and support activities that researchers have found helpful for

students and their parents include:

1. **Information gathering.** Activities that adolescents find most informative include

   spring orientations and counseling, student visitations and shadowing, beginning-

   of-school orientations, and study skills or time management classes offered during

   the summer before 9th grade (Mizelle, 2005).

2. **Parental involvement.** Parental involvement leads to higher grades, improved

   test scores, better attendance, more positive attitude and behavior, and higher

   graduation rates (Mac Iver, 1990). However, parental involvement continuously

   drops during both middle and high school years (Newman et al., 2007). Parental

   involvement and support during transition can be ensured by inviting them to

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meet with their child and the high school counselor to discuss coursework and

schedules; visit the high school in the spring before, or the fall of, the ninth grade

year; spend a day at the high school to experience student life; and even help

design and facilitate some transition activities (Mizelle, 2005).

3. **Social support.** At the time when friendship and social circles are particularly

important for adolescents, the transition into high school often disrupts those

networks. Such disruptions can interfere with students' success in high school

(Mizelle, 2005). High school transition programs should include activities that

will give incoming students opportunities to develop positive relationships with

older and other incoming peers, through such activities as: email pen pal

programs, freshman group meetings with counselors, enacting procedural

strategies allowing more interactions with peers and teachers, and summer social

events (Mac Iver, 1990; Mizelle).

4. **Bringing middle and high schools together.** Successful high school transition

programs depend on middle and high school administrators, counselors and

teachers working together to share information about the programs, courses,

curriculum and requirements of their respective schools (Mac Iver, 1990; Mizelle,

2005; Ferguson & Tilleczek, 2007).

5. **Healthy school climate.** A healthy school climate has been shown to be an

important determinant of successful school adjustment (see Barber & Olsen,

2004; Eccles & Midgley, 1989). School climate refers to how stakeholders in the

education process perceive and characterize the school environment (Rice, 2001).

Theoretical Perspectives—Explaining the Challenging Transitions

Over the past three decades, many theoretical frameworks have been developed or used to explain why adolescents find high school transitions challenging. Until the late 1980s, most researchers operated within a framework in which adolescents' problems with high school transitions were believed to result primarily from developmental changes (Anderson et al., 2000). Since the late 1980s, however, there has been a notable shift in the focus. Researchers began to examine the impact of contextual factors and students' abilities to negotiate the demands associated with school transitions. During the last two decades of the 20th century, four pioneering theories emerged to explain why high school transitions are challenging for an average adolescent. These theories addressed, in some manner, the role of the first two sets of challenging factors that were outlined in the previous section, i.e., institutional discontinuities and adolescent characteristics. However, none adequately explained why such transitions are more difficult for many minority students. To better understand why some groups of students, who are also frequently stereotyped, persist or fail during their high school transitions, some additional frameworks have been used to explain persistently higher post-transition attrition rates among some minority groups. Theories in this group also factor in the third set of challenges, i.e., negative role of broader national socio-political factors. The following is a brief outline describing the four pioneering theories and two additional frameworks/theories:

The timing and discontinuity theory. This theory by Simmons and Blyth (1987) revolves around the twin concepts of timing and discontinuity. The concept of timing

emphasizes that the gradual adjustment to one change before confronting another, benefits the coping process. Coping becomes difficult however, when adolescents are uncomfortable with their bodies due to rapid changes; families because of new expectations, and in some cases, a move or divorce; peers, because of new gender roles and initiation of dating relations; and new schools because of the more complex environment. The concept of discontinuity, on the other hand, emphasizes that the movement from the primary school environment to a larger and more bureaucratic secondary school exposes adolescents to various stressors. The timing and the discontinuity combined, exacerbate development of stress, adjustment difficulties, and problem behaviors during school transitions.

The stage-environment fit theory. Later work of Eccles and Midgley (1989) shifted the focus of adjustment difficulties squarely to the school environment. According to their stage-environment fit theory, declines in students' self-esteem, motivation, and academic performance following a school transition are a consequence of the new environment that does not "fit" or support their current developmental stage. Secondary schools place greater emphasis on discipline and control, offer less intimate student-teacher relationships, tend to group students by ability, and use public assessments and comparisons of students' ability. Such changes lead to a decline in students' self-concept, motivation, and ultimately their academic performance.

The transitional life events theory. Felner and Adan (1988) offer another framework, which assumes that all changes in life require adjustments, and that the range of difficulties associated with making adjustments reflects the environmental setting and

one's personal history and coping abilities. They refer to the "threshold of vulnerability" as a benchmark from which to hypothesize expected difficulties negotiating school changes. For students behaving above their threshold, negotiating school change tends to be easier because they have solid coping skills, are achieving academically and socially, and have fewer risk factors in their lives. For students behaving below their threshold, school change may be difficult because of the concurrent risk factors such as living in poverty, entering puberty, or other stressors. The limited capacity of larger schools to be responsive to their needs further threatens their adaptation.

The role strain theory. Other school transition studies conducted by Fenzel (1989), suggest a different perspective for understanding the potential for increased strain during times of change. Fenzel views life changes as processes of gaining and surrendering new roles. For students entering the secondary schools, role changes are reflected in the new expectations from parents, teachers, and peers. When these expectations are conflicting, confusing, or demanding, adolescents may develop role strain, and manifest problem behaviors and stress, that negatively affect their adjustments during transitions.

Cultural mismatch theories. Early approaches to understanding the role of social differences, specifically based on race and culture in learning process and its outcomes, sought to explain racial differences on IQ tests and school achievement by attributing those differences to biological deficiencies (Nieto, 2005). The biological deficiency models were soon replaced by cultural deficit models, contending that Blacks were not biologically disadvantaged, but instead were forced to adopt the "culture of

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poverty" (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Nieto argues that such approaches are not outdated;

instead, the current discourse continues to position marginalized groups as predetermined

low achievers by using labels such as "at risk" and "disadvantaged." Such labels

contribute to "teacher misperceptions" and "differing expectations" for different groups,

which in turn, have direct implications for their high school transitions and ultimate

academic success (see also Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

During 1970s, the cultural mismatch theory and its many variations, such as

cultural compatibility, cultural congruence, etc., emerged to counter those earlier

discriminatory approaches (Nasir & Hand, 2006). A core premise of these theories is that

schooling occurs as teachers and students negotiate complex social interactions that are

often informed by differing sets of values and norms. Racial and ethnic differences in the

ways of communication, doing, and knowing undermine the school performance of many

minority students (Nasir & Hand). Hence, the differing experiences, values, skills, and

expectations with which children enter school need to be considered (Nieto, 2005).

Steele's stereotype threats framework. Steele (1997) also examined how

societal stereotypes about certain groups influence the intellectual functioning and

identity development of their members. "Stereotype threat," according to Steele, is a

"social-psychological threat" that arises when one is in a situation or doing something,

for which a negative stereotype about one's group exists. This predicament threatens one

with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with

the prospect of conforming to the stereotype (Steele). Several studies give weight to

Steele's account that the internalized biases of teachers and counselors (both minority and

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white) against some minority students are an important factor in shaping the racial and cultural biases in schools; which lead to discrimination, various "phobias," and streaming of minority students into lower academic tracks (see Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Gaps in the Current State of Scholarship

It is evident from the above synthesis that the research on adolescents' high school transitions spans a wide range of concerns and theoretical perspectives, some of which have been delineated above. Two major gaps were immediately discernible from the above synthesis. First, studies with a process-oriented approach towards such transitions do not exist in the literature as of this study. The bulk of the transition-related literature involves studies that are primarily quantitative in nature. Not much exists in the literature that offers a process-oriented view of such transitions. There are growing calls for a multidimensional process oriented approach towards conceptualizing such transitions that can help provide an integrative view of the basic components involved in such transitions, and how those interact over time to produce different outcomes for different student populations (see Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007). Second, not a single study existed in the literature that investigated high school transitions from American-based private K-8 Islamic schools to American-based secular public high schools. To better explore and understand the multidimensional process involved in the Muslim adolescents' transition from K-8 Islamic to public high schools, the next section provides a brief synthesis of the literature that may inform this topic.

K-8 Islamic to Secular Public High School Transitions

Whether it is because Muslim parents stereotype public schools as "morally corrupt" and wracked by drugs, violence, and sexual promiscuity—or because they want to save their children's religious or cultural identity, or shield their children from discrimination and "Islamophobia," the establishment of Islamic private schools is gaining momentum (Joseph & Riedel, 2008). This momentum is evident from the rapid increase in the number of full-time Islamic schools, i.e., 50 in 1988-89, 250 in 1999-2000, and 370 to 400 in 2001-2002 (see Badawi, 2005; Maughan, 2003, as cited in Merry & Driessen, 2005). Since an overwhelming majority of these schools still offer only elementary or K-8 classes (Merry & Driessen), a vast majority of Muslim students from such schools continue to move to public high schools (Zine, 2007).

Additional literature was reviewed in order to better understand Muslim student transitions. The following two subsections provide a brief synthesis of that additional literature. The first subsection covers a profile of American Muslim communities (including their history and some of the challenges they encounter in their daily lives in the "post-9/11 America"), Islamic schools (including their evolving mission, daily life in a typical K-8 Islamic school, and challenges facing U.S. Islamic schools), and some specific characteristics of the Muslim youths who move from the Islamic schools to public high schools. The second subsection outlines some additional theoretical frameworks, including findings of a pilot study that was conducted prior to the onset of this main study, that hold the promise of illuminating many aspects of the Muslim youths' transitions.

Target Population—Emerging Profile

Estimating the number of Muslims in America has been a difficult and often "politically charged" project (Ewing, 2008). The United States Census Bureau does not collect data on religious identification, in part because of the principle of church-state separation. Because Muslims represent quite a small percentage of the total American population, figures drawn from general surveys tend to be unreliable (Pew Research Center, 2007). Therefore, there are widely varying estimates of the number of Muslims in the United States, ranging from 2 million to 7 million (U.S. Department of State, 2009). A conservative estimate by the Pew Research Center (2007) puts the number to be around 2.35 million, which includes both immigrant and American-born Muslims and their children. The same study further highlights that: (a) 65 percent of Muslim Americans are foreign-born coming from at least 68 different countries; (b) 39 percent of the foreign-born have come to the United States since 1990; (c) despite two-thirds being foreign-born, 77 percent of all Muslim Americans are citizens; and (d) a third of the total Muslim American population, approximately 850,000, is below the age of 18. Among the 35 percent American-born, many of whom are converts, 64 percent are African Americans, 27 percent white, and many have a Jewish background (see Merry & Driessen, 2005; Pew Research Center). While each of these sub-groups accounts for a significant share of the total U.S. Muslim population, actual proportions remain unknown (Pew Research Center).

Muslims in America—"The new kid on the block?" While Muslim Americans have been characterized by some as "the new kid on the block" in the American religious landscape, their history tells a complex story (Gomez, 2005). Their journey is unique in

that it is part of two quintessentially American experiences: the African American and the immigrant (U.S. Department of State, 2009). While both groups share an identity as Muslims, their historical, cultural, and socioeconomic circumstances have differed widely. African Americans have played a key role both in bringing Islam to colonies and its re-emergence since the 1970s. Approximately 30 percent of African slaves brought to America between 1619 and 1800s were Muslim; with some exceptions, most were forced to give up their Muslim heritage (Gomez). However, during the early part of the 20th century, their off-spring started reconnecting with their Muslim "roots," first under the banner of Black Nationalism through groups like the Moorish Science Temple in 1913 and the Nation of Islam (NOI) in 1930, and then by moving toward mainstream Islam (Ewing, 2008). In the beginning, those groups adhered to beliefs and practices that were quite distinct from (even ran counter to) the principles of mainstream Islam (Ewing). Things started to change, first after Malcolm X quit NOI and moved to mainstream Islam, and then in 1975, when NOI followed suit under the leadership of W. D. Mohammed. As a result, ties between African American and foreign-born Muslims began to develop, especially with the establishment and growth of Islamic institutions like schools, advocacy groups, and national organizations (Ewing).

Of the Muslims born outside the United States, approximately 37 percent are from Arabic-speaking countries and 27 percent are from southern Asia; there are also significant populations from Iran (12 percent), Europe (8 percent), and sub-Saharan Africa (6 percent) (Pew Research Center, 2007). Although small-scale Muslim migration to the United States began in 1840 and lasted until World War I, the bulk of Muslim

immigrants came after the enactment of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 that abolished the national origin quotas established in 1924 and encouraged non-European skilled-labor immigration to the United States (U.S. Department of State, 2009). Though most early Arab immigrants were Christians, Arabs who came after 1965 were mainly Muslim (Ewing, 2008). This second wave of Arab migration also coincided with the Muslim immigration from southern Asia. Many from the two groups came to pursue advanced degrees, and later became part of the skilled labor force. In the 1980s, they started focusing on a collective Muslim identity instead of an ethnic ones, and founded national organizations such as the Muslim Students Association (MSA) and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) (Ewing). This shifting focus became the precursor for establishing more mosques and Islamic schools by foreign-born Muslim Americans, and helped strengthen their ties with the American-born Muslims (Ewing).

According to the Pew Research Center (2007), Muslim Americans generally mirror the United States' public in education and income levels, with foreign-born Muslims slightly more affluent and better educated than American-born. Twenty-four percent of all Muslims and 29 percent of immigrant Muslims have college degrees, compared to 25 percent for the United States' general population. Forty-one percent of all Muslim Americans and 45 percent of immigrant Muslims report annual household income levels of $50,000 or higher, compared to the national average of 44 percent. Immigrant Muslims are also well represented among higher-income earners, with 19 percent claiming annual household incomes of $100,000 or higher (compared to 16 percent for the Muslim population as a whole, and 17 percent for the U.S. average). This

is likely due to the strong concentration of foreign-born Muslim Americans in professional, managerial, and technical fields (especially in information technology, medicine, law, and the corporate world); many of whom are instrumental in helping to establishing new mosques and Islamic schools (Merry & Driessen, 2005).

Challenges facing Muslim Americans. In a multi-cultural secular society like America, anyone committed to a religious tradition or community is confronted with two primary concerns that, in some ways, conflict with each other: (a) how to inculcate a commitment in the form of an identity in succeeding generations; and (b) how to instill a sense of belonging with the wider society and culture so that their children do not feel, or made to feel, like outsiders or aliens (Joseph & Riedel, 2008). For the Muslim Americans who are committed to their religion, this task is much more complex. According to Joseph and Riedel, foreign-born Muslims face two kinds of pluralism and diversity in forging individual and communal identities. On the one hand, many have come from fairly homogeneous societies—especially with respect to religious beliefs and practices—to one characterized by phenomenal diversity of religions, ethnicities, lifestyles, attitudes, and so on. On the other hand, in the Muslim communities to which they come, or which they form, they confront a plurality of ways of being Muslim, diverse beliefs, attitudes, experiences, modes of practice and worship, and self-identification. Despite being accustomed to the former, American-born Muslims also struggle with reconciling the latter and coming to terms with what it means to be a "good Muslim" (Joseph & Riedel). Just as Muslim Americans are confronted with defining a "common Islam" to help address the first concern of inculcating Islamic identity in their

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children (to be discussed under Islamic schools), the task of addressing the second concern of instilling a sense of belonging to the wider society is becoming much harder as they are being framed as the new "other" (Ewing & Hoyler, 2008).

With the end of the Cold War in 1989, Islam and Muslims have been cast as the new "other," inimical to "Western values" and "culture" (see Huntington, 1996; and for critique, see Said, 2001). In many ways, since the tragic events of 9/11, there has been a redrawing of the symbolic boundaries of the *nation* to include (if partially and conditionally) African Americans, Latinos, and East Asians, while positioning Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians as the true outsiders (Agathangelou & Ling, 2005; Akram & Johnson, 2004; Murray, 2004; Nayak, 2006; Volpp, 2002). The speed with which Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities across the United States were subjected to hate crimes, deportations, arrests, detentions, interrogations, profiling, and collective stigma (Akram & Johnson; Ewing, 2008; Ibish, 2003; Murray; Volpp); and the fact that the situation continues to further deteriorate (see Gallop, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2009), reveals the consequences of such positioning and the vulnerable place these communities occupy in the American public's imagination of the nation.

Such a framing continues to manifest in a dramatic rise in negative media portrayal and Islamophobia (Abukhattala, 2004; Jackson, 2010; Shaheen, 2001), frequent stereotyping of female Muslims as "oppressed" (see Andrea, 2009; Hodge, 2002; Hoodfar, 1993), increased profiling and discrimination (see Akram & Johnson, 2004; Eqing & Hoyler, 2008; Murray, 2004; Pew Research Center, 2009; Volpp, 2002), and outright harassment and attacks (Ibish, 2003; Murray, 2004). For instance, recent

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research by Media Tenor (a research firm that monitors and analyzes media coverage of key issues) reveals that the percentage of stereotypical and negative media reporting on Islam and Muslims has increased from 60 percent in the beginning of 2007 to 90 percent near the end of 2009 (Gallup, 2009). Based on a 2009 national poll, the same Gallup report reveals that 53 percent of Americans have misgivings about Islam, and 63 percent of the population knows little about the faith. Similarly, in another survey, six-in-ten American adults think Muslims are subjected to a lot of discrimination (Pew Research Center). When taken together with their misrepresentation in, or omission from, textbooks (see Abukhattala; Hodge; Jackson), such framing and attitudes make the task of inculcating sense of belonging in their next generations much more challenging for Muslim Americans (Ewing & Hoyler, 2008).

Effects of post-9/11 framing of Muslims as the "other" have been varied on the three major subgroups of Muslim Americans, i.e., African Americans, Arabs and, South Asians. African American Muslims have historically focused more on race-related domestic challenges and economic issues, and therefore avoided run-ins with the national security state (Ewing & Hoyler, 2008; Maira, 2008). Foreign-born Muslims however tend to focus more on foreign policy issues related to their countries of origin. Among them, Arab and other "visibly" Muslim Americans have experienced racism and "Islamophobia" for many years resulting from "the inertia of traditional American antipathy toward Arabs and Muslims and the political and religious domestic interests of both the Zionist lobby and the Christian Right" (Haddad, 2001, p. 91). They have been subjected to scrutiny and surveillance due to their criticism of United States' policies in

the Middle East and support of the Israeli occupation of Palestine (Haddad). South Southern Asians in the United States, by contrast, have generally had a different relationship to the national security state due to varied histories of migration and relationships of the United States with their home states (Jensen, 1988, as cited in Maira). They have suddenly found themselves to be the objects of intensified suspicion and surveillance as well as virulent large-scale "scapegoating" as part of the domestic war on terror and post-9/11 American engagement in South Asia (Ewing & Hoyler, 2008).

Such scapegoating has been particularly hard on Muslim youths. For instance, Ewing and Hoyler (2008), in their research on the youths from a professional Muslim South Asian community in the Raleigh-Durham area of North Carolina, observed a growing sense of tension among their participants between their American and Muslim identities, caused by humiliating treatment of Muslims (including family members), both locally and nationally, and the frequent projection in the media of the idea that they are the enemies. Despite being from middle class professional families, these well-integrated college-bound students nevertheless found themselves questioning their futures as they sensed the increasing difficulties of being Muslim in the United States following 9/11. There were some who sought to hide their Muslim identity or distance themselves from it, but others have, in increasing numbers, intensified their commitment to Islam or their Muslim identity (Ewing & Hoyler). Many young Muslim women, "outraged" by the negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims, feel a strong need to assert their presence. Since the veil (headscarf) is the most significant visible symbol of contemporary Muslim identity, many have taken up the veil not only from personal conviction but also to assert

their identity and existence to demand "fuller" social and political recognition (Hoodfar, 1993).

In many ways, post-9/11 anti-Muslim backlash has also produced unpredictable positive outcomes for the Muslim American communities. In addition to new and growing affiliations between various subgroups of Muslim Americans, it has also thrust them into institution-building and community activism (Ewing, 2008). For instance, government's freezing of the assets of several Islamic charities (that funneled charitable donations overseas) led to a precipitous shift in patterns of Muslim charitable giving, a shift that has had identifiable institutional effects (Joseph, Howe, Hout, Riedel, & Shweder, 2008). Charitable giving being a central aspect of Islam, when channels of giving to transnational organizations were blocked, many Muslims in the United States increased local giving, which in turn, accelerated the construction and expansion of mosques and Islamic schools (Joseph et al.; Joseph & Reidel, 2008). American mosques have also been affected in the process. For instance, as part of the long-term "Americanization" of Islam there has been a tendency for mosques to function more as community centers (on the model of churches) than in the countries of origin (Ewing, 2008). These functions intensified after 9/11, because Muslims felt a sense of threat and turned inward for support from other members of the community as well as Muslim institutions (Ewing & Hoyler, 2008; Joseph et al.). For many, such institutions play a critical role in fostering a sense of fully belonging to American society, especially at a time when this sense has been challenged by homeland security measures and increased stigmatization (Ewing).

Finally, in response to the backlash, Muslim Americans in the United States have, perhaps paradoxically, developed not only the confidence in their communities and institutions, but also a growing sense of political assertiveness (Shryock, 2008). They are realizing that many "ideologues" and "Islamophobes" have taken advantage of their marginalization and painted them as outsiders and a threat to the country (Haddad, 2001); and "that they can no longer let others define their identity and their future" (p. 101). In response, they are breaking a "long silence" and pushing back (Haddad; Shryock). They, along with many grassroots Muslim organizations (like Muslim Public Affairs Council and Council on American Islamic Relations), are starting to actively assert their identity and existence as well as demand "fuller" social and political recognition (Hoodfar, 1993; Merry & Driessen, 2005; Shryock)

Islamic schools—Muslim solution for cultural reproduction. The recent surge in the establishment of private Islamic schools is not an isolated phenomenon, nor is it specific to Muslim immigration. It is just the latest instance of a long-standing phenomenon that goes back at least 150 years. Establishing faith-based schools was the usual first response of immigrant communities, especially confessional ones, to American life and the American public school system (Joseph & Reidel, 2008). When waves of Catholic and Jewish immigrants began arriving in the United States early in the nineteenth century, many were both predisposed to prefer faith-based schooling as an alternative while being distrustful of centrally controlled forms of education. Essentially, anti-immigrant discrimination, plus some skepticism about the melting pot presumptions of the common schools movement, provided a strong impetus for those communities of

faith to establish private schools, where familiar structures of language, religion, and culture could be preserved and reproduced (Sanders, 1977 as cited in Joseph & Reidel).

The reasons for establishing Islamic private schools by Muslim immigrants are similar, in many ways, to those that motivated Catholics and Jews to establish their own schools. Muslims arriving in the United States from many parts of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East have been similarly predisposed, coming as they do from countries where religious institutions remain centers for education and where public education still tends to have a religious component (Joseph & Reidel, 2008). The "so-called" secular environment of American public schools is seen by many Muslims as falling short of the educational aims they have for their children (Merry & Driessen, 2005). Muslim parents who choose private schooling for their children do so because they believe the dominant society, mirrored in the public school, seriously jeopardizes Islamic identity and community (Cristillo, 2004). Cristillo further notes:

> In as much as a private Muslim school is meant to provide a quality
>
> education on par with the public school, its proponents see the school's
>
> "Islamic environment" as a safeguard to prevent Muslim children from
>
> drifting away from the imagined spiritual community, or Ummah, of
>
> Muslim "brothers" and sisters." In addition, by creating overlapping
>
> networks of social relations among members of local households, mosques
>
> and businesses, the private Muslim school provides a physical locus of
>
> collective identity in an otherwise religiously plural society where
>
> Muslims are a minority. (p. 7)

Moreover, in the post-9/11 environment, fears of prejudice and discrimination as well as concerns for children's physical and psychological wellbeing have also spurred the acceleration in the growth of Islamic schools (see Badawi, 2006; Zine, 2007).

Although Muslim immigration over the last few decades has spurred the recent growth of Islamic schools, African American Muslims were the first to establish private Islamic schools, commonly known today as Sister Clara Muhammad schools (Rashid & Muhammad, 1992). According to Rashid and Muhammad, these schools, in their earliest forms, were the ideological predecessors of both the Black Nationalist independent education movements of the 1960s under the Nation of Islam and the current "Afrocentric" education movement. Borrowing concepts from Islam, Christianity, and mythology, their primary goal in their early stage was to inculcate a confident black identity among students, and provide them with a worldview that stressed self-knowledge, self-reliance, and self-discipline. In the mid- to late 1970s however, under the leadership of W. D. Muhammad, the Sister Clara Muhammad School system underwent a profound transition from a focus on Black Nationalism to mainstream Islam with Islamic identity as its new primary ideological focus (Rashid & Muhammad).

Evolving mission and approaches. Private Islamic schools in the United States are distinguished from public schools principally by the addition of religious studies classes and the provision of a self-described "Islamic environment" through which an explicit emphasis on Islamic "character education" is implemented (Joseph & Reidel, 2008). It is important to note that most full-time Islamic schools promote themselves to their constituents not simply by providing an Islamic environment but also by promising

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a high-quality education by secular standards, one that can translate into high scores on the important standardized tests and acceptance into the finest colleges (Cristillo, 2004). In such perusal, one of the foremost challenges for such schools has been to adapt the secular frameworks and core curricula of public school systems to an overarching Islamic model of schooling. The question of how to "Islamize" education has been answered variously by Muslim schools, but a gradual progression in this national movement can be observed, moving from a concern over how to Islamize knowledge to an emphasis on developing an Islamic environment capable of nurturing an Islamic character (Joseph & Reidel). This shift is forcing such schools to articulate a vision of a common Islam and Islamic character that is recognizable and acceptable to all, and seems to parallel the emerging conception among Muslim Americans of what it means to be a "Muslim" (Cristillo).

With such a shift as well as recent surge in the demand for Islamic schooling, there has been a growing focus nationwide on some sort of a standardized Islamic character curriculum, commonly referred to as the "Tarbiyah Project" (Joseph & Reidel, 2008). Consider the following statement from the introductory paragraphs of one such curriculum:

> Islam is found on the principles of belief and righteous conduct. This
> connection between values and practice lies at the very heart of the Islamic
> way of life. Nevertheless, a crisis in values and character development
> exists throughout the Muslim ummah [world] today that is working to
> undermine the fabric of the Islamic spiritual, moral and social system.

Lacking a clear moral compass, Muslims today find themselves

marginalized socially, disoriented spiritually and generally in a quandary

about their role and responsibility in modern society. Without a proper

understanding of the Islamic value system, there is little hope that [the

status-quo will change]. (Uddin, 2001, as cited in Joseph & Reidel)

This renewed emphasis on Islam as a system of values and ethics goes beyond the

American context, and is part of a more general trend among Muslims in the West, to

"deculturize" Islam from any specific back-home cultural infringements (Cristillo, 2004).

As a result, the essence of Islam is increasingly conceived among Islamic schools as

residing in the virtuous person, rather than, for instance, in the person who has vast

amounts of religious knowledge (Joseph & Reidel).

Defining Islam in such terms also carries with it consequences for how Islam is

taught and transmitted. It has consequences for both Islamic school staff and Muslim

families (Cristillo, 2004). Because the emphasis is on values and ethics, the teaching of

Islam and Islamic character occurs primarily through the staff's own religiosity, their

own embodiment of virtue, and their own moral exemplarity (Zine, 2007). Likewise, the

Islamic environment is constituted by "sociomoral" norms of conduct upheld by all who

participate in the school, particularly staff (Joseph & Reidel, 2008). Moreover, such a

framing also calls for reducing contradictions between Islam and Islamic character

articulated in the Islamic schools and the "culturally tainted" version of Islam practiced in

students' homes (Joseph & Reidel). As a result, Islamic schools are not only helping

define the common vision of Islam and Islamic character, but they are also indirectly

forcing both staff and parents to adopt that vision in their personal and interpersonal lives

to become better role models for the next generations (Cristillo).

  Daily life in a typical K-8 Islamic school. K-8 Islamic schools are generally small

in size with low-student teacher ratios (Badawi, 2006). Physical spaces, schedule and

daily routines are structured to facilitate Islamic environment and practices (Zine, 2007).

According to Cristillo (2004), at a typical K-8 Islamic school, the day begins with

students filing through the front door to ensure that each student has complied with the

school dress code; boys generally wear slacks and collared shirt; girls wear slacks, a

Hijab (enforced to varying degrees after fifth grade in many schools), and a calf-length

top. Students are instructed in appropriate use of Arabic in five daily prayers and in

interpersonal contexts. Religious norms are also enforced to varying degrees; behavior

and food are classified as halal (lawful) or haram (prohibited), and boys and girls are

separated in class, at lunch, and during assemblies after the fifth grade (Joseph & Reidel,

2008). Teachers and peers are framed as "brothers" and "sisters" (Cristillo). Secular

curriculum in core subjects is supplemented with religious studies classes during periods

that might otherwise be used for electives in public schools (Joseph & Reidel, 2008).

The religious studies generally include study of selected portions of the holy Qur'an,

Arabic language, core principles of Islamic theology and worship, and Islamic history

(Cristillo, 2004). Separate prayer areas are established for male and female students and

staff; school days are shortened during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, and

students also get week-long breaks for the two Muslim religious holidays of Eid (Zine,

2007). Some scholars compare maintenance of this type of environment (and routines) to

hidden curriculum (culture) constituted by the use of symbolic knowledge, language, and religious norms (Cristillo).

Challenges facing Islamic schools. Despite "noble aims and very committed staff," American Islamic schools are faced with slow institutional development and daunting financial and logistical challenges (Merry & Driessen, 2005). Most schools are understaffed, and very few are able to provide a school nurse, proper science lab facilities, social workers, fine art classes, special education services, or guidance counselors (Badawi, 2006). Many also do not have a library or adequate extracurricular activities including physical education facilities and/or equipment (Merry & Driessen; Badawi). While Muslim organizations like IQRA and IIIT (International Institute of Islamic Thought) are making impressive efforts to help develop Islamic studies and character curriculum to supplement existing curricula, no comprehensive set of curricular materials presently exists (Cristillo, 2004). Most starting schools borrow curricular plan templates as well as other materials from neighboring schools and make appropriate adjustments (Merry & Driessen). There is also an acute shortage of qualified teaching staff that is well versed in secular curriculum and pedagogy, and can be good Muslim role models (Joseph & Reidel, 2008). Parents, mostly dedicated mothers with college degrees, help fill the void (Zine, 2007). Accreditation and state recognition are a top priority for Islamic schools, both to assure parents about their viability and "avoid religious stereotyping and keep media distortion to a minimum" (Merry & Driessen, p. 426); yet many are still struggling to procure basic school facilities to meet those priorities due to both zoning and financial constraints (Cristillo; Joseph & Reidel).

There may be money available through the local mosque, provided the school is mosque affiliated; yet mosque affiliation causes other challenges related to control, pedagogy, and "*masjid* politics" (Merry & Driessen, 2005). Independence from the mosque provides more freedom to organize the school according to the aims of the school board, but independence also brings with it formidable challenges for school budgets. School fees for a typical student at a well-staffed Islamic school can run to several thousand dollars a year; this does not include uniforms or textbooks (Cristillo, 2004). Parents also have to pay if they want their children involved in extracurricular activities that the school may not provide (Merry & Driessen). Like American public schools, American Islamic schools are only as good as their staff, facilities and parents make them (Joseph & Reidel, 2008). Many teachers lament how the fiscal limitations of their school curb the range of educational experiences their students are able to have, though positive home reinforcement continues to be the number one reason why students succeed in such schools (Lareau, 2002, 2003, as cited in Merry & Driessen; Badawi).

Characteristics of the Muslim youths from K-8 Islamic schools. Muslim adolescents, who have attended American K-8 Islamic schools for many years, tend to adopt "Islamic lifestyle" and identity, and develop a strong sense of belonging to the Muslim community (Alghorani, 2003; Zine, 2007). Because of many years of Islamic education, they are more knowledgeable about Islam than their Muslim peers in public schools; they know more about the message of Qur'an, core principles of Islamic theology and worship, and Islamic history (Cristillo, 2004; Joseph & Reidel, 2008). Moreover, after years of residing in an Islamic environment, Muslim students from such

schools tend to be more practicing of Islamic rituals, for example, offering five

mandatory daily prayers and observing month-long fasting during Ramadan (Badawi,

2006).

They also tend to adopt Islamic "sociomoral" codes involving modesty in their

daily personal and inter-personal lives (Joseph & Reidel, 2008). Girls tend to wear Hijab

and see it as part of "who they are" (Alghorani, 2003). Both boys and girls tend to prefer

a modest dress code, and avoid many of the behaviors that are part of contemporary

youth culture in public schools, such as alcohol and drugs consumption, casual hugs and

touching between males and females, dating and pre-marital sex, cursing, fighting or

involvement in gang activity (Cristillo, 2004; Zine, 2007). As a result, they confront

fewer social distractions than their public school peers (Alghorani). Such characteristics

combined with positive home reinforcement help them develop strong academic self-

concept and orientations (Cristillo). According to Zine, some liken the life in an Islamic

school with living in a "bubble" or a "ghetto," and worry that the young people may not

be socially prepared to engage with the "mainstream" society and youth culture.

Theoretical Perspectives—Some Additional Frameworks

Many theoretical perspectives were highlighted in the first section of this

literature review, which help illuminate and explain various aspects of challenging high

school transitions for both average and minority adolescents. However, some additional

frameworks were reviewed to better understand: (a) the modern conception of identity,

often a collection of identities, in multi-cultural societies and how it changes in different

situations involving incongruent spaces; (b) the contemporary framing of Muslims as the

"other" and the dramatic rise in negative media portrayal and Islamophobia; and (c) how the process of acculturation unfolds when people in general cross cultural lines. The next few paragraphs summarize those additional frameworks, and the findings of a pilot study that played a very important role in framing this final study.

        "Identity salience" and the changing conceptions of identity in multi-cultural societies. The concept of *identity* is fundamental in modern social psychology. It is generally used to define and describe an individual's sense of self, group affiliations, structural positions, and ascribed and achieved statuses (Peek, 2005). Contrary to earlier understandings of identity as fixed and immutable, today identity is more often considered an evolving process of "becoming" rather than simply "being" (Vryan, Adler, & Adler, 2003). Individuals possess and construct various situational, personal, and social identities, which they invoke based on the specific costs and rewards associated with those identities (Vryan et al.). A particularly useful concept in the identity research is "identity salience" (Stryker, 1980, as cited in Peek, 2005). According to Stryker, discrete identities may be thought of as ordered in a "salience hierarchy;" as individuals become more committed to a given role, that role will assume higher identity salience. Further, the higher the identity in the salience hierarchy, the more likely that identity will be enacted in a given situation, or in many situations (Stryker). In essence, this probability of invoking a particular identity, whether intentional or not, reflects a commitment to that identity. Although identities and salience hierarchies tend to be stable, individuals sometimes alter or take on new social identities, shed old ones, or rearrange an identity's relative salience (Vryan et al.).

Orientalism. To better understand the current national socio-political "discourse" on Islam and Muslims, it is important to understand Orientalism or *Orientalist* scholarship in the West and its manifestations (Said, 1978). Edward Said, in his seminal work titled "Orientalism," argued that much of the *Orientalist* scholarship (or the Western study) of the East or "the orient"—in particular Islamic orient—was a discourse involving political intellectualism bent on self-affirmation rather than an objective study, a form of racism resulting from a deep-seated historical prejudice of Islam, and a tool of imperialist domination. Such discourse, according to Said, constructed a binary division of the Orient and the Occident or "them" and "us" from the beginning, where Orient was framed as antithetical to the Occident. In the process of such self-affirmation and dichotomous identity-formation, Orientalists started characterizing Orientals, among other things, as exotic, servile, dark, erotic, God-obsessed, dangerous, promiscuous, and immutable. The main problem arose, however, when they started portraying and generalizing these artificial characteristics associated with the Orientals in their "scientific" reports, literary work, and other media sources. As a result, such a discourse created certain negative images about the Orientals—in particular Arab and Muslim Orientals—in the West, and in doing so, infused a deep prejudice in the Western psyche towards them.

Said (1978) maintained that such a framing and racist attitude, combined with Western hegemony over knowledge of the East, provided a justification for the Western imperialist projects. Orientalists appropriated the task of exploring and interpreting the Orient's languages, history, and culture all for themselves, with the implication that the

East was not capable of composing its own narrative. Far from being objective, Said wrote, the Orientalist scholars served the interests of power and collaborated actively in the Western hegemonic designs and colonization. With European declines after the two World Wars, the center of Orientalism shifted from Europe to America, where due to the changing world situation, Orientalism took a more liberal stance towards most of its subjects except Islamic Orientalism. Because of the newly found oil resources or geopolitical importance of the Islamic orient, the United States has been taking the positions of dominance and hegemony once held by Britain and France. As a result, the United States government required academic and expert understanding of the Islamic orient to come up with effective policies for dealing with them. American Orientalists looked towards their European forbearers' scholarship, and in the process American Orientalism was profoundly shaped by the views of its European counterparts. Despite increasing globalization and awareness, the western prejudices towards the orient— particularly Islamic orient—still persist.

The hegemonic Orientalist discourse against the Islamic orient has manifested in American political and social discourse for over 60 years, with varying degrees of vengeance, based upon geo-political events involving Muslims, for instance, the OPEC oil crisis, Iran hostage crisis, and many other events culminating in the United States' "war on terror" and entanglement in Afghanistan and Iraq (see Abukhattala, 2004; Agathangelou & Ling, 2005; Andrea, 2009; Ewing & Hoyler, 2008; Haddad, 2001; Hoodfar, 1993; Ibish, 2003; Joseph et al., 2008; Maira, 2008; Murray, 2004; Nayak, 2006; Nayak & Malone, 2009; Said, 2001; Shryock, 2008; Volpp, 2002). In fact, such

instances have given Said's work repeated new credence time and again (Nayak; Nayak & Malone). Beyond the political rhetoric and media portrayal, the publication of Said's work has led many scholars to highlight various manifestations of the Orientalist discourse and stereotypes in many areas related to public education, for instance, American textbooks (see Morgan, 2008; Jackson, 2010), and liberal feminist tradition creeping in female teacher perceptions vis-à-vis "oppressed" Muslim women (see Hoodfar; Andrea), for instance.

Acculturation and cross-cultural adaptations. Acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members (Berry, 2003). At the group level, it involves changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural practices. At the individual level, it involves changes in a person's behavior, values and attitudes, and identity (Berry). *Adaptation*, on the other hand, refers to changes that take place in individuals or groups in response to environmental demands (Berry). In cross-cultural psychology however, it refers to both the process of dealing with acculturation and the long-term outcome of it (Berry). Cross-cultural adaptations can be primarily *psychological* (e.g., related to sense of well-being or self-esteem) or *sociocultural* (e.g., the ability to "fit in" or acquire culturally appropriate skills to negotiate the daily intercultural living) (Ward, 1996). *Sociocultural* adaptations follow a learning curve with rapid improvement demonstrated over the first few months of cross-cultural transition, and then a gradual "leveling of" of newly acquired culture-specific skills; *psychological* adaptations, on the other hand, are more variable over time (Ward).

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Acculturation *process*, both at group (cultural) and individual level, essentially involves three stages: *contact*, *conflict*, and *adaptation* (Berry, 2003). Cross-cultural *contacts* occur for a number of reasons and continue long after initial contact in culturally plural societies when "ethnocultural" communities maintain features of their heritage cultures (Berry). As a result of the "continuous first-hand contacts," every side makes both short and long-term adaptations (Berry). Sometimes these mutual adaptations take place rather easily through the processes of *culture shedding* and *culture learning* on the part of non-dominant groups; however, they can also create *culture conflict* and *acculturative stress* as manifested by uncertainty, anxiety, and depression (Berry). In the case of conflicts, acculturating groups and their members use one or more of three coping strategies: *problem-focused coping* (involves attempts to change or solve the problem), *emotion-focused coping* (involves attempts to regulate emotions associated with the problem), or *avoidance-oriented* coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, as cited in Berry). Finally, the long-term *adaptations*, both *psychological* and *sociocultural*, are made; which may or may not improve the "fit" between individuals and their environments (Berry).

Prior work and pilot study findings. This study was informed in many ways by various projects that I carried out during doctoral coursework at the George Mason University, such as (1) a mixed-method evaluation study of a comprehensive Islamic education program at a local K-8 Islamic school, (2) a brief review of curricular practices in public schools both past and present,(3) an internship that involved shadowing school administrators in a local public school system, and (4) a limited scope pilot study to

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explore high school transitions from K-8 Islamic to secular public high schools. In fact, the very idea of this research was born out of that small pilot study, which was conducted for a qualitative research methods class. Three Muslim adolescents (two male and one female) were interviewed for an hour to ninety minutes. Three questions guided the study: (a) what are the challenges Muslim adolescents face when they transition from K-8 Islamic schools to public high schools? (b) how do they deal with those challenges while trying to adjust in the new environment and sticking to their religious value system? and, (c) what kinds of parental, peer or school support do they get during their transitions?

Despite its limited scope and tight schedule constraints, a hallmark of any doctoral course, the pilot study informed this main study in many ways; for instance, reframing of the main issue as a multi-dimensional process, some preliminary findings, and decisions regarding research design, participant selection, and preliminary interview protocol. First and foremost, it helped adjust the overall approach towards conceptualizing the issue, from the nebulous idea of the transition as more of a temporary or transient event involving challenges for the Muslim students, to a more appropriate conceptualization of it as a multi-dimensional process situated in the broader context of "systemic" school transitions, with a set of inputs, changes and challenges, adjustments, and outcomes over time.

Moreover, many constructs or themes emerged out of the pilot study, some of which were not fully developed. For instance, discontinuities between the two school systems (i.e., in the environment, curriculum, religio-cultural underpinnings of organizational procedures, and socio-cultural life); psychological challenges (i.e.,

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anxiety, stress, worries about stereotypes, and sense-of-loss); the concept of Muslim

identity and related challenges for more practicing Muslim students (i.e., difficulties in

observing obligatory religious rituals, modest dress code, increased workload due to

observing two religious holidays of Eid, peer curiosity and peer pressures, bullying and

stigmatization, and occasional prejudicial encounters with teachers); coping strategies

(i.e., participation in sports and Muslim Student groups or clubs, selective socialization,

support from other groups sharing additional social identities, closeness with female

teachers); and some sources of support during transitions (i.e., school policies against

bullying and stigmatization, school's exposure to Muslims, teacher attitudes about

diversity, strong Muslim Student Association, school and teacher support, and parental

involvement). In sum, the pilot study findings along with the additional doctoral

coursework projects, and the wide swath of the literature and theoretical frameworks

reviewed and highlighted above, provided many important insights that helped shape the

study framework outlined next.

Putting It All Together—The Study Framework

The most important thing to understand about your conceptual framework

is that it is primarily a conception or model of what is out there that you

plan to study, and of what is going on with these things and why—a

tentative theory of the phenomena that you are investigating. (Maxwell,

2005, p. 33)

Building upon the context outlined in the chapter one (depicted in figure 1.0) and

the subsequent synthesis of literature detailed in the previous two sections, the framework

depicted in figure 2.0 outlines the essential elements of the process involved in high school transitions of the Muslim adolescents from American K-8 Islamic schools to 9-12 secular public high schools. The top part reiterates the core of the process, that is, the "institutional discontinuities" or cluster of changes students encounter in their new schools *cause* a major disruption in the continuity of their lives, which requires adaptation to the changes (*effect*). The adaptation process involves, and is primarily shaped by, the interactions between them and their new schools. During such interactions, the Muslim youths encounter many challenging situations, where they have to make various adjustments and to strike a balance between altering their behavior to fit in with the changed circumstances, and at the same time, preserve the "essence of who they are."

The bottom part of the diagram outlines the various elements or sets of factors involved in the transition process. One element is the type and the magnitude of institutional changes Muslim youths encounter in their new high schools, i.e., organizational, social, and cultural changes (depicted as a). On the other hand, the personal and background characteristics they bring into the process (depicted as b)—specifically related to their prior schooling, various identities and personal choices, and family background—constitute the second element and affects their response. Moreover, the likely negative manifestations of the national "Orientalist" discourse—involving stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination, and violence—in daily schooling (depicted as c), comprise the third element that influences their interactions with the new environment and their adjustment outcomes. Finally, the quality of transition mentoring and support

they receive both prior to and during their transitions constitutes the fourth element

(depicted as d). Ultimately, the interactions between the various elements during the

adaptation process (depicted as e) lead to many short and long-term outcomes (depicted

as f). The framework diagram also outlines a basic typology for various adjustments the

Muslim youths make during their adaptation process. Essentially, each adjustment can

involve or go through some or all of the five stages, i.e., expectation/perception/feelings,

contact/exploration, challenge/conflict/stress, response/coping, and outcome.
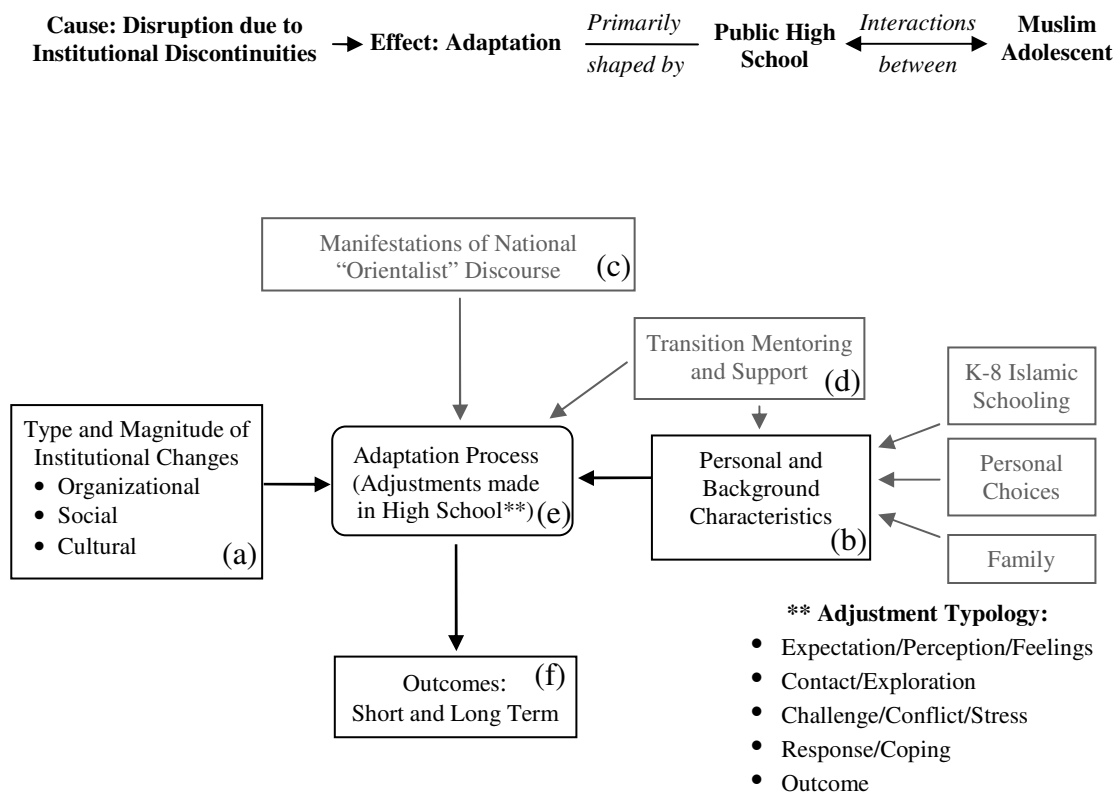
Figure 2.0. Framework for the transition process—Context and components

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this study was to explore the process involved in Muslim adolescents' transitions from K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools in selected areas of the United States; specifically, the study focused on the transition mentoring and support they receive, the changes and challenges they encounter, adjustments they make in order to adapt to the new institutional setup of secular public high schools, and the effect such transitions have on their ability to maintain their religio-cultural identity and lifestyle. The study was guided by the overarching question:

> What is the process involved in high school transitions of the Muslim adolescents, and adaptation of their religio-cultural identity and lifestyle in the new institutional setup, when they move from American K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools?

Furthermore, it focused on seeking definitive answers to the following sub-questions:

1) What are some salient characteristics that distinguish K-8 Islamic schools from secular public high schools? How do such characteristics influence students' personal and interpersonal conduct? How do the youths self-identify prior to high school transitions?

2) What kinds of transition mentoring and support do they receive from their families and friends, Islamic schools, and public high schools? Which of those do they find helpful? How can such efforts be improved?

3) What are some key changes and challenges they encounter in their new schools during transitions? How do those affect their personal, academic, and social adjustments?

4) What additional factors related to their personal and family backgrounds, Islamic schools, and public high schools do they find helpful during their adjustment efforts?

Researcher Background

As the researcher, I brought to this study both a keen interest and first-hand experiences with several aspects of its context. My interest in the issue stemmed from the fact that my own children have attended a K-8 Islamic school since kindergarten, and were enrolled in grades six, four, and one at the onset of this study. Throughout much of that time, I voluntarily worked with my children's Islamic school in various capacities. I also worked on various academic projects focusing on different aspects of the two school systems (K-8 Islamic schools and public schools) during my doctoral program including, but not limited to, a doctoral internship in public schools and a pilot study investigating high school transitions of three Muslim adolescents from American K-8 Islamic schools to 9-12 secular public high schools. That involvement helped me develop insights into the study participants' backgrounds, organizational and socio-cultural functioning and differences between the two school systems, along with some transition experiences of a

small sample of Muslim youths. Despite certain biases that flow out of such experiences, potentially shaping the way I perceived the data and interpreted the text, both the knowledge and sensitivity gained, and the deep personal interest in genuinely understanding the process has strengthened my expertise and credibility as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.

Familiarity with the Study Context

As a parent of children who attend an American K-8 Islamic school, and will be going to secular public high schools, the outcomes and implications of this study are not only academic but also personal. Since my children started going to an Islamic school, my family (as many other Muslim families I came to know throughout the years) had consciously engaged in efforts to selectively socialize, and limit our children's exposure to media (both news and entertainment media) in order to shield them from anti-Muslim prejudice during their formative years and supplement their Islamic schooling. In many cases, we adjusted our home environments and practices so that our children could move between home and school environments easily. These family choices and close work with the Islamic school provided me with a deeper understanding of many participants' backgrounds, their family choices and challenges, and various important aspects of Islamic schooling in the United States (i.e., goals, curriculum, teaching, organizational and socio-cultural setup, potential shortcomings, and challenges).

After setting my focus on possible dissertation research concerning the process involved in high school transitions of the Muslim adolescents, I made conscious efforts to use many of my academic projects during my doctoral program, involving both Islamic

and public schools, to further develop insights into the context of my study. For example, for a graduate research methods course titled "Evaluation Methods Used in Educational Programs and Curricula," I conducted a mixed method evaluation study during the spring of 2006 at an Islamic school.

Similarly, on the public school side, I used an independent study and my advanced doctoral internship, both during the fall of 2006, as vehicles to further gain insights into the curriculum development and functioning of the public school system. The independent study, titled "Curricular Practices—Past and Present," combined with the above-mentioned evaluation study at the Islamic school, provided me with an opportunity to understand the differences in curricular practices of the two school systems. During the advanced doctoral internship, where my primary goal was to observe the institutional climate and functioning of public schools, and various leadership roles school administrators played during their day-to-day work, I also got the opportunity to gain first-hand exposure and insights into the functioning of a local public school system.

Pilot Study Foundations and Exposure to the Issue

Prior to the spring of 2006, all my understanding and exposure to American public school systems was based on many literature reviews and academic projects I had worked on, discussions I had with colleagues in my education leadership and policy classes who worked in different local public school systems, and the media. It was during the spring of 2006, when I conducted a pilot study, where I interviewed three Muslim youths (two male and one female) for an hour to ninety minutes each in order to

explore their high school transitions from K-8 Islamic to secular public high schools. That was also the time when I was conducting the evaluation study at the Islamic school (prior to both the independent study and internship involving public schools) mentioned earlier. Questions guiding that pilot study included: (a) what are the challenges Muslim adolescents face when they transition from K-8 Islamic schools to public high schools? (b) How do they deal with those challenges while trying to adjust in the new environment and sticking to their religious value system? And, (c) What kinds of parental, peer or school support do they get during their transitions?

Despite its limited scope and tight schedule constraints, the pilot study contributed to my understanding of both the subject and the research design for the full study in many unique ways. First and foremost, it led me to adjust my approach towards conceptualizing the issue, from the nebulous idea of the transition as more of a temporary or transient event involving challenges for Muslim youths, to a more appropriate conceptualization of it as a process with a set of inputs, changes and challenges, adjustments, and outcomes over time. The ensuing reflections and further review of literature led me to situate Muslim youths' transition process in the broader context of "systemic" high school transitions, which has been keenly studied during the last three decades (see Benner, 2011). I also realized that I needed direct hands-on exposure to the day-to-day functioning of American public school systems in order to avoid similar blind-spots before starting my final study. As a result of that realization, I used my advanced doctoral internship to shadow administrators in select public elementary,

middle, and high schools in order to help me personally observe different aspects of public school functioning.

The insights from the pilot study, and the ensuing reconceptualization and internship, led me to revise my research questions and choice of the research design in order to focus on exploring the Muslim adolescents' transition as a process. On the research design, the context and content of the interviews from the pilot study provided many new directions. I realized that I needed to include a mix of participants in my study, not only based on gender and race or ethnicity, but also include freshmen and a few sophomores and those who had completed, or were about to complete, their public high schooling. I expected that such a sample would help me understand the transition process somewhat beyond the ninth grade, as well as explore the influences of major events involving Muslims, like the events of 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, on those transitions. I also realized that I needed to conduct more than one interview with each participant in order to better develop rapport with the participants and collect "rich data" (Maxwell, 2005) in the subsequent interviews. As a consequence, I needed a research design that used a simultaneous data collection and analysis in a "zigzag" fashion (Creswell, 2005), where one set of interviews would lead to analysis, which in turn, would lead to further and more focused data collection in the subsequent interviews. I also learned during that pilot study that I needed to consider interviewing female participants in a group of two in some cases in order to accommodate religio-cultural preferences of some Muslim parents.

Finally, the pilot study also provided a framework for constructing the preliminary interview protocol for this study and a set of preliminary codes and categories, some of which served as the "organizational bins" (Maxwell, 2005) for the initial open coding and data analysis. Some of the codes and categories or constructs that emerged out of the pilot study, albeit not fully developed in some cases, included: organizational and socio-cultural differences or "discontinuities" between the two school systems (i.e., differences in the environment, curriculum, socio-cultural underpinnings of organizational SOPs, and social/cultural life); Muslim identity-related challenges the Muslim youths encountered both in their personal (i.e., dress code, dietary restrictions, mandatory rituals and observing religious holidays) and inter-personal domains (i.e., cross-gender interactions, prohibited/discouraged practices, peer-curiosity, and bullying); coping strategies they used to adjust (i.e., participation in sports and MSA, selective socialization); and some sources of support that helped ease their transitions (i.e., family background, schools' exposure to diversity and Muslims, school and teacher support, strong Muslim group support, and parental support). In sum, my familiarity with the issue due to my work with Islamic and public schools, prior academic work, and the pilot study provided me with a solid foundation of expertise and credibility to serve as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis for this study.

Research Design and Rationale

I selected a qualitative "grounded" theory design using multiple in-depth participant interviews to investigate the process involved in Muslim youth's high school transitions. Although participant interviews were the main source of data for this study, I

did consult some additional sources of information in the beginning to both verify some of the participant accounts as well as gain additional insights on some specific topics related to every Islamic and public high school the participants attended. More specifically:

- I consulted school websites in order to check the school profiles and any transition mentoring and support related information, including announcements and PowerPoint presentations on the topic.

- I also consulted student handbooks available on each of the three Islamic schools participants attended in order to further gain insights into various aspects of the schools detailed in the chapter four.

Creswell (2005), in his treatise on educational research methods, describes grounded theory design as a "systematic" qualitative procedure used to generate a "process" theory that "explains an educational process of events, activities, actions, and interactions that occur over time" (p. 396). According to Creswell, it is the approach of choice, "when existing theories do not address your problem or the participants that you plan to study" (p. 396). Although researchers can collect many different forms of data in grounded theory design, many rely heavily on interviewing, perhaps as a way to capture best the experiences of participants in their own words (Charmaz, 2002) or "learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see" (Glesne, 2006, p. 81). Moreover, as a "systematic process," grounded theory design "exhibits the rigor quantitative researchers like to see in an educational study" (Creswell, p. 396), yet its methods "consist of flexible strategies for focusing and expediting qualitative data

collection and analysis" (Charmaz, p. 675). The design has features that contain a "self-correction" nature (Creswell), where, based on analysis of one set of data, the researcher obtains direction for collecting the next set of data (Charmaz). In addition, in data analysis, the researcher builds categories (used synonymously with themes) systematically from incident to incident and from incident to category, and stays close to the data at all times in the analysis (Creswell).

Essentially, a qualitative grounded theory design, using multiple in-depth interviews, is an appropriate choice when an investigation: (a) focuses on a process, (b) requires developing a theory or explanation of a process when existing theories do not exist or adequately explain the process under study, and (c) requires systematic, yet flexible procedures. The choice of grounded theory design for this study was made primarily for those three reasons. First, the guiding question for this study focused primarily on investigating a process involved in the high school transitions of Muslim youths from American K-8 Islamic schools to American secular 9-12 public high schools, and adaptations of their Muslim identity in the new school environment. Second, there was a need to generate, rather than to verify, a theory or a workable explanation for the process (see chapter two for detailed literature review and need for a process theory). Interpretation rather than measurement seemed especially important to this study. Third, the choice had to do with my own personal preference for a systematic yet flexible approach; systematic due to my own prior background and training (which has been more systematic and quantitative in nature), yet flexible, in order to develop better understanding of the process due to the deep personal interest.

Over the years, since its initial development by Glaser and Strauss in the late 1960s, three somewhat different approaches have emerged for the grounded theory design, i.e., systematic, emerging, and constructivist (Creswell, 2005). The differences among these approaches are primarily related to the degree of "prescription" for analysis and presentation of findings (Charmaz, 2002). Regardless of the differences however, all the variants:

- start with a tentative process involving some sequence of events or activities, and actions by or interactions among people;

- use purposeful theoretical sampling at some point in the study;

- use "emerging design" involving multiple iterations of data collection and analysis in "zigzag" fashion, where one set of interviews would lead to analysis, which in turn, would lead to further and more focused data collection in the subsequent interviews;

- use "open coding" to focus on discovery of basic social processes within the data;

- use "constant comparison" procedure for inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesize those social processes;

- select a "core category" as the central phenomenon for theory and sample emerging categories to refine and relate those categories through comparative processes; and,

- integrate categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the studied phenomenon (Charmaz; Creswell).

Throughout the process, researchers frequently write memos to elaborate on ideas about data and coded categories, explore hunches and thoughts to search for broader explanations at work in the data, and prevent paralysis from mountains of data (Creswell, 2005; Maxwell, 2005). Many also supplement memos with diagrams, which are more periodic, but when combined with the memos, "move the analysis forward and as such are just as important to the research process as data gathering itself" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 118).

In addition to following the above common steps, Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 1998) systematic approach was specifically used during the data analysis phase, primarily because it consists of the most clearly orchestrated procedures for data analysis (Creswell, 2005). The systematic design emphasizes the use of data analysis steps of open, axial, and selective coding; development of a visual representation called a "coding paradigm" that portrays the interrelationship of emerging categories; and ultimately, an overarching theory explaining the phenomenon being studied. (See the section on data analysis procedures for more details.)

Although the systematic grounded theory approach has been criticized by some researchers to be too "systematic" (Charmaz, 2002), overly emphasizing on rules and procedures, and a "preconceived" framework for categories (Glaser, 1992); and its distinct language may be viewed as "jargon" by some educators (Creswell); nevertheless, I selected this approach for performing analysis because it is preferred by the researchers with a "quantitative background" or those who "prefer rigorous procedures," and is still "widely used in educational research" (Creswell, p. 397). Furthermore, I addressed some

of the criticisms leveled by: (a) following the procedures outlined above that are common to all three designs; (b) being cognizant of the criticisms during the analysis phase (Maxwell, 2005); and (c) delaying the development of a "coding paradigm" in order to allow the theory to "emerge" from data instead of forcing it into the preconceived framework (Glaser). In fact, Corbin and Strauss (2008) remind us that "the paradigm is only a tool and not a set of directives. A common mistake among beginning analysts is that they fixate on the specifics of the paradigm rather than thinking about the logic behind its use and what this use of paradigm is designed to do" (p. 90).

Research Process

Participant and Site Selection (Sampling)

In a qualitative inquiry, the intent is not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2005). In order to best achieve that goal, a qualitative researcher purposefully selects individuals and sites that can provide relevant information to better learn or understand the phenomenon (Weiss, 1994). The standard used in choosing participants and sites is whether they are "information rich" (Patton, 1990). Qualitative researchers use many types of purposeful selection strategies, i.e., typical, criterion, critical, maximal variation, theoretical, confirming and disconfirming, opportunistic, etc. (see Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell). Grounded theory design recommends however that the selection decisions need to be made throughout the study, and that the theoretical sampling should be one of the strategies at some point in the study (Charmaz, 2002). Theoretical sampling is a purposeful selection strategy in which the researcher selects individuals or sites because

they can help the researcher generate or discover a theory or specific concepts within the theory (Creswell). Essentially, it helps the researcher to: (a) gain rich data, (b) fill out theoretical categories, (c) discover variation within theoretical categories, and (d) define gaps within and between those categories (Charmaz).

Following Patton's (1990) imperative, my intent was to select a diverse group of participants in the Baltimore-Washington (BW) metropolitan region whose experiences could help illuminate the process explored by the research questions developed for this study. The Baltimore-Washington region was selected for four primary reasons: (a) easy access and potential for minimizing travel, (b) a large Muslim population and many Islamic schools, (c) its population diversity and representativeness, and (d) a large area with potential for preserving participants' privacy. The grounded theory design's recommendations for continuous refocusing however required some kind of a broader sampling framework that could help set the overall foci and boundaries for the evolving sampling decisions. Miles and Huberman's (1994) sampling framework, adopted for the present study, shown in table 3.1, served both as a starting point and a guide for the continuous sampling decisions made throughout this study.

Guided by the sampling framework in table 3.1, my participant selection strategy evolved gradually from criterion (Patton, 1990) to theoretical (Charmaz, 2002) during the study. To be selected, a participant was required to meet at least the two basic criteria that I had used in my pilot study, and were implicit in the above framework, namely: (a) a Muslim adolescent must have completed all or at least the last part of his or her K-8 schooling in an American Islamic school; and (b) only those students whose high school

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transitions involved moving to a secular American 9-12 public high school were eligible

for selection. Informed by my prior work and detailed literature review, I broadened the

participant selection criteria to include: (c) both males and females and the three major

racial or ethnic sub-groups of the American Muslim populations (i.e., African Americans,

Arabs, and South Asians) in order to help illuminate variation, if any, within their

transition experiences due to their additional social identities based upon their gender,

race or ethnicity; and (d) two groups of participants—five to six freshmen to explore their

transition experiences as they unfolded, and two or three older participants who had been

in American public high schools for more than a year in order to gain further insights into

their longer-term integration experiences.

Table 3.1. *Sampling Framework Used for the Study*

Sampling Parameters	Possible Choices
Settings	Secular 9-12 public high schools in one or two regions of the U.S.
Actors	At least eight Muslim adolescents who made their high school transitions from American K-8 Islamic schools to secular 9-12 public high schools
Events	Muslim adolescents' high school transitions from American K-8 Islamic schools to secular 9-12 public high schools, and adaptation of their Muslim identity in the new institutional setup of public high schools
Processes	K-8 Islamic schooling and its outcomes that influence the Muslim youth's high school transitions; transition mentoring and preparations they receive prior to their move; simultaneous changes and challenges they encounter during such transitions; their gradual adjustment to those changes and challenges; their experiences of adapting their Muslim identity in the new institutional setup of public high schools; anti-Muslim/Islam stereotypes or prejudices and discrimination they encounter, if any, and their coping strategies; effects of negative media coverage of Muslims and national/geo-political events involving Muslims on their transitions; and their overall integration outcomes

However, as I started recruiting participants and collecting preliminary data, I came across an opportunity to recruit additional participants from a second metropolitan region in what is known as the "Bible Belt," i.e., the Raleigh-Durham-Cary (RDC) metropolitan area in North Carolina. Despite the travel and additional time commitments involved, including them in my sample offered me better opportunities for collecting not only richer data, but also discover any further variations among the participants' experiences due to: (e) some characteristic differences between the two regions, i.e., differences in history, population characteristics and nature of diversity, influences of televangelists on the region or lack thereof, and etc.; and (g) participants' additional characteristics of emerging interest, i.e., freshman and sophomore siblings who transitioned into the same public high school one after the other, bi-racial/ethnic White-Arab participants, participants transitioning into a nationwide top achieving public charter high school, and etc. Their inclusion provided me opportunities to gain further insights into the influences of those additional participant and site/region characteristics on the transition process.

Although two to three participants from the second group should have provided sufficient information, one of the female participant in that group (Nadda) could not make it for her second interview for personal reasons. Although she made herself available for answering my questions through email, I did include another female participant (Rashida) into the second group. Rashida emerged as a subject of choice because of two additional background characteristics of potential interest: (a) she was the only participant who attended a medium-sized public high school with over twenty-

percent of the student body comprised of Muslim students; and (b) she started her freshman year just before the events of 9/11. Her experiences were expected to provide further insights into the effects of having many Muslims around, as well as those of the catastrophic events like 9/11, on high school transitions of Muslim youths.

Finally, I added a third group comprised of three additional participants in the final sample towards the end of data collection and analysis phase on a purely opportunistic basis. This group included an American-born Muslim youths of Somali descent who went to a secular private high school after his K-8 Islamic schooling, and two Muslin siblings of Pakistani descent who moved to a public middle school near the end of seventh grade due to family relocation and later moved to a secular 9-12 public high school from there. Although those three participants did not meet the two basic criteria laid out in the sampling framework, they were included to serve as a "comparison group" (Maxwell, 2005) in order to highlight differences in transition experiences and provide a better contrast with the experiences of the main participants in the first two groups. Moreover, inclusion of the two siblings (Ahmed and Rehana) and Rashida, all of whom had completed high school, also helped explore longer-term adjustments and illuminate the effects of major catastrophic events like those of September 11th on the high school transitions of Muslims.

Table 3.2 reflects the final sample that evolved over the course of this study. It includes the participant group, region, participant pseudonym, gender, race/ethnicity, high school (HS) grade, and the years in Islamic school (IS). The table also includes the number of interviews I conducted with each participant and the follow-up phone or email

communications made with them. Two of the participants from group one were interviewed beyond their freshman year; while Sadaf was interviewed during her freshman and sophomore years, Saeeda was interviewed during freshman, sophomore and junior years.

Table 3.2. *Study Participants*

Group	Region	Participant	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	HS Grade	IS Years	Interviews	Calls and Emails
One	BW	Abdul	Male	African American	Freshman	5-8	2	3
	BW	Saeeda	Female	Asian (Pakistani)	Freshman, Sophomore, Junior	K-8	4	3
	BW	Osman	Male	Asian (Pakistani)	Freshman	6-8	2	1
	RDC	Mohamad*	Male	Mixed (White mother/Arab father)	Freshman	K-8	2	1
	RDC	Sadaf	Female	Asian (Indian)	Freshman, Sophomore	K-8	2	3
	RDC	Mona	Female	Arab (Palestinian)	Freshman	4-8	2	1
Two	BW	Rashida	Female	African (Somalian)	Finished	K-8	1	3
	RDC	Omar	Male	Arab (Palestinian)	Sophomore	K-8	2	1
	RDC	Maria*	Female	Mixed (White mother/Arab father)	Sophomore	K-8	2	2
	RDC	Nadda	Female	Arab (Palestinian)	Sophomore	K-8	1	5
Three	BW	Ahmed**	Male	Asian (Pakistani)	Finished	3-7	2	1
	BW	Rehana**	Female	Asian (Pakistani)	Finished	K-7	2	3
	BW	Ali	Male	African (Somalian)	Freshman (private)	5-8	1	1

Notes: * and ** were siblings respectively

BW – Baltimore-Washington metropolitan region

RDC – Raleigh-Durham-Carey metropolitan region in North Carolina

Research Relations and Ethical Considerations

"In a qualitative study, the researcher is the instrument of the research, and the research relationships are the means by which the research gets done" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 83). Therefore, the research relationships a qualitative researcher develops with the participants in his or her study, and with the "gatekeepers" who can facilitate or hinder participant selection and data collection, are an essential part of research methods (Creswell, 2005). It is also important to remember that what is a "research project" to a qualitative researcher is always, to some degree, an intrusion into the lives of its participants or the sites to be used for data collection (Maxwell). Therefore, when the research involves minors, a qualitative researcher has certain ethical and legal obligations to the participants and the research site (Creswell, Maxwell). Moreover, as the sole instrument of research, the "burden of proof" to create "trustworthiness" of the research findings rests upon him (Charmaz, 2002); and as such, he has certain ethical obligations to the audiences of the research (Creswell). According to Maxwell, engaging in full disclosure throughout the research process is a significant component of ensuring the trustworthiness of the findings and meeting the ethical obligations towards the audiences.

With those recommendations in mind, I set out to recruit participants for my study in the broader Baltimore-Washington metropolitan region in the beginning. Ultimately, the efforts also extended to the Raleigh-Durham-Cary metropolitan area. As this study required interviewing primarily high school freshmen and some sophomores, who are generally considered minors, I focused on approaching and soliciting approval from the parents whose children met the sampling criteria in order to recruit the would-be

participants. I received formal approval from George Mason University's Human

Subjects Review Board (HSRB), which is responsible for ensuring the rights and welfare

of human subjects recruited to participate in research activities conducted under the

auspices of the university, before I contacted any parents of the would-be participants.

The HSRB, as part of its research approval process, reviews every aspect of the proposed

research, including but not limited to, safeguards employed to ensure participants' rights

and privacy, template and contents of the consent and assent forms, instrumentation,

recruitment materials used in the study, and procedures for appropriate handling of the

collected data to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of participants' responses.

After receiving formal HSRB approval, I approached many Muslim parents either

through principals or teachers in the Islamic schools, or personal acquaintances and

friends. I consciously chose not to select participants who attended the same school my

children attended, or parents who were close friends, in order to both avoid potential

confidentiality issues and to facilitate an open and meaningful participation by the

participants. For some of the Islamic schools in the two regions, I contacted their

principals after getting their email addresses and contact phone numbers from the Islamic

Schools' League of America website (http://www.4islamicschools.org/schools/), which

maintains a list of member Islamic schools in the United States and Canada. Essentially,

a principal or a teacher from an Islamic school, or an acquaintance or friend, contacted

and encouraged the parents to allow their children to participate. Once the parents

showed willingness, I was provided their phone numbers or email addresses. Afterwards,

I directly contacted the parents over the phone or via email, and explained to them the

purpose and process of the research, how I would ensure their children's rights and privacy, how they or other parents and Muslim youths would benefit from it, and addressed any questions they raised. I used the HSRB approved flyer (see appendix B) in those communications. Abdul was the only exception. A community activist friend directly introduced me to him at a community fundraiser for his previous Islamic school. During that encounter, Abdul provided me his parents' phone number, whom I contacted afterwards, to solicit their approval after explaining to them what I had explained to other parents.

I was concerned in the beginning that some parents of female participants would be reluctant to allow their daughters to participate in the interviews with a male interviewer for religio-cultural preferences. As a result, I was prepared to solicit help from a female teacher at my children's school, or a female colleague in the doctoral program, to help conduct interviews with the female participants. Based on my prior experience during the pilot study, where I interviewed a female participant in the presence of her sister, I was also prepared to conduct interviews from the female participants in groups of two or in the presence of another person, or in a semi-public place like a teachers' lounge in an Islamic school, or participants' homes. Weiss's (1994) advice that, "the best way to deal with the situation [where others are present in an interview] is to include everyone present in the interview" (p. 144), proved to be a helpful guide for handling such situations. However, not a single parent raised an issue with my interviewing the female participants.

There were no objections to the audio-tapping of interviews once they were told about the safeguards that were in place to ensure their children's rights and the privacy of their responses (see data collection procedures and data management strategies section for further details). I interviewed Saeeda, Sadaf, and Rashida in the privacy of study rooms or a similar setup in their homes. Similarly, I interviewed Ahmed and Rehana together in their home. Maria and Nadda, who were close friends, chose to be interviewed together on weekends in the teachers' lounge in their Islamic school, where Maria's parents worked. Similarly, Mohamad and Omar preferred to be interviewed together in the same lounge. I accommodated the location and timing preferences of every participant or parent. In the end, I was well satisfied with the outcomes of those arrangements. In every case, whether the participants were interviewed individually or in a group of two, and whether they were interviewed in their homes or public (or semi-private) places, I was amazed at the participants' desire to tell their stories in detail and how they piggy-backed on each other's accounts in the joint interviews.

"Zigzag" Data Collection and Analysis

In a grounded theory design, data collection, analysis, and subsequent theory development tasks are integrally connected (Charmaz, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). They proceed in a "zigzag" fashion, as the researcher collects initial data, preferably through tape-recorded interviews, analyzes it immediately (after transcribing the interviews verbatim into textual form) rather than waiting until all data are collected, and then bases the decision about what data to collect next on this analysis (Creswell, 2005). In the process, the researcher uses the "constant comparison" procedure (Glaser, 1992),

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that is an inductive (from specific to broad) data analysis procedure to generate and

connect themes or categories by comparing incidents in the textual data to other

incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to other categories. This process

continues until category saturation is reached, when the researcher makes the subjective

determination that new data will not provide any new information or insights for the

developing categories (Patton, 1990). From among the major categories derived from the

data, the researcher then selects a core category as the basis (for the central phenomenon),

and relates the other major categories to the core category for writing the grounded theory

(Creswell). The resulting theory offers an abstract explanation of the process involved in

the central phenomenon being studied (Charmaz). Throughout the process, the

researcher writes memos and does diagrams to elaborate on ideas about the data and the

emerging categories (Corbin & Strauss).

As depicted in figure 3.1, my data collection, analysis, and subsequent theory

development also proceeded in a similar zigzag fashion. Starting with a preliminary

conceptual framework based on prior work and review of the existing literature, which

also formed the basis for the first set of interviews, I conducted a total of twenty-five

interviews, each lasting between one and a half to three hours, and made twenty-eight

follow-up phone calls or email communications throughout the process. A total of

thirteen participants were interviewed—seven from Baltimore-Washington (BW) region

and six from Raleigh-Durham-Cary (RDC) region. Participants selected provided a

variety of perspectives including gender, race or ethnicity, time in Islamic and public

high schools, role of siblings if any, variations in Islamic and public high schools, etc. It

took over a year to collect and analyze the bulk of the data. The data and emerging

findings were verified with the participants throughout subsequent interviews and in

follow-up communications. Most of the interviews were conducted during November

2008 through August of 2009 (depicted as phase 1 through phase 5 below), and telephone

and email follow-ups were made over the following few months (depicted as phase 6).

The original plan envisioned completing most of the data collection and analysis

towards the end of November of 2009. However, some personal reasons led me to delay

my dissertation defense; I continued to follow select participants. Specifically, I

interviewed Saeeda during her sophomore and junior years because of some specific

challenges she experienced, which are detailed in the chapter four. I also interviewed

Sadaf over the phone towards the middle of her sophomore year because she was elected

class president. The last data were gathered in March of 2011. This additional activity is

depicted as the phase 7 in the figure 3.1. Throughout the process, I wrote numerous

memos of different kinds and varying sizes and created diagrams to explore, describe,

and relate various pieces of the data and emerging categories.

Data Collection   Data Analysis

Saturated Categories and
Theory Development

Phase 7   Additional interviews
BW & R-D-C   Saeeda (phone/personal)
Feb 10-Mar 11   Sadaf (phone)   Additional themes and
                                                    more Refined Categories

Phase 6   Follow-up emails
BW & R-D-C   and phone calls   More Refined Categories
Aug 09-Nov 09   (Selective/integration coding &
                                                    memoing/diagrams)
Phase 5   Ahmed** & Rehana**
B-W
Jul-Aug 09   Ali
                                                    More Refined Categories
                                                    (Open, axial, & selective/integration
Phase 4   Sadaf   coding, & memoing/diagrams)
R-D-C   Mona
May-Jun 09   Mohamad* & Omar
                 Maria*   More Refined Categories
                                                    (Open, axial, & selective/thematic
                                                    coding, & memoing/diagrams)
Phase 3   Abdul
B-W   Saeeda
Mar-May 09   Osman
                 Ahmed** & Rehana**
                                                    Refined Categories
                                                    (Open & axial coding, &
Phase 2   Mona   memoing/diagrams)
R-D-C   Sadaf
Jan-Mar 09   Maria* & Nadda
                 Mohamad* & Omar   Preliminary Categories
                                                    (Open & axial coding, &
                 Rashida

Phase 1
B-W   Abdul   Preliminary Categories
Nov 08-Jan 09   Saeeda   (Open coding & memoing)
                 Osman

Preliminary Conceptual Framework
(Based on prior work and literature review)
Figure 3.1. Zigzag data collection and analysis (adopted from Creswell, 2005)

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Interviewing and Data Management Strategies

As preferred by grounded theory researchers, I chose semi-structured face-to-face interviews as the primary data collection method for this study, except near the end, where I used both phone calls and emails for quicker probing and follow-ups. The data collection started with a short interview protocol comprised of two parts, a short introduction to the study and interviewing process, and nineteen broad questions (see appendix D-1). The interviews varied in length from one-half hour to two and in some cases three hours. The questions covered a wide range of interest areas, i.e., participants' personal and family background; Islamic schooling; transition mentoring and preparations; feelings prior to and experiences of the first day of a public high school; a typical day as a visible (where applicable), or otherwise, Muslim male or female on a public school campus; their views of their public school teachers and peers and how they compared with their Islamic school teachers and peers; some of the challenges they encountered in their new schools and their response to those challenges; their sources of support, etc. The questions were guided by the emerging categories discovered in the pilot study and the prior detailed literature review.

Essentially, the interview protocol for the first set of interviews was designed with three specific goals in mind: (a) to introduce the participants to the purpose, process, expectations and time commitments, and their rights during the interviewing; (b) to keep the interview questions "sufficiently general to cover a wide range of experiences as well as narrow enough to elicit and explore the participant's specific experience" (Charmaz,

2002, p. 679); and (c) to build rapport with the participants in order to get closer to the studied phenomenon (Weiss, 1994).

Prior to the first interview with each participant, I asked each parent and participant to sign a parental consent and participant assent form respectively (see appendix C for the HSRB approved parental consent and participant assent forms used for this study). I made every effort to accommodate participants' preferences, or the preferences of their parents, for the interview time, place, and settings. Six participants chose to be interviewed in their homes (i.e., Ahmed, Osman, Rashida, Rehana, Sadaf, and Saeeda), five in their old Islamic schools (i.e., Maria, Mohamad, Mona, Nadda, and Omar), and the remaining two were interviewed in a coffee shop or a local community center (i.e., Abdul and Ali respectively). Out of the total of thirteen, six participants (who were either close friends or siblings) also chose to participate in the interviews together in groups of two due to logistical constraints or religio-cultural preferences. All the interviews were tape recorded with both parental and participants' consent.

After completing the first set of interviews, and each subsequent interview, I prepared either an email memo or a tape-recorded voice memo detailing first impressions, observations about the whole interviewing experience, the nature of conversations, and other noticeable things in order to preserve the context for the later analysis. I used a digital recording device for audio-recording purposes, which was suitable for transferring the recorded audio files to a password protected personal laptop and facilitating easy transcriptions. After transferring the digital voice recording files to the laptop, I also made a backup copy of the files stored on a thumb drive in order to store

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it in a separate secure place that was constantly locked. I labeled the audio and

corresponding transcription files with participant pseudonym, interview number, and the

interview date, for example, Mona_1of2_20090219.wav was used for the digital audio

file and Mona_1of2_20090521.doc was used for the corresponding transcription file.

I personally transcribed each interview, either immediately after the interviews, if

no other interview was scheduled in the following few days, or after each batch of the

interviews was completed in each phase outlined in the data collection procedures. I

replaced all participants and their school names or other identifiable information in the

transcript with pre-assigned pseudonyms to ensure their privacy. I also used *italicized*

words in square brackets to provide cues about the context, as recommended by Creswell

(2005); for example, [*pause*], [*laughter*], [*telephone rings*], and [*inaudible*]. Transcribing

interviews myself not only gave me confidence in the accuracy of the transcriptions and

more control in their proper organization, but the exercise also helped me listen to the

tapes and write further memos about my impressions of the interviews. Moreover, the

tightly integrated nature of data-collection and analysis mandated by the grounded theory

design, a tight schedule, and budget limitations did not allow for soliciting help in

transcribing the interviews.

As the interview process continued after the first set of interviews, I shifted the

focus to the meanings of events experienced by the participants, which were shared in

prior interviews, allowing for inductive grounded approaches to data collection. The

questions become sharper and more specific. Each subsequent interview, or follow-up

call or email, also included clarifications and member checks integrating early

information, from the same participant and from the interviews with others, continuously providing themes for further discussion. Thus, in addition to immediate probes into the causes and impact of events or verification of interpretations of the prior conversations, each interview often served as the basis for the subsequent interview questions, and my use of semi-structured interview protocols became an iterative process. I created a participant-specific protocol for each interview that would feed-off of prior conversations with the same participant, and also the emerging categories or themes from the conversations with the other participants. See appendix D-2 for sample participant specific follow-up questions, and appendix D-3 for sample questions for the second interviews and subsequent phone or email follow-ups.

I continued to collect data until adequacy was attained—that is, category saturation occurred and variation was both understood and addressed (Charmaz, 2002). Essentially, the data generated from the face-to-face interviews and follow-up calls and emails were promptly reduced and analyzed. Each participant was asked to verify the accuracy of the accounts and their interpretations during the second interview or in the follow-up phone calls or emails. The accounts of interest from the freshmen were shared with the sophomores, and with those who had completed high school, to get their insights based upon their longer-term view of their overall experiences. With the exception of one participant (Ali), twelve participants provided enthusiastic reviews. The follow-up calls varied from five minutes to forty minutes, and emails varied from a few liners to a few paragraphs or pages in some cases. In responding to follow-up queries, participants

also provided specific information required to complete and complement the emerging theory. See appendix E for a sample email response.

Data Analysis Procedures

The systematic design in grounded theory emphasizes the use of data analysis steps of open, axial and selective coding, which lead to the development of a "logic paradigm," or a visual picture of the theoretical model, and a story line in order to develop the narrative that describes the phenomenon being studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998; Creswell, 2005). However, being mindful of the criticisms leveled against the approach, which were highlighted under the research design and rationale section, I chose to delay a formal analysis involving the three steps in the beginning in order to avoid "premature commitment" to Strauss and Corbin's framework or "lack of conceptual depth" (Glaser, 1992; Charmaz, 2002; Creswell). In fact, Corbin and Strauss (2008) remind us that "[a]n important point to remember is that the paradigm is only a tool and not a set of directives ... beginning analysts ... being overly concerned about identifying—conditions or strategies or consequences in data rigidified the analysis process, and miss the creativity" (p. 90). In any case, I began mentally identifying conceptual labels as I transcribed the interviews. After finishing transcription of each interview, I read through each one of them, and the corresponding memo I wrote after completing that particular interview. I did this primarily to become familiar with the data. In addition, I commented on words or phrases that somehow seemed intuitively important during this perusal. This process is similar to circling words or phrases with a pencil.

Moving through the transcripts sentence-by-sentence, I asked such customary questions of the data as "What seems to be going on here?" and "What is the interviewee really saying here?" and "What difference does it make anyway?" Sometimes the answer was a sentence or phrase, and sometimes simply a descriptor. However, occasionally I transcended these limitations and identified a label that really seemed to conceptualize participant experiences, for example, Islamic schooling as "life in a bubble." After completing a first reading of each transcript and corresponding preliminary memo, I wrote a second memo, further elaborating on my impressions of the participant accounts and some of the codes and categories that jumped right out of the data during the informal reading and exploration exercise. I did not use any of the prior known codes and categories from the pilot study and the literature during this preliminary exploration.

The formal data analysis primarily revolved around using the open, axial, and selective coding procedures. To carry out the formal analysis, I did not use any qualitative software tools like N-vivo, etc. Instead, I relied on manual sentence-by-sentence readings, and used Microsoft Word's many powerful features (i.e., highlighting, commenting, change tracking, and drawing) to carry out the coding and analysis of the interview transcripts. Although I come from a "business intelligence" background, where it is common to seek patterns in quantitative data using "intelligent" data mining software tools, I was skeptical of relying on any qualitative data analysis tool like N-Vivo to carry out similar meaningful analysis work on textual data without losing the essence of participants' accounts. Performing a sentence-by-sentence analysis iteratively by hand, although time consuming and labor intensive, helped ensure a clear understanding of the

data, participant accounts, and social processes embedded in those accounts. During the

formal analysis, I used some of the known categories that emerged from the pilot study

and existing literature on high school transitions as well as the preliminary informal

exploration as "organizational bins" for sorting the data (Maxwell, 2005).

It is important to point out that, although grounded theory analysis consists of the

three types of coding—open, axial, and selective—the lines separating the three are

largely "artificial," and for explanatory purposes only (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), "to

indicate to readers that though we break data apart, and identify concepts to stand for the

data, we also have to put it back together again by relating those concepts" (Corbin &

Strauss, 2008, p. 198). The three types of coding did not transpire in distinct stages

during the data collection and analysis for this study. In retrospect, I moved between

conceptualizing a new category in open coding and positing relationships between

categories in axial coding throughout the early stages of analysis—naturally and

frequently subconsciously. Strauss and Corbin described the alternating process of open

and axial coding: "Though open and axial coding are distinct analytic procedures, when

the researcher is actually engaged in analysis he or she alternates between the two

modes" (p. 98). Later in the study, I moved between open and axial coding intentionally

in order to test emerging relationships. I also started using selective coding when a

critical number of categories and sub-categories started to emerge out of the data.

Open coding. In the open coding, the goal is to segment the interview data in

order to develop themes or categories and sub-categories of information about the

phenomenon being studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Creswell, 2005). During the

process, as conceptualized in figure 3.2, raw data are formed into indicators (I) that

represent small segments of information (i.e., a line, a sentence, or a conversation

segment, etc.). These indicators are, in turn, grouped into several codes (e.g., code A,

code B, code C), and then formed into more abstract categories (e.g., category I, category

II). The process involves constantly comparing indicators to indicators, codes to codes,

and categories to categories (Creswell). The "constant comparison" helps eliminate

redundancy and develop evidence for the emerging categories (Glaser, 1992). The codes

are termed "properties" in the systematic design (Creswell), which are subcategories of

open codes that serve to provide more details about each category. Each property, in

turn, is dimensionalized where appropriate. A "dimensional property" means that the

researcher views the property on a continuum and locates, in the data, examples

representing extremes or range on this continuum (Creswell). For example, under the

category of "social changes and challenges", the property "making friends" consisted of

possibilities on a continuum ranging from easy (for boys) to very hard (for some girls).
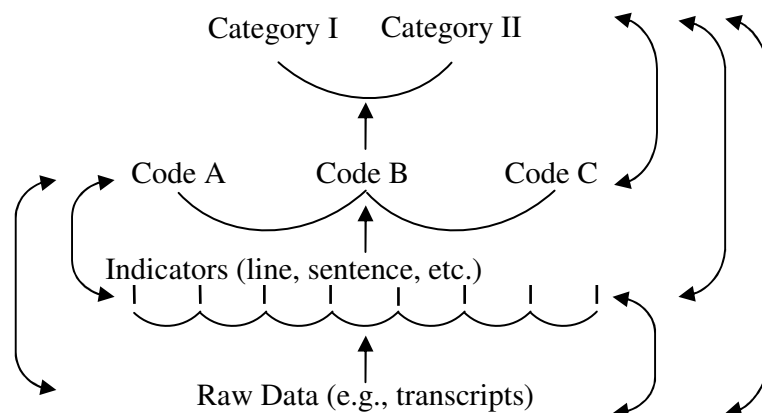
Figure 3.2. Open coding in grounded theory (adopted from Creswell, 2005)

I used Microsoft Word to carry out this process of open coding involving constant comparison in multiple iterations. In the first iteration, as depicted in figure 3.3 for example, I highlighted sections of interview transcripts, which formed the indicators mentioned above, and used Word's comments feature to: (a) summarize the key ideas described in the highlighted piece of text; (b) code any social process or property being discussed in square brackets using "active verbs" where possible (Charmaz, 2002), for example, [making friends]; and (c) dimensionalize the property, where appropriate, using additional codes in parenthesis, for example, (hard). Next, those comments from the first iteration were extracted and saved in a separate word document, where a second iteration of coding and analysis was carried out to code themes or categories across conversation segments or prior codes (see figure 3.4).

Throughout the process, I asked questions of the data described earlier in order to open up the data. As I continued analyzing the data, I reached deeper levels of understanding and uncovered new relationships among various categories and subcategories. Ultimately, in successive iterations, after further coding and categorization, eliminating duplicates and merging very similar terms into single labels, I began grouping similar concepts into categories, sub-categories, and their properties and dimensions. Throughout the process, I consciously tried to look for "emic" (from participants' own words or phrases) labels for the codes or categories wherever possible instead of relying on "etic" (from the literature and my own words or phrases) labels.

The complete set of categories and sub-categories, along with their properties and

dimensions, are summarized in appendix F.
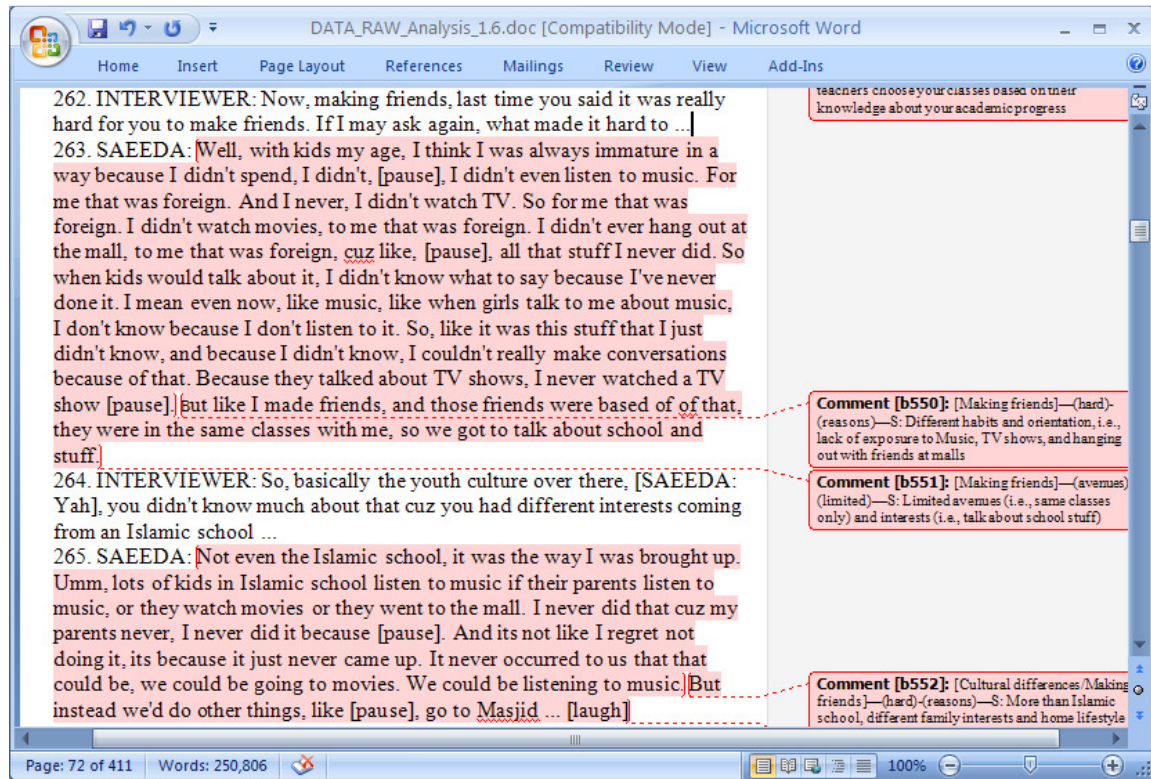
Figure 3.3. Sample screen shot of open coding using Microsoft Word
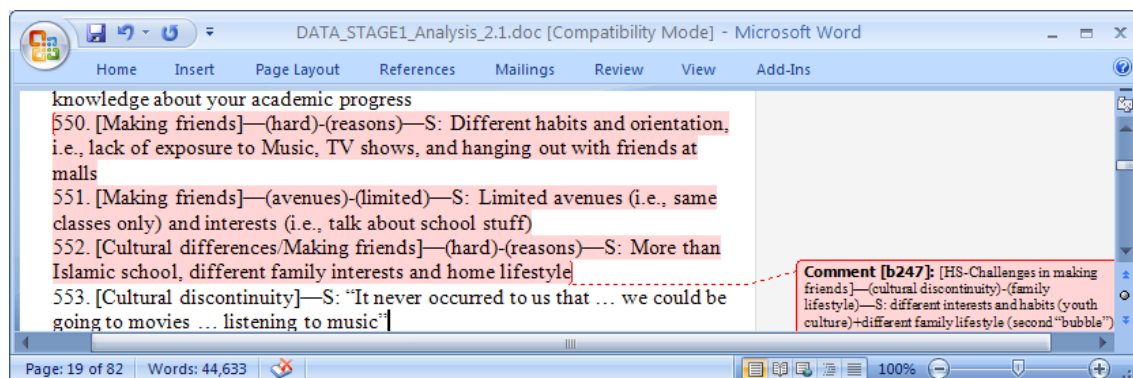
Figure 3.4. Sample screen shot of further coding and categorization using MS Word

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Axial coding. Whereas open coding fractures the data, axial coding puts those data back together in new ways by making connections between categories and sub-categories or their properties (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Creswell, 2005). To do this, as shown in figure 3.5, one open coding category is selected and positioned at the center of the process being explored (as the core phenomenon), and other categories or sub-categories are related to it as the causal conditions (events or incidents that lead to the occurrence of the core phenomenon), strategies (specific actions or interactions that result from the core phenomenon, and are devised to maintain, obtain, or achieve some desired end), contextual and intervening conditions (specific and general situational factors that influence the strategies), and consequences (the outcomes of employing the strategies) (Creswell). Essentially, this exercise involves creating "paradigm" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), which portrays the interrelationship of causal conditions, core phenomenon, strategies, contextual and intervening conditions, and consequences.
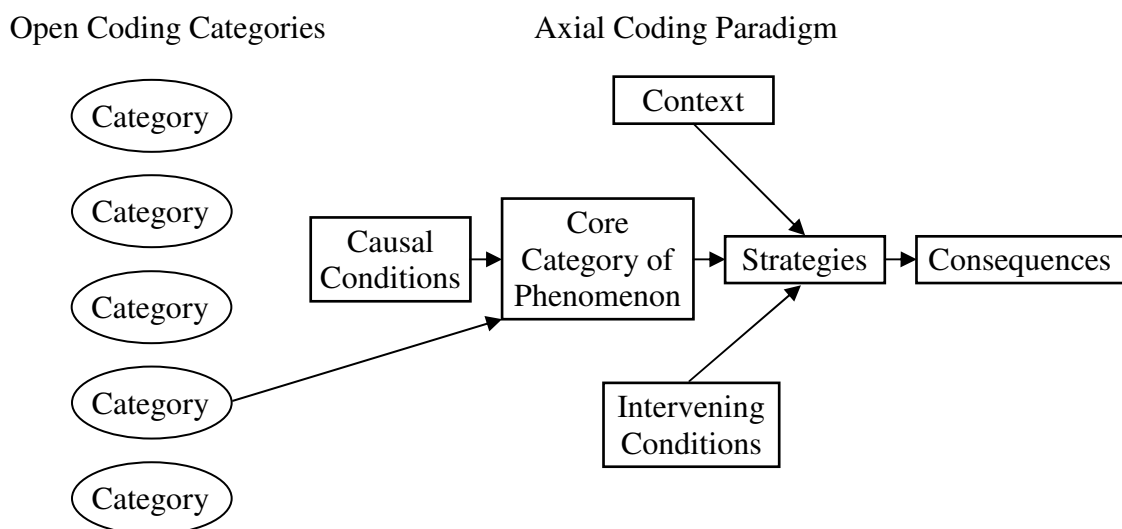
Figure 3.5. Grounded theory coding from open coding to the axial coding paradigm

Following the paradigm model developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), I began integrating the categories and sub-categories or their properties during the axial coding phase. Although I was growing confident that the *emic* category "surviving in the new pond" represented the core phenomenon, but as yet unsure how that category or its sub-categories would fit into the paradigm model central to the systemic grounded theory design, I focused on charting the course or the path each participant took during his or her transition. To do that, I constructed a tentative paradigm model by linking different categories and sub-categories or properties from the comprehensive list generated during the open coding process (see appendix G), and then checked if the model accounted for each participant's transition experiences by reading his or her transcripts and any relevant memos. During the first iteration, I relied on the original raw transcripts (shown in figure 3.3); however, in the subsequent iterations of adjusting the paradigm model, I relied on the intermediary files (like the one shown in figure 3.4), which were smaller than the raw transcript files. This process led to the additional abstraction and revision or regrouping of the categories and sub-categories or their properties that emerged during the open coding process. The final paradigm model is shown in the figure 5.0 (chapter five).

Selective coding. In selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998), which Corbin and Strauss (2008) later called "theoretical integration," a grounded theory is written from the interrelationship of the categories in the paradigm model (Creswell, 2005; Strauss & Corbin; Corbin & Strauss). Essentially, it is the process of "selecting a core category; systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development" (Strauss &

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Corbin, 1998, p. 116). The process is facilitated through such techniques as writing the story line for the core category or phenomenon, making use of integration diagrams (including the paradigm model), and reviewing and sorting through the written memos (to be discussed in next section) (Corbin & Strauss). The effort culminates into an outline for the overarching theoretical scheme, which then forms the basis for writing the final narrative or synthesis for the emerging theory.

The *emic* category, "surviving in the new pond" or "surviving outside the bubble" was used as the core category for the story line. It seemed abstract enough to encompass the process of varied-pace gradual adjustment to the changes and challenges the Muslim youth encountered, and forceful enough to communicate the difficulty of moving from a small "bubble" of K-8 Islamic schools to a "huge" and "totally new pond" of 9-12 secular public high schools. In the beginning, it was difficult to divide the phenomenon being studied into discrete stages to develop a story line. However, by sorting through and reviewing the memos I had written throughout the data collection and analysis, and integrating the information in the table summarizing the codes and categories (see appendix F) and the various diagrams I had created (see appendix G for a sample diagram), I managed to write a preliminary "story outline" for the subsequent selective coding using participant voices (see appendix H). This preliminary outline then formed the basis for writing the overarching theoretical scheme and the final narrative (see chapter four) and the synthesis of the theory (see chapter five).

Memos and Diagrams

Memos and diagrams, the first a specialized type of written record and the second a visual device, "are essential aspects of analysis whether the research aim is description or theory" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 140). Qualitative analysis involves complex and cumulative thinking that evolves over time—months and sometimes even years, and it would be very difficult to keep track of that change or evolving thought without the use of memos (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Moreover, the very act of writing memos forces the researcher to think about the data (Charmaz, 2002). Diagrams, on the other hand, are conceptual visualizations of data, and because they are conceptual, diagrams help to raise the researcher's thinking out of the level of facts (Strauss & Corbin). According to Corbin and Strauss, they force a researcher to think about the data in "lean ways," that is, in a manner that reduces the data to their essence. There are no rules governing the style or substance for writing memos or doing diagrams; they begin as rather rudimentary representations of thought and grow in complexity, density, clarity, and accuracy as the research progresses (Strauss & Corbin). They can aid: (a) data exploration and open coding; (b) identifying and developing categories, concepts, properties, and dimensions; (c) making comparisons and asking questions; (d) elaborating the relationships between conditions, actions, interactions, and consequences; and (e) developing a story line (Corbin & Strauss). As a rule, writing memos should begin with the first analytic session and continue throughout the research process; doing diagrams however, should be more periodic (Strauss & Corbin).

I am a firm believer in writing as a way of knowing, as a way of describing, and as a way of analyzing. I am also a visual person. That said, I engaged in memo writing

and creating diagrams from the very start of the research process and in every aspect of

this study. I wrote numerous memos of varying sizes and sophistication and created

many diagrams throughout this study. These memos and diagrams enabled my analysis

to proceed from:

- conceptualizing the research problem to finalizing the research questions;

- conducting the literature review to writing and drawing the conceptual framework
  guiding this study;

- planning the initial sampling strategy to the developing theoretical sampling and
  organizing the data collection and analyzing strategy;

- brainstorming for the preliminary interview questionnaire to recording the first
  impressions after completing each interview or developing the content for the
  follow-up interviews and communications;

- informal exploration of the data to formal open coding;

- developing codes and categories to elaborating properties and dimensionalizing
  those properties;

- verifying the emerging themes and categories against the participant accounts and
  existing literature to exploring the negative cases or carrying out the comparative
  analysis across the participants and regions;

- linking concepts and categories to developing the coding paradigm and final
  framework;

- writing a preliminary story line for the core category to developing the
  overarching theoretical scheme; and

- writing the final narrative (chapter four) or synthesized theoretical model (chapter five).

Not using any qualitative software, like N-Vivo, forced me early on to devise an elaborate strategy regarding the general layout for the content of memos, an easy-to-understand naming convention that can facilitate sorting and reviewing the memos, and a versioning method to keep track of the evolving memos dealing with similar themes. At minimum, the general layout I used for writing memos included the date the memo was written, type of the memo or focus, any title or sub-title that was helpful in that context, any direct quotes from the participants where necessary, and my impressions or write-up. As obvious from the two samples in appendix I-1 and I-2 respectively, the memos I wrote evolved in the layout, complexity, density, clarity, and level of sophistication over time as the research progressed. Moreover, as obvious from the snapshot in the appendix I-3, I adopted a simple yet sophisticated naming convention for organizing and storing the memos. All the memo names were prefixed with "MEM_" for memos, followed by the broader focus (i.e., axial, comparison, integration, etc.), the broader theme, and a number to version the evolving memos.

Issues of Trustworthiness and Transferability

"All fieldwork done by a single field-worker invites the question, why should we believe it?" (Bosk, 1979, as cited in Maxwell, 2005, p. 106)

In a qualitative study involving interviews, the researcher is the sole instrument of the research (Maxwell, 2005). This means he or she can shape its context, frame, and content (Charmaz, 2002). He or she rarely has the benefit however, of methods to

"objectively" collect data, or statistical manipulations that "control for" plausible threats to validity of the study (Maxwell). His or her subjectivity or "biases" can create "participant reactivity" (participants reacting to his or her presence by espousing views they think will be most acceptable) during interviewing, which negatively affects his analysis as well as conclusions (Maxwell). A qualitative researcher's questions and interviewing style can "force" participant responses through leading questions (Charmaz); he or she can also "define the analytic story at the expense of the participants' story by forcing data into preconceived categories" (p. 677). A qualitative researcher must, therefore, attend to two specific validity *threats*—his or her own biases and participant reactivity (Maxwell). It is important to realize, cautions Maxwell, that completely eliminating the two threats is impossible in a qualitative study.

Lincoln and Guba (2000) go even further, and argue that qualitative research cannot be judged on the positivist notion of validity, but should rather be judged on an alternative criterion of trustworthiness. They, like Miles and Huberman (1994), offer interpretive alternatives to the four quality measures used in positivist research, i.e., confirmability for objectivity, credibility for internal validity, transferability for external validity, and dependability for reliability. Table 3.3 summarizes the issues of concern, positivist worldviews on those issues and their interpretive alternatives, and some of the suggested strategies to address those issues.

Table 3.3. *Issues of Trustworthiness, Worldviews, and Strategies to Address the Issues*

Issue of Concern	Positivist Worldview	Interpretive Worldview	Strategies to Achieve Trustworthiness
Rigor of method	*Internal validity*: A statistically-significant relationship is established, to demonstrate that certain conditions are associated with other conditions, often by "triangulation" of findings.	*Credibility or Internal consistency*: The research findings are credible and consistent, to the people we study and to our readers. For authenticity, our findings should be related to significant elements in the research context or situation.	a) Intensive long-term involvement (Maxwell) b) Rich data (Maxwell; Lincoln & Guba) c) Respondent validation (Maxwell; Lincoln & Guba) d) Triangulation (Patton, 1990; Maxwell; Lincoln & Guba) e) Quasi-statistics (Maxwell) f) Discrepant evidence and negative cases (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998; Maxwell) g) Comparison (Strauss & Corbin)
Representative-ness of findings	*Objectivity*: The findings are free from researcher bias.	*Confirmability*: Conclusions depend on subjects and conditions of the study, rather than the researcher.	a) Continuous researcher reflections and disclosure of potential biases and participant reactivity (Maxwell, 2005) b) Making the research process explicit by leaving rich audit trail of process and product or artifacts (Lincoln & Guba, 2000)
Reproducibility of findings	*Reliability*: The study findings can be replicated, independently of context, time or researcher.	*Dependability*: The study process is consistent and reasonably stable over time and between researchers.	a) Making the research process explicit by leaving rich audit trail of process and product or artifacts (Lincoln & Guba) b) Alternatively, following Lincoln & Guba: "Since there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without dependability), a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter" (p. 316)
Generalizability of findings	*External validity*: The researcher establishes a domain in which findings are generalizable.	*Transferability*: How far can the findings or conclusions be transferred to other contexts and how do they help to derive useful theories?	Depends upon the degree of similarity between the original situation and the situation to which it is transferred, and therefore, the researcher cannot specify the transferability of findings; he or she can only provide sufficient information that can then be used by the reader to determine whether the findings are applicable to the new situation (Lincoln & Guba; Maxwell)

In order to address the twin threats of researcher biases and participant reactivity or enhance trustworthiness of this study, I have incorporated a number of strategies from the above list. First, throughout this study, I have consciously engaged in continuous reflection to ensure my own awareness, and thus awareness on the part of my research audience, of how I might have influenced the study and its outcomes due to any potential biases. Following Maxwell's (2005) recommendations that the best strategy to address the influence of researcher biases on a study is to disclose them as openly as possible. I have provided the lengthy description of: (a) my own background, personal interests into this study, and prior work on the issue earlier in this chapter; (b) literature review and the conceptual framework that informed my understanding of the issue at the onset of data collection and analysis; (c) my sensitivity and reasons for not selecting participants from the Islamic school my children attended or the children of close friends; and (d) the research relations I developed with the participants and gatekeepers during participant selection. Furthermore, in my participant selection strategy, I included a diverse range of participants (based on race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and timing in the transition process), in order to search for discrepant evidence and negative cases, explicit comparisons and triangulation across participants and across time (by interviewing the three groups of students discussed in the section on participant selection).

During data collection, I tried to avoid the use of leading questions at all times (see appendix D-1 for the preliminary questionnaire that was used in the first interviews). I also tried to avoid incorporating any preconceived notions based on the literature review or the conceptual framework. Furthermore, zigzag data collection and analysis (see

figure 3.1) and the multiple interviews mandated by the grounded theory design (see

section on interviewing and appendix D) also provided me ample opportunities for the

intensive long-term involvement with the participants that Maxwell (2005) recommends.

The strategy offered me the opportunity to keep my questions broad and general during

initial interviews in order to minimize participant reactivity (see appendix D-1). With the

subsequent interviews, the participants developed trust in the research and grew more

confident to share their experiences openly as Charmaz (2002) predicted (see for example

figure 3.3 for rich participant response). As a result, I was able to gradually ask more

focused questions to further clarify the emerging themes (see for example, Appendices

D2, D3, and E), share my interpretations of their accounts for respondent validation or

"member checking" (see for example figure 3.3, discussion on zigzag data collection and

interviewing, and appendix D-2). The intensive long-term involvement also helped

generate "rich" data (see for example, figure 3.3 and numerous participants quotes

weaved into the narrative in Chapter four)—data that are detailed and varied enough that

they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on (Maxwell). Throughout the

interviews, I also consciously tried to create a balance between asking significant

questions and forcing responses (see Appendices D1 through D3 and E, and the sections

on zigzag data collection and interviewing).

In my data analysis, the key strategies involved the use of triangulation of

responses from multiple participants and frequent member checking during the

subsequent interviews. Throughout, I tried to examine data from multiple perspectives. I

used not only the "etic" categories with which the literature and my prior pilot work had

provided me (i.e., organizational, social, and cultural discontinuities), but also the "emic" themes and codes that emerged from the user data (i.e., "life in the bubble" and "surviving in the pond"), paying close attention to even those codes which seemed to be marginally useful to the purposes of the project (Maxwell, 2005). Although the primary method of data collection I used was interviews, I also used triangulation among participants' accounts and, occasionally, the existing literature, school websites, and school provided handbooks to confirm the emerging findings. After I composed statements of relationships, I validated them against the data. Use of cross-case comparisons (comparisons across different participant and groups) during the three modes of coding, further strengthened the search for discrepant evidence and negative cases (see narrative in Chapter four for some examples). Furthermore, the ongoing analysis as part of the zigzag data collection and analysis facilitated continual participant verification and member checks. Such member checks included joint review of interpretive and descriptive accounts and conclusions (see for example, figure 3.3 and appendix D-2), and ensured that the participant accounts were clearly recorded.

In the final narrative in Chapter four, I provide elaborate participant quotes and "quasi-statistics" (Becker, 1970, as cited in Maxwell, 2005)—as much as possible. Particularly, when presenting theoretical and interpretive conclusions, I have frequently provided quotes from the participant accounts to convey the meaning of events in the lives of participants, and included my own interview questions in the narrative where appropriate, so that readers can examine the context for themselves and reach their own conclusions regarding the validity of my interpretation of a particular point. I used quasi-

statistics—the use of simple numerical results that can be readily derived from the data (Maxwell), where possible, in order to help convey the amount of evidence in data that bears on a particular conclusion or threat, such as how many discrepant instances exist, and from how many different sources they were obtained. In chapter five, the final synthesis of the emerging theory (themes and relations) also triangulates the findings against the existing literature, where applicable; in order to further validate its accuracy. Finally, throughout this chapter and chapter four, and various relevant appendices, I have left a sufficient audit trail by providing many sample artifacts, screenshots, and diagrams to meet Lincoln and Guba's (2000) "confirmability audit" requirements (see, figures 3.1, 3.3, and 3.4; elaborate participant quotes in chapter four; and appendix B through I).

This study is not intended to be externally generalizable or transferable to other settings and situations, but rather to explore the process involved in high school transitions of Muslim adolescents' from American K-8 Islamic schools to American secular public high schools and adaptation of their distinct religious identity in the new institutional (cultural, organizational, and social) setup. Specifically, it aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the participants' accounts and a grounded theory that explains the changes and challenges Muslim youths encounter during such transitions, adjustments they make in order to adapt to the new institutional setup of secular public high schools, and the effect such transitions have on their ability to maintain their Muslim identity. Understanding those accounts may provide thematic awareness of possible parallels elsewhere in the lives of other participants in similar situations, and some aspects of the theory or findings may be transferred to other situations depending upon the degree of

similarity between the situations, but that is not the goal. Findings of this study are intended to provide rich description and insights for Muslim parents, educators in the two school systems, policymakers, and teacher training programs.

Reporting the Outcomes

With its emphasis on theoretical density rather than thick, rich description, grounded theory reporting, when compared to other qualitative methods, is perhaps the sparsest of the qualitative paradigm (Creswell, 2005). Writing is on a conceptual level with description being secondary (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, grounded theory reports must establish a clear, analytical story that incorporates all important components of that story (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In general, "[a grounded] theory is reported in three possible ways: as a visual coding paradigm, as a series of propositions (or hypotheses), or as a story written in narrative forms" (Creswell, 2005, p. 409).

In line with those guidelines and keeping various potential audiences in mind, I have reported the final outcomes of this study in two of the three forms mentioned above. In chapter four, after a brief profile of the participants, the outcomes of this study are reported in a narrative form, using participants' voices by interweaving many of their quotes throughout the narrative. The intended audiences here are those who prefer to read a detailed "story-like" narrative. In chapter five, I present a sparse conceptual synthesis of the emerging theory, and integrate the findings with the existing literature where applicable in the discussion section. In addition, I discuss implications for the various stakeholders, study limitations, and implications for the future research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the process involved in the high school transition of Muslim adolescents from K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools. Specifically, the study examines the transition mentoring and preparation support they receive, changes and challenges they encounter during their transitions, adjustments they make in order to adapt to public high schools, and the effects such transitions have on their ability to negotiate and maintain their Muslim identity. As previously stated, this study was guided by the overarching question:

> What is the process involved in high school transitions of the Muslim adolescents, and adaptation of their religio-cultural identity and lifestyle in the new institutional setup, when they move from American K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools?

Furthermore, it focused on seeking definitive answers to the following sub-questions:

1) What are some salient characteristics that distinguish K-8 Islamic schools from secular public high schools? How do such characteristics influence students' personal and interpersonal conduct? How do the youths self-identify prior to high school transitions?

2) What kinds of transition mentoring and support do they receive from their families and friends, Islamic schools, and public high schools? Which of those do they find helpful? How can such efforts be improved?

3) What are some key changes and challenges they encounter in their new schools during transitions? How do those affect their personal, academic, and social adjustments?

4) What additional factors related to their personal and family backgrounds, Islamic schools, and public high schools do they find helpful during their adjustment efforts?

Informed by an extensive review of the existing literature and the researcher's prior work on the subject, this study started with the premise that such a transition does not simply start with a move to a new school or end after the first few days or weeks. It is instead an extended process that is set in motion way before the actual school shift, and goes on longer than the first few days or weeks. To understand such a process, thirteen participants were asked in interviews, follow-up phone calls and emails to share their personal and family lives, Islamic schooling experiences, transition preparations, and experiences as freshmen (and beyond) in public high schools. Additional documents related to their Islamic and public high schools were also consulted. The narratives that follow are the result of puzzling together the pieces of each participant's story about what it is like to be a Muslim going through transition to a secular public high school after years of schooling in a K-8 Islamic school.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section summarizes important characteristics related to the participants' personal and family backgrounds, Islamic schools, and public high schools. Section two provides the reader an integrated narrative of participants' lifestyles prior to their transitions as well as how they self-identify both within, as well as outside, the boundaries of Islamic schools to help understand the full context of their transition experience. Finally, section three takes the reader through the collective experiences of the participants as they went through their high school transitions.

The raw data has been interwoven throughout the narratives in order to leave sufficient room for the reader to make alternative interpretations. The raw data was edited occasionally to improve readability. When transcribed, spoken language reads very different from written narrative, particularly conversation that occurs during an interview. Run on sentences, fragmented thoughts, repetitious words and phrases, and the use of pausing words such as "uh" and "um" are common. Not only can spoken language be difficult to read and follow, but it can also give an unflattering impression of the speaker. Following Walcott's advice (2001), transcript narratives were edited occasionally to improve readability and to preserve the dignity of the interviewees without unduly altering the meaning of their accounts.

SECTION 1: Summary of the Participant Characteristics

Getting to know the participants, their background and prior schooling, high school transition stories, and their perceptions of struggles throughout the process was an interesting process in itself. Examining their experiences and understanding the context

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in which their stories evolved made it necessary for me to ask them to reflect upon their

previous schooling experiences and their experiences as high school freshmen or beyond.

While reflecting on one's experiences is often difficult for adults, it can be daunting for

adolescents. At times, it was a challenge for some participants (3 out of 13) to express

their perceptions verbally, without regard to maintaining a particular image, and for me to

bring forth deeper reflections. However, I was pleasantly surprised that the majority (10

out of 13) did a great job at conveying their perceptions. This can also be observed from

the length and quality of their responses, additionally interwoven throughout their

narratives in this chapter; the responses from the first three participants were short and

shallow, while those of the remaining ten participants were long and reflective, and often

more insightful. They acted like they were eager to tell their stories, particularly the

female participants who reported experiencing many difficulties during their transitions

to public high schools.

Qualitative dissertations in general include detailed individual profiles of

participants. However, instead of writing thirteen separate profiles, I chose to break

down the participant background information into three tables, and provide a summarized

view, which may look familiar to quantitative researchers who are used to seeing a

"descriptive summary." I find that tabular data is more helpful because "one advantage

of using tables is that they can summarize a large amount of data in a small amount of

space" (Creswell, 2005, p.195). Moreover, tabular data facilitates quick reference and

comparison. The following few subsections summarize the participants' personal

characteristics, family and other background information, and some relevant information pertaining to their Islamic schools and public high schools.

Personal Characteristics

Table 4.1 provides the summary of participants' personal characteristics, which include their group number (see chapter 3 for further details on participant groupings); pseudonym; schooling information, such as high school year when they were first interviewed, and subsequent years if they were interviewed beyond their first year. Table 4.1 also reveals the years they spent in an Islamic school; demographics information, such as gender, race or ethnicity, and U.S. birth; some select religiosity indicators, i.e., if they wear headscarf (applicable only to female participants), prayed five times every day, and observed month-long fasting during Ramadan. Finally, in Table 4.1, I state my first impressions of participants at the time of the first interviews.

At the onset of the data collection, the group labeled "One" included six freshmen. Three male and three female, half of whom were in public schools for some time during their elementary years, and the remaining half spent all their early schooling years in an Islamic school. Two out of six participants from this group were interviewed beyond their freshman year, while Sadaf was interviewed during her freshman and sophomore years, and Saeeda was interviewed during her freshman, sophomore and junior years.

Table 4.1. *Participants' Personal Characteristics*

| Group | Participant | Schooling | | Demographics Information | | | Religiosity Indicators | | | First Impressions |
		High School Year (s)	Years in Islamic School	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	US Born	Headscarf	Prayers	Fasting	
1	Abdul	Freshman	5-8	Male	African American	Yes	N/A	Yes, miss sometimes	Yes	Confident, street smart
	Saeeda	Freshman, Sophomore, Junior	K-8	Female	Asian (Pakistani)	Yes	Yes	Yes, always	Yes	Self-reflective, traditional
	Osman	Freshman	6-8	Male	Asian (Pakistani)	Yes	N/A	Yes, miss sometimes	Yes	Reserved, image-conscious
	Mona	Freshman	4-8	Female	Arab (Palestinian)	Yes	Yes	Yes, always	Yes	Calm, image-conscious
	Sadaf	Freshman, Sophomore	K-8	Female	Asian (Indian)	Yes	Yes	Yes, always	Yes	Reserved, image-conscious
	Mohamad	Freshman	K-8	Male	White mother/Arab (Palestinian) father	Yes	N/A	Yes, always	Yes	Quiet, street smart
2	Maria	Sophomore	K-8	Female	White mother/Arab (Palestinian) father	Yes	Yes	Yes, always	Yes	Self-reflective, soft-spoken
	Nadda	Sophomore	K-8	Female	Arab (Palestinian)	Yes	Yes	Yes, always	Yes	Self-reflective, soft-spoken
	Omar	Sophomore	K-8	Male	Arab (Palestinian)	Yes	N/A	Yes, always	Yes	Confident, layback
	Rashida	Completed	K-8	Female	African (Somalian)	Yes	Yes	Yes, always	Yes	Articulate, assertive, and very religious
3	Ali	Freshman	5-8	Male	African (Somalian)	Yes	N/A	Yes, always	Yes	Self-reflective, deeply religious
	Ahmed	Completed	3-7	Male	Asian (Pakistani)	Yes	N/A	Yes, always	Yes	Confident, easy going
	Rehana	Completed	K-7	Female	Asian (Pakistani)	Yes	Yes	Yes, always	Yes	Articulate, assertive

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The group labeled "Two" included three sophomores (two female and one male) and one female participant who had already finished high school. None of the participants in this group had any prior public schooling. Mohamad and Maria were siblings; one was a freshman and the other a sophomore at the time of their first interviews respectively.

The group labeled "Three" included one male and two female participants with varying degrees of public schooling before their high school transitions. Ali was in the Islamic school for grades five through eight, and later went to a secular private high school. Ahmed and Rehana, the other two siblings, moved to a public middle school halfway through their seventh grade year due to a family relocation, and went to a public high school from there. While Rehana had no prior public schooling before going to the Islamic school, Ahmed went there when he was in grade three.

In all, there were six male and seven female participants, all born in the United States. Among them, two participants were of mixed ethnicity or race (White mother and Palestinian Arab father), one African American, three of Arab origin (Palestinian), five Asians (four Pakistanis and one Indian), and two Africans (Somalian). All of the female participants wore *hijab* or the Muslim headscarf, and therefore, were visibly identifiable as Muslims. Every participant reported that he or she regularly prayed five times each day and observed fasting during the month of Ramadan. The last column in Table 4.1 includes my first impressions of each participant from my notes when I met them for the first interviews. I used the words confident or street smart in addition to quiet, laid back or easy going, to describe four out of the six male participants. Among the remaining

two, I recorded Ali as calm and deeply religious, and Osman as reserved and image-conscious. Among the female participants, I noted the two who had already finished high school as articulate and assertive. For three out of the remaining five, I wrote self-reflective and soft-spoken in my notes, and for the remaining two, I noted reserved and image-conscious. I also used the words very or deeply religious for Ali and Rashida respectively, both of whom were of Somali descent.

It is worth noting that those whom I wrote down as image-conscious turned out to be the ones who provided mostly shallow responses. However, among them, Sadaf was more reflective when I interviewed her during her sophomore year. Moreover, the three female participants whom I described as self-reflective in my first impressions explained that they had become "shy" in their public high schools. Finally, I noted Saeeda as traditional in my notes in the beginning. Later, when I shared with her my impressions of her, she explained:

> Yes, I think you're right! This is my theory. See, I feel like the oldest girl takes more of the traditional role. Because the parents invest so much time in the first one, especially if it's a girl, in terms of values and etiquettes, like "you shouldn't be loud," this and that. By the time, it's a second or third child, that kind of dies down. So, I feel like it's the eldest female child, and if she went to a private Islamic school, she'd take on a more traditional viewpoint. I don't know [pause], maybe it is the combination of both I guess. (Saeeda, 4-6)

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Family and Other Background Characteristics

Table 4.2 presents the summary of participants' family and other background characteristics. It includes information, such as number of siblings, whether a participant was the oldest child in his or her family, parents who were immigrants at some point, parental education, and whether their parents attended US public schools for their own schooling, number of siblings in their Islamic schools, whether the participants had siblings, friends, or any other relatives in the same high school.

Every participant had one or more siblings in the family, and seven out of thirteen were the oldest in their respective families, resulting in no sibling support or models to follow during their transitions. Ten out of thirteen participants also had parents who were immigrants at some point in their lives; and out of the remaining three, two had one immigrant parent and one with no immigrant parents. All but one from those immigrant parents had United States public schooling. Eight out of the thirteen participants had both parents who had completed college; everybody's father was a college graduate and mothers had completed at least a high school education. The majority of the participants (8 out of 13) had siblings in their Islamic schools; however, only five out of the thirteen had one or more siblings in their respective high schools. Out of those five, only four (i.e., Ahmed, Mohamad, Mona, and Rehana) had siblings in high school prior to their own transitions, while Maria's sibling (Mohamad) came to the high school when she was a sophomore. Finally, only four participants reported having some friends or cousins in their high schools at the time of their transitions.

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Table 4.2. *Participants' Family and Other Background Characteristics*

Group	Participant	No of Siblings	Oldest Child	Immigrant parents	Parental Education	Parents US Public Schooling	Siblings in Islamic School	Siblings in High School	Friends or Relatives in High School
1	Abdul	6	No	No	Both college	Yes, both	No	No	Yes, friends
	Saeeda	5	Yes	Yes	Both college	No	Yes, three	No	No
	Osman	2	Yes	Yes	Both college	No	No	No	No
	Mona	2	No	Yes	Both college	No	Yes, one	Yes, before	No, only sister
	Sadaf	1	Yes	Yes	Both college	No	No	No	No
	Mohamad	3	No	Father (yes), Mother (no)	Father college, mother HS	Yes, mom	Yes, two	Yes, before	No, only sister
2	Maria	3	No	Father (yes), Mother (no)	Father college, mother HS	Yes, mom	Yes, two	Yes, after	No
	Nadda	2	Yes	Yes	Both college	No	Yes, three	No	No
	Omar	1	Yes	Yes	Father college, mother HS	No	Yes, two	No	No
	Rashida	3	Yes	Yes	Father college, mother HS	Yes, dad	No	No	Yes, cousins
3	Ali	2	Yes	Yes	Father college, mother HS	No	No	No	No
	Ahmed	5	No	Yes	Both college	No	Yes, three	Yes, before	Yes, friends from public middle school
	Rehana	5	No	Yes	Both college	No	Yes, three	Yes, before	Yes, friends from public middle school

Islamic School Characteristics

Table 4.3 describes some basic characteristics of the participants' Islamic schools, such as the school region (i.e., Baltimore-Washington is noted as Region 1, and Raleigh-Durham-Cary in North Carolina is noted as Region 2), school pseudonym, school level, sizes (of the campus, student and staff bodies) and staff demographics by gender, type of curriculum used, and whether the school offers coed classes or had a mosque on its premises.

The participants were selected from three Islamic schools, two from the Baltimore-Washington region (i.e., Furqan and Iqra) and one from Raleigh-Durham-Cary region in North Carolina (i.e., Al-Noor). The majority of the participants (7 out of 13) were from region one while the remaining six were from region two. All the schools were K-8; two had coed classes in both elementary and middle school grades (i.e., Al-Noor and Furqan). Nonetheless, they seated both boys and girls on their "own sides" in the same class during middle school years. The third school (Iqra) had two separate wings, one for boys and one for girls. Iqra was also getting ready to launch a high school the following year. During Rashida's time, Furqan was a girls only school with all female teachers.

Table 4.3. *Participants' Islamic and Public High School Characteristics*

Group	Participant	Region	Islamic School Characteristics						Public High School Characteristics			
			Name	Level	Sizes and Demographics	Curriculum Used	Coed	Mosque on Premises	Name	Type	Demographics	Total Muslims
1	Abdul	1	Iqra	K-8	See below	See below	No	Yes	Liberty	Public	2600+ students, 8% white, mostly blacks and Hispanics	4
	Saeeda	1	Iqra	K-8	See below	See below	No	Yes	Curie	Public	1600 students, 60% white, 23% Asians; blue-ribbon	25-30
	Osman	1	Furqan	K-8	See below	See below	Yes	No	Newton	Public	1500+ students, majority white	20-25
	Mona	2	Al-Noor	K-8	See below	See below	Yes	Yes	Wayne	Public	250+ students, college prep, mostly female students/teachers	10-12
	Sadaf	2	Al-Noor	K-8	See below	See below	Yes	Yes	PC	Public Charter	535 students, majority white, top 20th nationwide	10-12
	Mohamad	2	Al-Noor	K-8	See below	See below	Yes	Yes	Lee	Public	2500+, students diverse	20-25
2	Maria	2	Al-Noor	K-8	22 room-campus; 220 students; 20 teachers, 17 or 85% female; other support staff of 12;	State and county standards in core subjects	Yes	Yes	Lee	Public	2500+, students diverse	20-25
	Nadda	2	Al-Noor	K-8			Yes	Yes	Einstein	Public	1800+, majority white, magnet	10-12
	Omar	2	Al-Noor	K-8			Yes	Yes	PC	Public Charter	535 students, majority white, top 20th nationwide	10-12
	Rashida	1	Furqan	K-8	10 room-campus; 120 students; 14 teachers, 13 or 93% female	National standards in core subjects	Yes	No	Hill	Public	1500+ students, 2/3 from 70 countries	20%
3	Ali	1	Furqan	K-8			Yes	No	Horizon	Priv.	K-12, 950+, secular, majority white	15-20
	Ahmed	1	Iqra and Public	K-8	26 room-campus; 315 students; 30 teachers, 95% of teachers for girls' wing female	State and county standards in core subjects	No	Yes	Oxford	Public	1400 students, 60% white, 23% Asians; blue-ribbon	25-30
	Rehana	1	Iqra and Public	K-8			No	Yes	Oxford	Public	1400 students, 60% white, 23% Asians; blue-ribbon	25-30

Furqan was the smallest school with a 10-room campus, 120 total students, and 14 teachers, of which 13 were female. Iqra on the other hand, was the largest with a 26-room campus that was split between two-separate wings (one for boys and the other for girls), 315 students and 30 teachers in total in both wings; all but one teacher in the girls-only wing was female. Al-Noor had a 22-room campus, 220 students, 20 teachers (out of which 17 or 85% were female), and a 12 member support staff. Both Al-Noor and Iqra used state and county standards-based curriculum for core subjects; Furqan, on the other hand, used national standards-based curriculum. Two out of the three schools (Al-Noor and Iqra) had a mosque on their premises, which was open to both students and the local Muslim community.

Public High School Characteristics

Table 4.3 also summarizes some important characteristics of the participants' high schools, such as pseudonym, its type (i.e., public, public charter, or private), student population and demographic breakdown, and total number of Muslims in the schools. The majority of the participants (10 out of 13) went to eight public high schools of varying sizes. Wayne High School, a college prep magnet school, was the smallest with around 250 students, and Liberty High School, an "inner-city" school for all practical purposes, was the largest with over 2600 students. While both Curie High School and Oxford High School were on the national blue-ribbon list, PC High School, the only public charter school in the list, was ranked among the top 20 best high schools nationwide. PC High School selected its students through a statewide lottery. Ali's school, Horizon High School, was the only secular private K-12 high school on the list.

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Every high school had some Muslim students, from four in Liberty high to around 30 in Curie and Oxford highs. Hill High however had a sizable Muslim student population, almost 20%.

SECTION 2: Life Prior to High School Transition—Inside "*The* Bubbles"

This section synthesizes the participants' accounts of their lives prior to their transition to secular public high schools. It covers their K-8 Islamic schooling and some specific family and personal lifestyle choices that help illuminate the kinds of changes and challenges they encounter in their new schools. Four key themes emerged from those accounts that shed some light on their lives prior to high school transitions.

First, life inside *a typical* U.S. K-8 Islamic school is "like living in a bubble." Despite its many shortcomings and "sometimes annoying" rules, students feel a strong sense of "safety" and "belonging," and find it "natural to be a Muslim" in the bubble. Moreover, its "integrated" academic program and other organizational and socio-cultural characteristics help them "prepare well academically, Islamically, and personally."

Second, the school's emphasis on character education often influences home environment. Families tend to become selective in their socialization habits, and both the home and "select social circle" become "sort of a second bubble."

Third, the students interact with the "worlds" beyond the twin bubbles of school and their select social circle to varying degrees; experiences of prejudicial treatment in those interactions create anxieties among some students about going to a public high school.

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Fourth, prior to their high school transitions, students use their social identities based upon gender, parents' country of origin, country of birth, and religion to construct their identity salience hierarchy, and they rearrange the hierarchy in different contexts without much thought.

K-8 Islamic School—An Inside Look at "*The* Bubble"

> The Character Education is of paramount importance and, as such, it has been made part of the School mission ... Means of effective Islamic character education [used include]:
> 1. **Empower students and hold them accountable**: ...
> 2. **Family involvement in the educational process**: Families are encouraged to participate in the school and model proper Islamic behaviors in the home, thereby reinforce the Islamic world-view of the child.
> 3. **Staff as Role Models**: School is committed to providing the most qualified staff that live Islam in their daily lives ... The Teacher, while drawing the boundaries of appropriate teacher-student relations, is also a Brother or Sister in faith to each student, and must foster that bond accordingly ...
> 4. **Curriculum Integration**: Character education is integrated into the existing curriculum ... the general framework in which all education takes place ...
> 5. **Environment**: The environment in the school helps build Islamic identity and awareness ... For this reason, Islamic standards of conduct, appearance, arts, celebrations, and general acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, and charity are exercised and determine the overall climate ...
> 6. **Islamic Character Traits**: Every month the school will focus on one character trait ... [through] essays, poems, daily reminders, bulletin boards ...
> 7. **Dress code**: Staff and students are expected to model proper examples of Islamic dress. In order to eliminate vanity, competition on the basis of financial status, and promote group spirit, <u>STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO WEAR THE SCHOOL UNIFORM</u>.
>   (Al-Noor Student Handbook, 2010-2011, pp. 28-29)

Specific differences among the three Islamic schools notwithstanding, a common portrait emerges about a typical U.S. K-8 Islamic school—a typical day at the school, and its organizational and socio-cultural characteristics. Like many of its Catholic and Jewish counterparts, the Islamic school shares many foundational features with a modern-day public school, for example, the broader mission of educating children, a school building

with classrooms, full-time teachers and other support staff, core courses and PE, health and art classes, and in many ways similar daily routines and yearly calendars. However, it has many distinct characteristics that set it apart from a public school, such as "the responsibility" of inculcating Muslim identity and religio-cultural values among students, a focus on character education, increased direct involvement of parents and community in school operations, religious studies courses, and built-in accommodation for religious practices and holidays. Such characteristic differences lead to a greater focus on creating an "Islamic environment," strict codes-of-conduct, staff role modeling, and presence of "familiar faces" around. As a result, the Islamic schooling experience becomes, in Saeeda's words, "like living in a small bubble." The bubble, despite its "annoying rules" and "shortages," helps students develop a strong sense of safety and belonging, and "prepare[s] [them] well academically, Islamically, and personally."

A typical day. A typical day at a K-8 Islamic school begins with cars lining up in a designated area where parents drop off their children. Students gather at the gymnasium (Al-Noor), cafeteria (Iqra), or in their classrooms (Furqan) until the bell rings and the morning assembly or homeroom activities start. The morning assembly generally includes recitation of a portion of Quran, morning announcements, and an occasional short "pep talk." Uniform check is performed during the assembly time (Al-Noor and Iqra), or during homeroom activities (Furqan), to ensure that each student has complied with the school's dress code. Boys generally wear slacks and collared shirts; girls wear slacks, a *Hijab* (headscarf), and calf-length tops (Al-Noor and Furqan) or *jalbab* (Iqra). The rest of the school day is divided into three "chunks" of class periods, with a 10-15

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minute snack break after the first chunk, and an hour-long break for both lunch and the

mandatory *Zuhr* (early afternoon) prayer after the second. Students bring their own

lunches (Iqra and Furqan) or a local Muslim catering group serves a *halal* lunch (Al-

Noor), which they eat in the school cafeteria or another designated area. Elementary and

middle school students generally have separate lunch times, and one or more teachers or

parent volunteers are responsible for monitoring the cafeteria. During class periods, the

school offers Islamic studies, Arabic and Qur'an classes in addition to the core and other

courses generally offered in a typical public school, i.e. math, science, language arts,

social studies or history, art, PE and health. Like a typical public school, a typical

Islamic school also offers optional extra-curricular and sports activities albeit limited

after the core school hours. The school day ends with the similar lining up of the cars for

student pickup.

If the school has coed classes in grades six through eight (Al-Noor and Furqan),

boys and girls stay on "their own sides" of the classroom, cafeteria, and the prayer areas.

They also separate in PE and health classes. There is some departmentalization in math

and science, and also class switching in Arabic, health, and classes involving lab work.

> All the classrooms were together but we stayed on separate sides of the
>
> classroom. In Arabic, we split because we were at different levels. Basically,
>
> everybody's class started with Arabic. Next, we will have math and language arts,
>
> then usually Islamic studies or Quran after the first break. After lunch, there
>
> would be science or the social studies and the health class. The health class will

be separate between boys and girls. There were separate health teachers, a brother and a sister. (Sadaf, 1-35)

After lunch, students get time to make *wuddu* (ablution) and gather in a designated prayer area for the mandatory *Zuhr* (early afternoon) prayer. School adults also join the students, and a senior male staff member or an upper-classmember leads the prayer. If the school has a mosque on its premises (Al-Noor and Iqra), a designated *Imam* (prayer leader) leads the prayers, and adults from the surrounding Muslim community also join the students and staff. On Fridays, the prayer break is generally longer and includes a 20-30 minute *Khutabah* (sermon) before the prayer; the person responsible for leading the prayer delivers the *Khutabah*. The school shortens the length of average class period on Fridays to make up for the extra time.

> We'll have lunch after our history class; it'll be around 20-30 minutes. We will start preparing for the prayers after lunch. Everybody will take turns and make *wuddu*. They'll clear tables in the science room and somebody always calls the *Azan* [call for prayers] and the *Iqamah* [a second call for prayers right before the start], and brother [teacher] or one of the students will take turn to be the *Imam*. (Ali, 1-8)

> Fridays, the teachers will give us an hour, an hour and fifteen minutes for lunch and Friday prayers ... After the lunch break, we went to pray everyday, [including] Friday prayers, at the *Masjid*. They are built together ... Other people come ... They have an *Imam* to lead the prayers and give *Khutabah* (Sadaf, 1-39)

A typical Islamic school uses a modified daily schedule during *Ramadan*—the Muslim month of fasting. It shortens the school day for an hour or more by reducing the time for each class period and eliminating the lunch break for the higher grades. Most of the school staff and students in seventh and eighth grade observe the daylong fasting throughout the whole month. However, the school allows younger students, and some older students and staff who are not fasting for personal reasons (such as health issues, nursing, or during a menstrual cycle), to use the cafeteria for lunch. Students get little or no homework and the optional extra-curricular activities are cancelled during the entire month and, in lieu of the aforementioned, the school encourages students to gather at a neighborhood or school-affiliated mosque in the evening for a community *Iftar* (breaking of the fast) and the *Maghrib* (prayer after the sunset).

It was lot easier during Ramadan. They will go easy on the homework.
We finished school and left early at 2 o'clock, and then basically
everybody from the school will come back at *iftar*. (Abdul, 1-18)

A typical Islamic school also closes for a week or more to observe the two Muslim religious holidays of *Eid-al-Fitr* and *Eid-al-Udha*. It uses different approaches to make up for the lost time, from opening on the days when public schools close (Al-Noor and Furqan) to eliminating the Winter Break along with other traditional holidays (Iqra). Regardless of how the school makes up for the lost time, the students "really like" the reduced workload and *Eid* breaks because they get more time to spend with family and friends "without worrying about tomorrow."

Well, we got the last ten days of *Ramadan* off, so it was nice. We'd have *iftar*

parties. We always got together on *Eid*. It was fun! (Sadaf, 1-43)

Eid was also fun. Everybody will see everybody. We get to see each other for

long time. We would just hang out together without worrying about tomorrow.

(Ali, 1-20)

Organizational characteristics. As Table 4.3 reveals, a K-8 Islamic school is

generally much smaller than its local public elementary or middle school counterpart.

The "home-like" environment of the school helps students develop a strong sense of

belonging to the school and the Muslim community. Students frequently see "familiar

faces," find "so much common to share and talk about," and feel "a stronger bond of

brother or sisterhood" with both students and the staff. They also feel "comfortable" and

"safe" about "what [they] wear," "why [they] pray," "who [they] are," "how [their]

names sound," and "because there are no drugs, gangs, fights, and the usual crazy stuff

like dating or showing off." Boys and girls differ on the issue of privacy however.

Whereas girls feel that they have "more privacy" in their Islamic school, many boys (3

out of 5 among the male participants) complain about "no privacy whatsoever" and

"strict monitoring" of their activities during the middle school years.

At the operational level, the typical Islamic school structures its facilities, daily

schedule, yearly calendar, and other day-to-day routines to facilitate not only learning the

core subjects, but also the learning and practicing of Islamic teachings. Mandatory

prayers and modified scheduling to encourage fasting during Ramadan, and two week-

long Eid breaks are part of school's daily schedule and yearly calendar. Despite

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coeducation, the classes have a seating arrangement where boys and girls stay "on their own sides." Similar separate arrangements are also the norm during PE, health classes, lunch, and prayer timings. Boys and girls can form their own clubs, such as a debate club and a community service league, and they can also participate in the student government and various intra- and inter-group competitions. However, they are required to follow a "strict" code-of-conduct in their personal and inter-personal dealings. Gender fraternization and promiscuous behavior involving dating or "meeting in private" between boys and girls is strictly prohibited during school hours or school-sponsored activities. Al-Noor categorized such conduct as a level 3 or "serious infraction."

Regarding academics, the typical Islamic school offers core curriculum in English, math, science, and social studies or history in line with the respective local county, state or national standards. Religious studies courses and character education are integral components of the overall academic program. Islamic perspective is also integrated throughout the core courses, where learning both the core and religious subjects and "behaving appropriately" is framed as a religious duty, and the role and contributions of Muslims is highlighted in a positive manner. There is some departmentalization and class switching, but there is "always a homeroom teacher." The school relies on daily homework to offset some of the time required for additional subjects and built-in religious rituals. Despite complains about "too much homework," students consider the extra load helpful in preparing them for high school. It helps them develop self-discipline and time management skills, which "come handy" in their public high schools.

Socio-cultural characteristics. The typical Islamic school embodies ethno-cultural diversity of the Muslim Americans. Despite many "back-home cultures" of its members, Islamic cultural values and norms guide almost every aspect of the schools' socio-cultural setup. The school name and its overall architecture convey the underlying Muslim cultural underpinnings. Portraits involving religious symbols and messages decorate school hallways and classroom walls. The modest dress code is a standard feature for both male and female students as well as school staff. Students learn appropriate use of Arabic in order to memorize, and recite, portions of Quran in five daily prayers. They also learn to use Arabic terms in interpersonal communication, for example, in greeting each other (*Assalam-Alaikum* or peace be upon you), giving thanks (*Allahmdullilah* or thanks God), referring to the future (*Insha'Allah* or God willing), and according praise (*Masha'Allah* or all praise be to God). The school also enforces religious norms as part of the school code-of-conduct to varying degrees. Behavior and food are categorized as *halal* (lawful) or *haram* (prohibited). For example, any conduct resulting in peer pressure, cursing, fights, and racism as well as engaging in social troubles prevalent in public middle or high schools like drinking and drugs, dating and pre-marital sex are classified *haram*.

On the social side, females dominate both the student and staff bodies in the Islamic school. At both Al-Noor and Furqan, girls were in the majority among students, and females constituted around ninety percent of the staff. However, Iqra had separate wings for boys and girls, and the staff in the two wings represented a similar gender

makeup. Class or socioeconomic status is generally not a visible factor in the social setup and functioning of the school.

Because of limited budgets and the requirement of staff being "appropriate Muslim role models," the typical Islamic school primarily relies on parents and other community members (with adequate educational background) to teach and meet its staffing needs, either as a volunteer or a paid member. As a result, the participants become used to seeing familiar faces, of both peers and the staff, in school, home, local *Masjid*, or community. Furthermore, since the students stay together in the same classes "for so long," they develop stronger friendship circles.

Essentially, the typical K-8 Islamic school's daily routines and its organizational and socio-cultural characteristics enforce the sense of living in the small "bubble" among students. Students' home culture and history is "very much present" and celebrated in the school regularly. They tend to develop a stronger bond with both their peers and the staff. Despite "sometimes annoying rules" or other deficiencies (like small sizes, shortage of qualified staff, lack of enrichment programs, etc.), they feel a strong sense of "safety," "belonging," and find it "natural to be a Muslim" there. They pray regularly, follow appropriate dress code guidelines, and practice the Islamic socio-moral code in their personal and inter-personal conduct. Moreover, the marked absence of traditional distractions that define the mainstream youth culture in public schools, and the discipline required to keep up with the extra homework load, helps Islamic school students "prepare well academically, Islamically, and personally."

Family Lifestyle and Selective Social Circle—"The Second Bubble"

K-8 Islamic schools expect parents to play an active role in their children's religio-cultural upbringing and character education, both within and outside the school. Within the school, they seek parents and other community members (with adequate education credentials) to work as teachers and in other support roles, commit to a Muslim lifestyle, be effective role models, and offer their services on a meager salary due to budgetary constraints. Outside of the school, they encourage parents to become role models for their children, and provide an appropriate Islamic environment in order to reinforce what students learn in school. Participants' accounts reveal that such school practices and expectations tend to influence their families' lifestyle. Families become selective in their socialization habits, both in their personal lives at home and the kinds of people they socialize with outside the home. To be sure, those are not the only factors leading to a family's selective socialization habits. Other factors may include a family's prior orientation and commitment to Muslim lifestyle, worries about children's psychological and physical safety outside of home, and time constraints due to the extra homework load children regularly experience in Islamic schools. Regardless, the altered lifestyle and the select social circle the participants live in become "sort of a second bubble."

In their desire to meet the school expectations for facilitating their children's Muslim upbringing, many parents become more religious themselves than before. Some start praying for the first time in their life; they also increase their participation in the school-affiliated or a local mosque. As parents become more observant, many mothers

start wearing headscarves if they did not do so before. Sadaf described her family's

transformation:

> Both my dad and mom became actively involved with the school ... Their
>
> involvement did affect everyone. My mom started wearing *hijab* and my dad was
>
> praying more at the *masjid*. He always prayed, but not in the *masjid* ... In a way,
>
> both *hijab* and the *masjid* became part of our lifestyle. (Sadaf, 1-45)

Many also start altering their media consumption habits to varying degrees, such

as listening to music, watching TV or movies, and internet surfing; some completely stop

or minimize it, others "stick to the appropriate stuff just because of their kids." Those

who were already "practicing" also become more "mindful" of their habits and routines.

Saeeda explained:

> It wasn't only the Islamic school, it was the way I was brought up. See, lots of
>
> kids in Islamic school listen to music if their parents listen to music, or they watch
>
> movies or they went to the mall. I never did that because my parents never did it
>
> ... Instead, we'd do other things, like go to *Masjid* [laugh]. (Saeeda, 2-265)

Families not only adjust their personal lifestyles, they also alter their social circles

to varying degrees. Many start socializing with other families whose children attend the

same school or the *masjid*, or those who share similar interests, for example, pray

regularly, use headscarves, disapprove of "unnecessary" mixing of boys and girls, and are

more conservative in their media consumption habits. Some even relocate near the

school, *masjid* or the neighborhood with other "practicing" Muslim families. Others try

to bring their children to the local *masjid* more frequently, particularly on weekends or

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during the month of Ramadan, and start attending *halaqas* (religious studies classes) or volunteering for various activities at the local *masjid*. The mosques and Islamic schools also start various after-hour sports and extracurricular activities like soccer, volleyball, martial arts, and boy and girl scout clubs. Rehana described how her family's lifestyle changed over time:

> Our family, we became very involved with the *masjid*, we still are. So, that became our support system when we moved … We started teaching at Sunday schools and Saturday schools, and that was like a family thing. We all used to go and do it, like every child in my house, we used to go to Quran class. We had our own Sunday school. We'd do *halaqas* … My brothers went to Martial Arts class in the evening in the *masjid* ... I made many new friends with the Muslim group we have here, and we started going to like parties. It definitely made us feel like we're at home. (Rehana, 1-206)

That does not mean however that the Muslim children who attend K-8 Islamic schools completely disassociate or stop interacting with non-Muslims in their neighborhoods and the public sphere. They interact with their neighbors and public at large to varying degrees. Many parents enroll their children in various sports and extra-curricular activities at local YMCAs or recreation centers to make up for the inadequate sports facilities or other enrichment programs at Islamic schools:

> I play basketball in Al-Noor, but I took swimming lessons at the local YMCA … Most of my friends I hang out with are non-Muslim … (Mohamad, 2-199)

As a result, their exposure to the "mainstream" media and "youth culture" varies along gender lines and prior public schooling from "very little" for the majority of the female participants (5 out of 7) to "knew a lot" for most of the male participants (5 out of 6). Nonetheless, in general, the busy schedules and limited time available to families after work or regular homework load for the children tend to force many families to be selective in their socializing habits and circles. As a result, both home lifestyle and the select social circle become "sort of living in a second bubble" in the words of Rehana.

Occasional Prejudicial Encounters—Glimpses of "*The* Outside World"

In a society where Muslims are both a tiny minority and "often misunderstood" or "negatively portrayed in the media," families cannot fully insulate their children from unwanted prejudicial encounters in the public sphere. Even though the twin bubbles of Islamic school and select social circle help reduce the frequency and potential negative effects of such encounters, they cannot completely shield them from negative encounters. Participants' accounts reveal subtle and not-so-subtle experiences of stereotypes and prejudicial encounters before their high school transitions. The nature and frequency of such encounters vary greatly by participant's gender, racial or ethnic background, diversity of the region where they live, and their level of interactions with non-Muslims in the public sphere. Such encounters seem to play a role in shaping participants' pre-transition anxieties and perceptions of what to expect in their public high schools.

For the male participants, their phenotype or "skin color" and ethnic background seem to be primary triggers. Those who looked White (Mohammad and Omar) or African American (Abdul and Ali) did not report any negative encounters that they

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perceive to be related to their Muslim identity in their public dealings, prior to their

transitions. However, those who looked "obvious" Pakistani or Arab (Ahmed and

Osman) reported encountering prejudicial reactions, but mostly in their public middle

schools experiences. Although not specifically asked, half the boys did mention

"frustrating waits" at the airports while travelling overseas with their families and being

subjected to "'random' screenings all the time." Furthermore, because the boys in

general were often "out in the neighborhood," they were more aware of how they were

"portrayed by the media" than the girls. However, none reported any obvious prejudicial

encounters in their communities. It was difficult to compare the regional differences in

stereotypical encounters due to participants' "obvious looks," because none of the

participants from the Raleigh-Durham-Cary region looked "Middle Easterner," or went to

public schools prior to high school.

For the females, their *hijab* or headscarf was the primary trigger for the

prejudicial reactions. Maria, who is half-White and half-Palestinian Arab, is hard to tell

apart from a typical White American teenager except for her *hijab*. She reported

experiencing what she considered to be negative prejudicial encounters primarily because

of her *hijab* and visible Muslim identity:

> [Prior to the first day] I was worried about ... how people would treat me because
>
> I wear the scarf ... I had some experiences with other people, like just walking in
>
> Target store once. There was one time where this person stopped, she came up to
>
> me and just started yelling about how I was going to hell because I was Muslim.
>
> So I was afraid that may be some students or teachers would be racist ... I don't

watch TV much. Indirectly may be, like this woman I mentioned. She may have been influenced by media, or she may have lost someone in the wars, I don't know. But, the media did not directly influence my thinking at that time. (Maria, 2-13, 15, 17)

Obviously, Maria was aware of the negative media portrayal of Muslims, but such awareness did not influence her thinking until she encountered its negative manifestation first-hand.

Nadda, on the other hand, encountered many of what she considered to be overt stereotypical reactions in her public dealings, because she wore *hijab* and interacted with many restaurant customers frequently while helping her parents with their business:

See, since we own a restaurant, I help my parents sometimes. It's just weird like, you'd see a Caucasian guy [pause]. And, you know, I'd start like, "What do you need?" or something like that in perfect American accent. And, he'd be like, "Do you speak English?" As if he didn't listen to what I said. I don't know [pause]. It feels so weird. I think about it sometimes, like they see our *hijab* and pass judgment that we don't know English. It is depressing you know. (Nadda, 1-68)

It is interesting to note that only the female participants from Raleigh-Durham-Cary region reported experiencing such prejudicial encounters in a public sphere. None of the female participants from the more diverse Baltimore-Washington region reported any such encounters in the public sphere prior to their high school transitions.

Self-Identification and Salience Hierarchy—"Muslim First or American?"

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Prior to their high school transitions, participants self-identified in many different ways depending upon the context and surroundings. They used their social identities based upon gender, parents' country of origin, country of birth, and religion to construct their identity salience hierarchy. What is amazing to me is that they rearranged the hierarchy in different contexts without much thought. Even more amazing for me was how they responded to the dichotomously framed question that many ask in the media of Muslims, "Do you think of yourself as an American first or as a Muslim first?" Many patterns were easily discernible from their conversations or responses to specific questions, about how they self-identified or rearranged their identity salience hierarchy in different contexts.

Within their Islamic schools, their identities based upon gender and parents' country of origin are high in the hierarchy. Everyone is a Muslim and everyone is an American, so "nobody thinks in those terms." While the typical Islamic school uses gender as a differentiator because of its policies on dress code and code-of-conduct, participants generally rely on their parents' country of origin (i.e., African American, Pakistani, Palestinian, etc.) as the differentiator from and among their peers. Similarly, when they address an adult in school (a staff member or parent) or talk about them in their conversations, they use gender-based qualifiers like "brother" or "sister" to address them. Among peers, on the other hand, they frequently use peer names in face-to-face conversations regardless of their gender and without the customary "brother" or "sister" qualifiers. However, they rely on gender (which is often discernible to them from peer names) and parents' country of origin if a gender-related name is not discernible when

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they converse about their peers in absentia. For example, they use "Samira [female name], the Syrian" and "Ayan [hard to tell the gender], the Egyptian boy" depending upon the situation.

Within their families, they often use "American" to differentiate themselves from their parents. For example, Rehana while discussing a conversation with her mother regarding her plans for *Eid*, clearly used her American identity to distinguish herself from her mother:

> We were planning like what everyone was going to wear on *Eid*, and like *Mehndi* [a traditional herb used to color hands on special occasions like Eid or weddings in South Asia] designs came into the discussion. My mom is so much into *Mehndi* on Eid. I told her like, "Mom, it's so Pakistani, I'm an American and I don't wear *Mehndi* like you do." (Rehana, 2-312)

Outside of the twin bubbles however, they mix and match depending upon the context. Among Muslims, it is pretty much the same as in Islamic school. However, with non-Muslims they switch, albeit subconsciously, between any combination of "American," "Muslim," "African American" etc. Maria and Mohamad would also alternate between White and Palestinian depending upon their audience. Regardless of what identity they bumped up or down in the hierarchy, often the choice was "automatic" depending upon the appropriateness of the situation. If the use is purposeful, it is generally for differentiation purposes.

Nothing made the automatic hierarchy rearrangement more clear, than when the participants were asked to respond to the often dichotomously framed-question that many

ask in the media of Muslims, "Do you think of yourself as an American first or as a Muslim first?" Their responses were more insightful, and reflected the clear conceptualization of what it meant to be a Muslim or an American for them. Here is how some of them responded:

> Well, I have been asked something like that before. Honestly, to me, it is a stupid question. I don't think you can mix your nationality with religion. I think the person who asks that question is totally ignorant about Islam and Muslims. Anyway, I'd ask back like, do you call yourself an American or a Christian first. Or, whatever his or her faith is ... (Rashida, 3)

> What do you mean? They're not mutually exclusive, are they? … I am an American and a Muslim at the same time, one is my country and the other my religion. (Sadaf, 2-58)

> Well, first off, being a Muslim is a belief, your faith, religion, and being an American is where you are born, you are from. So, I'm both. I believe in Allah, that makes me a Muslim. I was born in America, that makes me American, duh! (Rehana, 2-220)

> Ok, to me, that is a dumb question. I would answer, I'm both. See, America is my country because I was born here, and that makes me American. Islam is my religion, and that makes me Muslim. It's like comparing apples and oranges. (Omar, 2-122)

In general, the participants' Muslim identity ranks low in their salience hierarchy when they stay within the bubbles. It is just one aspect of their being. However, when

they encounter prejudicial treatment in the public sphere, which they perceive to be related to their Muslim identity as previously discussed, they become more conscious of their Muslim identity. This is particularly the case for girls who wear *hijab* and experience prejudices. Their awareness of their Muslim identity changes when they go to a secular public high school. Such experiential differences are described in the next section.

SECTION 3: Transition to a Public High School—From Bubbles to *The* Pond

This section synthesizes the collective experiences of the participants as they go through their transitions from American K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools. Their accounts reveal that such a transition involves four discernible phases. These phases are preparation, disorientation, redrawing boundaries and "found my place" or equilibrium. The narrative that follows is broken into six subsections. The first describes their transition preparations or the preparation phase, which takes place prior to their first day of a public high school. It details the transition mentoring and preparation support they receive from their families and friends, Islamic schools, and public high schools. It also describes participants' self-concept, aspirations, their perceptions of parental expectations, and mixed feelings they carry about going to a public high school prior to their first day of school. The next three subsections describe the remaining three phases involved in their transitions, which take place within the boundaries of a public high school. They essentially detail the kinds of changes and challenges participants encounter in their new schools over time, and adjustments they make as a result to adapt to their new schools. The fifth subsection summarizes various personal, family, Islamic,

and public high school related factors that help ease their transitions. The final subsection summarizes participants' advice for their parents, Islamic schools, public high schools, and the Muslim youth in Islamic schools. A brief section summary is provided at the end.

The Preparation Phase—Getting Ready for "The Pop"

During, or before their last year of Islamic school, students and their families often engage in conversations about possible high school options. Many parents evaluate private and public high school alternatives when their first child gets ready for transition to high school. Some choose to relocate, specifically when the local public high school in their area is "not that good" and they live in large metropolitan regions like Baltimore-Washington or Raleigh-Durham-Cary, where relocating within a 20 miles radius means better high schools. Others opt for a charter or a magnet high school of some sort, if that is an option. Ali and his family chose a private school instead of a public high school. Ahmed and Rehana's family relocated to a nearby county when their older sister was in her eighth grade, because the high school close to their residence was "not that good." Both Omar and Sadaf participated in a statewide lottery for a public charter school. Once they made it into the school, Sadaf's family moved to "live near the school." Once participants' parents choose the public school option for their first child, particularly girls, most play an active role in their preparation and mentoring process. Overall, as the next three subsections show, the participants in this study (students in K-8 Islamic schools) received varying degrees of transition mentoring and support from their families and friends, Islamic schools, and public high schools.

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Friends and family—"scares" and "advice" to "active involvement".

Participants' families and friends played an important role in their transition preparation

and mentoring. Parents worked with both Islamic and public schools to ensure that their

children's admissions process went smoothly. Many, specifically those who did not go to

United States' public schools for their own schooling, attended high school orientation

sessions along with their children or on their own. Parents with prior public schooling

exposure were somewhat more relaxed when it came to the admissions process and

attending orientation sessions. Nonetheless, they were actively engaged with their

children's high schools. Participants' parents were the primary source of mentoring

outside of their children's respective schools. Their mentoring efforts included things

like "candid talk [with their children] about everything," "advice," "caution," "raising

expectations," etc. Some parents in the Raleigh-Durham-Cary region, out of their

concerns for their daughters' safety or social isolation, gave them the "choice" to remove

hijab in high school if they "felt uncomfortable." However, none of the female

participants entertained such an idea. They consider the *hijab* as a "part" of them. Nadda

described her conversation with her mother:

> My mom asked me, "Do you ever want to take your scarf off?" I said, "No, I've
>
> no problem with it, it doesn't bother me." It's like wearing a shirt, and without
>
> that I'd feel weird. I'd feel like something is missing, I don't really think about it.
>
> (Nadda, 1-212)

After parents, siblings, cousins, or friends who were already in high school, were

the second important source of mentoring outside of the two school areas examined.

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With the exception of Ahmed and Rehana, who went to the high school with intact friendship circles from their public middle school, only two other participants had siblings (Mohamad, and Mona) in school prior to them. One had cousins (Rashida), and Abdul had "some friends from the neighborhood" in the same high school. Whereas parents spoke about "general things," helped with the admissions process or "worked with" counselors for "the course selections," siblings and other extended family members or friends were a "big help" in "keeping company," "finding places," navigating the socio-cultural setup, and "making new friends." They were also the source of "scares" and gossip about "getting lost in the zoo," "kids getting jumped on" or "thrown into the dumpsters." Overall, siblings who were already in a public high school and parents who actively engaged in the mentoring and transition preparation process "made a big difference."

Islamic schools—"some advice" to "help with *almost* everything". Every participating Islamic school provided some form of mentoring to its outgoing eighth graders, but only Al-Noor offered direct preparation support to its students. However, their efforts did not come close to the well-coordinated support the public middle school provided for Ahmed and Rehana. Both Furqan and Iqra lacked any well-planned mentoring and support programs for their outgoing students. A few teachers offered some mentoring in the form of advice and admonishments, where they "told" students about "what to expect," "importance of staying focused," and "how to avoid common problems" in a public high school. Participants also heard things like "high school is big," "[they] will need to work harder," "there are many *haram* things to avoid," and

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"[they] are walking *Dawah* and should act as [Muslim] role models." None of the

students from the two schools recalled hearing anything about the high school application

process or orientation sessions. However, Iqra provided more mentoring to its girls than

Furqan did. In the girls' wing at Iqra, teachers engaged students into various role-playing

activities to "get them ready" for dealing with the likely social encounters in high school

that are "Islamically inappropriate," such as how to react to handshakes or hugs, cursing,

drugs, etc.

> … I remember in 8th grade, we would role play situations that may happen in
>
> high school cuz most of the girls in 8th grade, because we've been there for like
>
> [pause], since elementary school. But, you know when it comes to the situation in
>
> real life, you kind of forget what you had practiced [laugh]. Your brain freezes …
>
> (Saeeda, 2-120)

Al-Noor's transition preparation support and mentoring program for its outgoing

eighth graders was much more organized and well planned than the other two Islamic

schools. The school arranged its own orientation session for both students and their

parents in order to explain to them the high school admission process. The academic

coordinator walked them through the registration requirements and deadlines for various

local high schools, provided them appropriate registration and course selection

forms/sheets, helped them fill those out, and encouraged them to attend orientation

sessions at their respective high schools. The school also made sure that every eighth

grader filled the necessary forms in order to enter into the public lottery for PC High

School—the top 20th ranking public charter school in the region. While Maria and Nadda

complained that Al-Noor did not mentor them well about how to deal with the social changes, Mona and Sadaf's accounts revealed that the school had heard their grievances. Mona stated that her teachers talked to the students about likely "changes," or "problems" they may encounter in their public high schools and how to deal with those. Al-Noor "could not" however, take them to their respective high schools for a pre-transition visit.

In contrast, the public middle school Ahmed and Rehana attended, offered a more comprehensive and well-coordinated preparation support and mentoring program. Their program essentially included two phases. In the first phase, the teachers and counselors at the middle school explained to the students every step involved in their move to the high school and corresponding deadlines. Teachers also discussed "what to expect," "where to go for further help," and "what to avoid." In the second phase, the counselors at the school took their outgoing eighth graders to their high school on a daylong trip in the spring when high school was in session. During that trip, the students met with their would-be high school counselors, filled out registration forms and made all the preliminary course selections for core and elective courses for their upcoming semester/year, visited classes and other facilities, explored various extracurricular activities available to them, and participated in various hands-on activities alongside the freshmen. In the end, both Ahmed and Rehana "knew exactly what to expect," and were "looking forward to the first day at the new school."

The level of mentoring and preparation support greatly influenced participants' attendance in high school orientation sessions. Since Furqan and Iqra only provided limited mentoring, but no concrete support to their students, participants from the two

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schools either missed high school orientations "because they did not know" (e.g. Abdul

and Rashida), or one of their parents attended those "because they handled the

admissions" (e.g., Osman, and Saeeda). Since Ali transitioned to a private high school,

he did attend the orientation there along with his mother. Every participant from Al-

Noor, except Sadaf, attended orientation sessions at their respective high schools, and in

many cases, their parents joined them too. Sadaf missed the orientation because she was

travelling overseas during the summer and "came back just before the first day."

However, because of Al-Noor's well-planned support program, Sadaf did not miss any

registration deadlines; in fact, she was one of the lottery winners for the charter school.

Public high schools—Internet outreach to "one or more" orientation sessions.

Every public high school in this study offered one or more orientation sessions for its

prospective students and their parents during the summer, and in some cases, back to

school nights on the day before their first high school session. Details about the

admissions process and various dates, including the dates for planned orientation

sessions, were usually announced through the respective schools' website. It was clear

from the review of the websites, and accounts from Ahmed and Rehana, that their main

transition support activities were primarily structured for the students from feeder middle

schools. There was no direct proactive outreach by the public high schools for local

private schools other than putting information on their websites. It was up to the

individual Islamic schools or the parents to get the necessary information from high

school websites, and ensure that their children met the registration and other

requirements, and attended the orientation sessions prior to their first day of school. In

all, five participants did not attend high school orientations. While Sadaf and Rashida missed their orientations because of overseas travel during the summer prior to school, Abdul missed it because he "didn't know," Saeeda's dad and Osman's mom attended school orientations instead of them.

The orientation sessions offered by public high schools covered many aspects of the high school life. The sessions generally started with a presentation. In the presentation, both parents and prospective students learned about the school background, its policies on GPA and graduation requirements, class selections and parental role in the selection process, academic schedule for freshmen, attendance policies, and various curricular and extra-curricular programs available to the students. After the presentation, both students and parents had the opportunity for building walkthroughs, in-class "chats" with teachers, and meetings with counselors. The schools also tried to arrange various social activities where students participated in hands-on activities alongside their would-be peers. Participants who attended their respective schools' orientation found those "helpful in some things." Orientation attendance also created anxieties for some. Participants who went to large schools, started to worry about "getting lost" or "finding classes on time." Moreover, while some male participants worried about "distractions" in their new schools, female participants found their new schools "very different" and were worried about their prospects of "making new friends."

The day before—self-concept, aspirations, parental expectations, and mixed feelings. Participants' accounts reveal a strong sense of self-concept, high academic aspirations, and general awareness of parental expectations prior to their first day of high

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school. Their accounts also reveal mixed feelings about going to a public high school for one reason or another. There was a unanimous consensus among the participants that their Islamic schools had prepared them well "academically, Islamically, and personally." They also "knew" that their parents expected them "to be good Muslims and do well in high school." As a result, they had high academic aspirations. Despite all that, they still had mixed feelings about going to a public high school. Their feelings ranged from excitement to anxiety about many aspects, such as "getting lost," "not fitting in," racial prejudices, etc..

Boys were generally excited for the change; girls on the other hand "would have preferred to stay in an Islamic school if that was an option." Despite such preferences, every participant, except Mona and Rehana, revealed some anxiety about going to a public high school. Their anxieties primarily originated from their previous public schooling experiences or lack thereof, their awareness of stigma attached to their ethno-religious backgrounds, their perceptions based upon "gossip" and "different ways of doing things" associated with public schools, or their perceptions of their high school after attending the orientation sessions. Mona attended a public elementary school before coming to Al-Noor. Her parents were Palestinian Americans, like other participants of Palestinian origin, she was "somewhat" aware of the challenges of being an Arab and a Muslim and the stereotypes associated with her ethno-religious background. She also started wearing *hijab* after coming to Al-Noor. Nevertheless, she was still excited about going to a public high school because it was a small college-prep school, where females were in the majority among both students and the staff. Her sister was also a sophomore

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there. Rehana, one the other hand, moved to a public middle school towards the end of

7th grade because of family relocation, where she experienced the "worst stereotypes."

She was "really excited" to go to high school because she "saw some *hijabis*" during

orientation, and expected "less problems there" than in her middle school.

Among those participants who had no prior public schooling experience, boys had

a different set of worries than girls. Whereas both Mohamad and Omar were "really

excited" to "see new faces" and avail "more sports opportunities," Mohammad was

worried about "getting lost" once he saw his school during the orientation and realized

"how big it was." Omar on the other hand went to a small top-ranking public charter

school and was "more worried about openness and temptations." Although both came

from Palestinian origins, the usual stereotypes associated with their ethno-religious

background were not a source of their anxiety because "it was hard to tell" if they were

Arabs without getting to know them. Girls, on the other hand, were worried about "not

finding classes on time" (Maria and Saeeda), or that they "didn't know what to expect"

(Saeeda and Rashida), "may not fit in" (Maria, Nadda, and Sadaf), "mixed PE and other

group activities" (Maria, Nadda, Rashida, Sadaf, and Saeeda), stereotypes because of

their *hijab* (Maria, Nadda, and Sadaf), or racism (Maria). Their worries about stereotypes

or racism resulted from their previous prejudicial encounters in the public sphere that was

mentioned earlier.

Among the boys with prior public schooling, their anxieties resulted from the

negative encounters they previously experienced in public schools due to their ethno-

religious background, their perceptions based upon "gossip" and "different ways of doing

things" associated with public schools, or their perceptions of their high schools after attending the orientation sessions. Both Ahmed and Osman had experienced bullying and peer taunts by their public school peers because they "looked Arab or Pakistani." Osman was worried about similar experiences in high school. Abdul and Ali, on the other hand, were spared from such experience because they "didn't look foreign." For Ali, who was good in sports and came from a highly religious Somali American family, "too much openness" was his main concern. Abdul, on the other hand, was going to a neighborhood high school where gangs, fights, and drugs were a major problem. Although he missed orientation, he knew many friends from the neighborhood who "went to the same high school." They "kept telling" him that the school was bad and "people get shot all the time," and that he "would change." In sum, the participants started their journey to a public high school with a strong sense of self-concept, high academic aspirations, general awareness of parental expectations, along with mixed feelings for various reasons.

The Disorientation Phase—Overwhelming First Few Days or Weeks

> I don't know [long pause]. I was kind of excited and really scared at the same time [Pause]. When I first got to school, I saw a student with orange hair and a Mohawk, wearing a baggy jeans, and long earrings. It was just weird thing. I don't know, it was just [long pause]. I saw different people that I had never seen in my life. It was totally new. I came in late, a week behind, to a completely different school. A public school for the first time, and it's a high school. And, it

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was, it was also my first time in a mixed class, and with male teachers. So, it was

a lot, a lot [stretched]! (Rashida, 1-78)

"Too many" simultaneous changes seemed to overwhelm the Muslim youth in

this study during their first few days or weeks when they transitioned from a K-8 Islamic

school to a public high school. On the very first day, many immediately feel "lonely"

and "other" in the new environment, and frequently encounter situations that remind

them of their "loss" of familiar settings, established routines, and people "who

understood" them. The change was more difficult for girls who wear *hijab* than boys,

except when the school had a sizable Muslim student population. Among the girls, those

who spent their K-8 years in a "girls only" wing or school, "having guys" in the

classroom and as teachers is a big psychological shift, let alone closely working with

them and "jumping around in their presence during PE." Others, who were "used to

having guys around," "newness of the places, people, and their ways" and complete

"absence of the familiar faces" caused anxiety, stress and a sense-of-loneliness. For the

first time, some girls experience first-hand ignorance and prejudices, "awkward"

encounters, or were put "on the spot" to answer questions about their *hijab*. They often

responded impulsively, and a few admitted making mistakes (in retrospect) out of

confusion that caused a "bad start." Essentially, "the horrible" first day and challenges

resulting from simultaneous organizational and socio-cultural changes disoriented them.

First day—"too many changes". Every participant started his or her first day of

public high school with the mixed feelings of excitement and anxiety, except Saeeda who

"did not want to go to public school." Parents drove the majority of them (11 out of 13)

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to the school; Abdul walked to his neighborhood high school, and Rashida took a school bus with her two cousins already going to the same high school. Once they got to their schools, they encountered too many organizational and socio-cultural changes, some of which they had "never seen" before. They encountered changes, such as "different people ... never seen [before];" "large buildings with many floors;" "guards and security checks;" "ID badges, maps, schedule, and lunch codes;" "meeting counselor for the first time;" "frequent moving;" "sea of people walking randomly;" "totally new teachers and peers;" "mixed classes and male teachers;" "boys and girls hanging out together in hallways;" and "hugs and high-fives." Their initial reactions to those encounters were described as "shocked" and "felt small" (Mohamad); "scared" and "horrible" (Abdul); "nervous" (Osman); "worried" (Omar); "afraid of getting lost" (Maria); "scared to death" (Nadda); "[felt] like any other day at public school" (Ahmed); "intimidated by huge people" (Rehana); "felt different" (Ali); "felt out of loop" (Mona); "confused and stressed" (Saeeda); "[felt] it was rush" (Sadaf); and "it was a lot" and "exhausting" (Rashida).

It also became clear to Abdul, who missed his orientation, that missing orientation can lead to system hiccups, and can make the first day "horrible" if some things are not sorted out in advance. Because of name confusion, he spent his whole day in the library until his school sorted it out. It was also hard for him to find classes the following day:

> My first day was horrible! Because I had two different last names … They didn't know what last name I was under, so they sent me to the library until they sort it out. I was really frustrated because I missed the whole first day and did nothing

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... I'm sure if I went there before and met my counselor, that shouldn't have

happened... Then, my second day of school, it was not bad because of my

schedule or something got messed up, but it was hard finding my classes, and

there was not much help ... I had to find everything myself. (Abdul, 1-76)

No other participant who missed orientation (i.e., Osman, Rashida, Sadaf, and Saeeda)

reported encountering any system hiccup on his or her first day.

Specific challenges. Many of the changes participants experienced on their first

day as a freshman are not uncharacteristic of high school transitions. It was clear to me

in talking to each participant, particularly the females, that coming from such a tight-knit

community as a K-8 Islamic school, one in which school was experienced as a "bubble"

or a "second home," made the early phase of transition especially difficult. Saeeda

explained:

First few weeks were extremely terrible for me. I was scared. I knew that

everything will be different and like, I knew I had to make new friends. But, I

had never thought that the school would be that different. Iqra was small, my

teachers were all female, and my friends were all female. After like nine years in

a school where everybody around you is Muslim, you know everybody and

everybody knows you, and then you know you're going to a totally different

world, where everything is different. Like the teachers are different, the

environment is different, and people around you are different ... just like going

from the school where everybody knows you to a school where you are a *nobody*.

Nobody knows you. Like for me, that was really really hard. I was used to

having my friends, my teacher sisters. And now, it feels like nobody cares about you. I have no friends, and no teachers understand what you're going through or where you come from. Really, like you become *nobody* overnight. (Saeeda, 1-203)

Becoming "nobody" or "the only hijabi" and loneliness. Interestingly, the female participants who never went to a public school before, except Rashida whose school had a sizeable Muslim population, leaving their old school community came with the nagging sense of being a "nobody." While Abdul and some other boys (Mohamad and Omar) felt like their transitions provided them a chance to be free or "myself," the transition for these young women brought with it separation from the communal bonds and the religio-cultural setup they had come to depend on as a source of their "true" selves. Nadda expressed the same sense-of-loss as Saeeda, and regret at having to leave Al-Noor:

I liked it a lot here [at Al-Noor], the home-work was a lot sometimes but, the environment is lot better because you don't feel like you're left out, you're a minority, you all grew up as one no matter what race you are or whatever else you are. I loved being with people who knew me, and who completely understood my way of life. But, like in my high school, nobody knows much about where I'm from or who I am. I was totally comfortable at Al-Noor. Now, every morning I ask myself, "Who am I going to talk to? Who am I going to hang around with?" God, it feels so weird. (Nadda, 1-25)

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Saeeda further highlighted another first experience, which some other female participants also noted, and that was being the only girl wearing *hijab* on her school campus:

> I was really scared and sad because in my classes, I'm always the only *hijabi*, and like, it's so weird because I wasn't used to that until I came here. Like, I'm all alone now, during those six hours of my day ... sometime I panic, I'm like, "Oh my God! I'm all by myself, alone." It happens when I feel like, people stare at me, and like I'm sitting by myself in the classroom, and everybody is talking to everybody. (Saeeda, 1-67)

Nadda and Sadaf were also the only ones with a *hijab* in their schools. Loneliness and the sense of being "the only hijabi" were also shared by them, and in many classes by Maria. Mona reported similar feelings in one or two classes where she did not know anybody.

Rehana, on the other hand, experienced similar feelings when she first moved to her public middle school from Iqra in her seventh grade due to family relocation. However, she went to high school with an intact circle of friends and two siblings. For Ahmed, who was also "the only Muslim boy" in his middle school along with his two sisters, having Muslims in high school for the first time "was like a really big change:"

> See the change we faced was different. For us, when we went to middle school. So, me and my twin sister, we were the only hijabis, and Ahmed was the only Muslim boy in the whole school ... So, for us, it was a different change ... I stuck with the same group of friends, and they stuck with me. For us, it was just getting

to know the place and getting to know new schedule, like fitting in, knowing

where to go ... (Rehana, 2-67)

Well, I think one of them [the changes] was that since there wasn't really any

Muslims in the middle school, so when we went to high school, there were many

Muslims, Muslim boys I met, and that was like really a big change. (Ahmed, 2-

65)

"Stares" and the sense of otherness. "Stares" and "people looked at you

differently" was the second common observation many female participants, except

Rehana and Rashida, reported during their first few days. For example, Sadaf while

touching upon the issue of loneliness discussed earlier, also highlighted her perceptions

of how her peers looked at her:

... A large number of students came from same schools, so people had a clique;

they had someone to hang-out with the whole day. I didn't know anybody, and

that just made the whole experience more like uncomfortable. Nobody talked to

me the whole day. Also, some students, they looked at you differently. That

made me feel lonely ... (1-69)

Saeeda panicked sometimes when her sense-of-loneliness was aggravated by peer

"stares," and Nadda often felt "the burden of being judged" by her peers while touching

upon loneliness and peer "looks:"

I was not happy the first day of school. I thought it was horrible, I know I didn't

like it. I was just scared to death. I was nervous because people looked at you

differently. No one wants to talk to you, everyone looks at you thinks, you're

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weird or something. It's scary, I didn't know anybody from my high school, it's

really hard … (Nadda, 1-60)

Both Nadda and Maria touched upon some other peer misperceptions, which will

be discussed in more detail in the following subsection, such as "linked to" terrorists or

"don't speak English," all combined to raise the awareness among the female participants

about being the "other" or increased their sense of otherness:

... I don't talk much, and people usually get the first impression that I'm a

terrorist, I'm linked to those somehow, [Maria: or you don't speak English],

exactly ... (Nadda, 1-55)

"Normal names" and awkwardness. Boys, on the other hand, did not talk much

about the feelings of loneliness or otherness because of stares or things of that nature.

However, those who carried long or "different" ethnic names, reportedly "felt awkward"

during the first few days, when their teachers or peers could not say their names correctly

or would "get it wrong." Peers and teachers "paused" on their names or their school

names during introductions or roll calls. Such encounters raised the awareness among the

participants that their names are less than "normal." Omar and Mohamad described their

"awkward" experiences:

You can tell like, you're in a new world. They can't say my name correctly. I

sort of felt awkward when people couldn't say my name or Al-Noor ... Class after

class, whenever they'd go through the list, they'll always get my name wrong,

every single time. Sometime I feel like shouting at them like, "Just be quiet

already" ... And then your classmates, when they meet you, they'd ask like, "what

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school did you go to?" I would say, "Al-Noor school." They'd be like, "What?"

[laugh] ... So, it was sort of awkward at first. (Omar, 1-69)

Yah, when they read the role and they like pause. I know it's me, because it's

really hard to read my name, specially my last name. My Spanish teacher, she

calls people by their last names, so when she'd pause, I'd say, "I'm just right

here" [laughs]. I know it's me because everybody else has like a "normal" name.

It was definitely awkward at first. (Mohamad, 1-70)

Both Mohamad and Omar shortened their names when their peers had trouble

saying their names. However, they seemed to realize that there is some stigma attached

among Arab and Muslim communities when boys shorten their names in public schools

to hide their background. While relating their own accounts of short names they

proactively tried to explain that they did not shorten their names to hide their

backgrounds. Omar summed up the challenge for them:

I don't hide. I really don't care what people think. It's just my first name is really

like two names, Abdul [Arabic name]. It never fills in the sheet, so they would

say like, "Abdula" or something like that. It would be kind of weird for me. I'd

be like, "call me Abd" or "Abdul" ... One of my teachers, she would call me by

my last name, and she'd be like, Mr. Danon. It is weird because Danon is

nowhere close to my dad's name, it's kind of a yogurt. I'd tell her, "Can you

please use Abd or Abdul?" (Omar, 2-22)

"Bad start"—"pairing with a guy," "goof-up [in retrospect]" and stress. For the

female participants, who come from girls-only Islamic schools, dealing with gender

mixing can be particularly hard in the beginning. Often, they "don't know how to deal with it," and sometimes their responses create "awkward situations" or "goof-ups." On her first day of high school, Saeeda found herself paired up with a boy. She described how she reacted, which not only created an awkward situation with her teacher and peers, but it got her onto a "bad start" and prolonged episode of "social awkwardness:"

> I also remember, my biology GT teacher, she paired me up with a guy in the very first class on the first day. In my mind, I was like, "What is this?" I went up to her and told her, "I can't sit next to a guy." The whole class was like, "She is so rude!" She was just like, "Oh, ok, ok, ok!" I think she wasn't expecting that at all. The poor teacher, she worked like all summer long making like the table charts, and I totally ruined it. So, she made me sit on a different table. Me and the guy, we were sitting on two different tables, and while everyone else had a pair. It was really just awkward ... The poor guy, I probably offended him more than I should have ... That thing just messed up the whole day, like the whole few weeks for me. I was very stressed. (Saeeda, 2-80)

It was not only the girls who came from girls-only school, pairing up with "guys" was also "awkward" experience for others who went to the schools with mixed classes. For example, Sadaf reported similar "awkwardness" when she was paired up with boys in her science classes. However, her reaction was more subtle:

> Mixed group was hard at first. It was in science first because we had to do stuff together with partners, and it was kind of awkward. (Sadaf, 1-118)

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"Put on the spot"—ignorance or prejudice. Some female participants also shared
how they felt like they were "put on the spot" by their teachers because of their *hijab* on
the very first day of their freshman year. While describing her first day of high school,
Saeeda reported:

> It was really funny because I couldn't sleep that night ... Then my dad drove me
> to the school. I cried the entire way ... [laughing]. When I get there, I had
> biology GT. I'm like, my eyes are soak and red, and we'll have to stand in this
> circle. The teacher was going around and asking everybody like, "What's your
> name?" "What middle school did you go to?" Then when she gets to me, and I
> told her that I went to a private school. She was like, "So why are you wearing
> this [*hijab*]?" I was not expecting that at all ... I don't even remember what I
> said, and the next day I brought her a pamphlet talking about *hijab* [laughing].
> That was really awkward. (Saeeda, 1-76)

When I followed up with Saeeda to know her understanding of why her teacher might
have asked that question, she explained:

> ... I don't know, like at that time, there was so much going on, I didn't think about
> it. I just felt awkward ... It's hard to tell really if she asked that question because
> she didn't know about *hijab* or she was being stereotypical. I'd think, we're in
> Maryland, like between DC and Baltimore, she should have seen someone with
> *hijab*. I'm not saying she was bad to me, she never was, like she was always nice.
> I don't know what made her ask that question, like maybe she really didn't know
> about the *hijab*, or maybe she was confused, like maybe she thought, I'm a

modern nun [laugh]. But, I made sure she knew after that [laugh], like I gave her

that pamphlet on *hijab*. (Saeeda, 5)

"I've become shy" in high school. Becoming shy in high school was another

recurring theme many female participants mentioned when they spoke about their initial

experiences in a public high school. None of them reported to be shy in their Islamic

schools. Many tried to explain the reasons for their shyness. Their responses reveal

some of the challenges they encountered in their respective high schools because of their

shyness. The unfolding challenges they faced over time are discussed in more details in

the next subsection:

> Well, I've become a really shy person in my high school. Al-Noor was a small
>
> school, you knew everybody, you were comfortable with them. And, when you
>
> go to the public school, it's just like a whole new world. It's like you just have to
>
> start all over, it's kind of hard to do that. You become shy. While like in public
>
> school you see new people every day, so you get to learn more social skills in
>
> making new friends. (Maria, 1-54)

> At Al-Noor, I was not shy at all. But, at my high school, I feel a lot of peer
>
> pressure ... they talk about the stuff that you're not comfortable talking about, like
>
> the boyfriend and girlfriend stuff ... also, like you're a minority there in high
>
> school, so you're not sociable as much. I'm very shy at high school. I don't talk
>
> much, and people usually get the first impression that I'm a terrorist ... (Nadda, 1-
>
> 55)

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I am very quiet and very shy in public school. But, the second I leave, I am loud

and I am happy, I am smiling, laughing and making jokes, and totally myself.

That is my split personality that I just don't communicate much. (Saeeda, 2-161)

"Guys in PE," "weird uniform" and "only one going to the bathroom to

change". Not every participant took PE in their freshman year; however, for those who

did, girls were generally "very uncomfortable" having PE alongside "guys" in the very

beginning. Both Mona and Sadaf had not taken PE. Everyone else bought long running

pants and full-sleeve shirts to wear under their regular PE uniform shirts, but for many,

who used to wear *jalbabs* or the long garbs in their Islamic schools (more common in

higher grades), wearing pants in public school setting and in front of the guys, was

"really awkward." Saeeda described her first days of PE:

Well, in Iqra we would wear *jalbab*, and even now in high school, I wear *jalbab*.

For PE, I bought long running pants, and just wearing pants outside, and then like

in front of the guys, it is just awkward for me ... Because the common uniform is

a half-sleeve t-shirt and shorts, and what is weird is that girls' shorts are much

shorter than boys' shorts ... I've bought running pants and another full-sleeve shirt

to wear underneath my half-sleeve shirt. Then also the whole changing thing was

awkward, I change in the bathroom, I don't change in the locker room like

everybody else does, and the girls would stare at me or make side comments

sometimes ... then, the whole guy and girl thing in PE ... it is very uncomfortable

experience for someone like me. (Saeeda, 1-152)

Not only did she touch upon her main challenges of wearing pants and doing PE in mixed settings, but she also highlighted two other aspects that she characterized as "awkward," i.e., the "weird uniform" for girls and the common changing practices in the locker room. She did not feel comfortable changing "right there" in the locker-room. Instead, she went to the bathroom to change, which invited "stares" and "side comments" from her peers. Maria also reported similar experiences. Many times she would keep her gym clothes on under her *jalbab*.

It is not only the girls who felt uncomfortable in the beginning. Some boys also found those experiences "awkward." Ahmed, who went to a public middle school in his seventh grade due to family relocation and moved to public high school from there, also found such practices problematic. He felt uncomfortable pairing up with girls in PE and going to the bathroom to change; he was also teased by his peers for both, and was often called "Mr. Shy:"

> Oh, yah [laugh], in high school, I was in 9th grade when I took PE. Well, in PE, I felt really awkward because it was like everyone is changing right there with their lockers, and I'm the only one who is going to the bathroom to change [laugh]. And, we also had to play with the girls in the PE class, and it was, it was really awkward for me because the way they dressed. For me, that was the worst part. And, then the people I knew, they'd tease me, they'd call me 'Mr. Shy' or something like that. (Ahmed, 1-147)

The other three male participants did not report feeling any awkwardness in such encounters. While Mohamad and Abdul had been in the similar situations in local

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YMCAs and other public swimming pools before, Omar quickly followed his peers' lead, and started doing the same.

"Pray at home" and "feel really bad about delaying". For every participant, except few who had the option to pray at school from day one (i.e., Ali, Maria, and Mohamad), prayer was a big issue in the beginning. They did not know if their schools allowed Muslim students to pray or there was a room, and many did not "found the courage to ask." Many chose to pray at home instead, and some "felt bad" when they could not make it on time:

> That was a major change for me, because here it was part of the system, and I
>
> don't have a social support network, like MSA. So, I went with that option where
>
> I can go home and pray there. But like, I always feel guilty about delaying it.
>
> (Nadda, 1-103)

Both Omar and Sadaf, who went to the same school, asked in the beginning for a place to pray when the first Friday came. They were allowed to pray in the principal's office because he was out that day. However, they did not feel comfortable to ask again:

> Well it was on the first Friday, I did try, and they said, "You guys can borrow the
>
> principal's office for today since he is not here today." So, we went ahead and
>
> prayed that day, but after that we did not ask because we were only three people.
>
> (Omar, 1-108)

Rashida's school did have a sizeable Muslim student population; however, they never asked for a place to pray except during Ramadan, when the school would open a student conference room for its Muslim population to spend time and pray when they

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were fasting instead of going to cafeteria. She prayed when she got home in the beginning:

> First day, it was definitely hard for me. There was no place to pray. I mean I didn't really know where I'd go to pray or what I would do to pray. I'm pretty sure that I probably prayed when I got home. Just because the timing at that point was such that, barely I was able to catch *Zuhr* before the *Asr* time started ...
>
> (Rashida, 1-72)

For Mohamad and Maria, because the Muslim Students Association or MSA in their school had already obtained the permission and secured a place, it was easy for them to pray during their lunchtime. Similarly, Ali went to a private high school, where there was a prayer room dedicated for people of every faith where anybody can go and pray or meditate.

"My way"—"go with the flow," "stay by myself," "tell myself," "ignore," or "escape". During the first few days or weeks, participants responded in a variety of ways to cope with the overwhelming changes and the specific challenges highlighted earlier. Their accounts reveal five discernible strategies, all of which can be considered impulsive or reactionary in nature. The strategies they used were "go with the flow," "stay by myself," "tell myself," "ignore," and "escape" to the old circles. While boys primarily chose to go-with-the-flow and ignore or escape to the old circles to deal with the new organizational and socio-cultural realities, girls mixed and matched all those approaches depending upon the context and the nature of changes or challenges they faced. When I asked Omar how he dealt with all the changes in the beginning, he explained:

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... My motto was just go with the flow. I mean keep your eyes and ears open, and yah, don't forget who you are, and things always work out ... Like in the beginning everybody is trying to settle down, like wonder around, so you just do the same ... then you've like, ask your counselor, ask the front office, ask anyone you know if you need help. There is always help. And, then just follow the crowd ... Also like when someone messes with you or your name, you just ignore and keep going. (Omar, 1-80)

Essentially, by Omar's definition, everyone went with the flow when he or she used "the map to find classes," met with their counselor, tried to "follow the rules" or "things [they were] told," etc. When faced with the initial socio-cultural conflicts in the beginning, some of which were described above, they primarily chose to ignore and "keep going." They also kept going back to old friendship circles in the Islamic school, neighborhoods, or the local mosque.

Girls, on the other hand, used some combination of all those strategies in one context or the other. They went with the flow in dealing with many organizational aspects or changes in their new schools. Those who knew a friend or a family member, they stayed with them outside the classes, and those who did not know anyone from before, they primarily stayed by themselves in their classes and during their lunches, unless if they were "paired up" with a female peer "by chance:"

... You walk in, you go with someone you know, if you don't, I mean I'm at least by myself. I've nowhere to go ... so I just sit there, listen in class. If you're paired up with a girl for a group activity, you get a chance to talk to someone, and if it is

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a boy, you just focus on the work. If not, I stay by myself ... then you go to lunch ... when I really feel lonely, I tell myself, like it takes time, and like I've life outside the school. And, then I go home, and like, right when I walk through the door, I pray and forget about the school. (Nadda, 1-94)

Nadda's account also reveals the two additional strategies that many female participants use, and those are "tell myself" or self-assurances (for better times to come) and escape to the life outside the school or old circles, such as family, old school, mosque, or old friends. Saeeda's account further highlights such approaches:

Because I know that I'd never get myself in that life [high school life], because I already have a life outside of the school, I'm not really worried about the whole like making friends thing. I don't have any friend in school. I have life, like I go to *masjid* all the time … I have all these friends from Iqra, so like making friends is not a big deal for me … My whole support system has been like I keep reminding myself, once I'm out of this place, its over ... I've the rest of the day to do whatever I want ... that has been my only support side, like I know that I have a life beyond the school, and that has been the only thing that has kept me going. I just have to get through the school day. (Saeeda, 1-201, 2-205)

Parting ways—sports or academics and shifting identity salience. Within the first few days, both male and female participants part ways. Boys quickly drift towards sports to both fulfill their "love" of sports and fit-in at the same time. Everyone participated in school-sponsored sports from the very beginning. When I asked Abdul about sports, he explained:

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I love sports. I love wrestling and basketball. I started playing in my school from like day one and it helps, I mean like you get comfortable, like with a lot of people. It's not just one grade, you've like people from every grade level, so you become friends with a lot of different grades, and they teach you how to stay out of trouble ... (Abdul, 1-108)

Girls, on the other hand, turn their focus towards "classes" or academics. By now, they seem to have sensed that they will face "more problems" if they participate in sports or extracurricular activities. They "find it safe to focus on classes." Moreover, focus on the classes also keeps them "preoccupied" and serves as another coping mechanism. Saeeda explained her choices:

I kind of go to school to, like go to school, and when I come back, I've a life. I don't get involved in extra-curricular activities, like I don't want to deal with more problems, or like people's looks. All I care for now is like my classes and grades. It helps keep my mind busy too ... Like, I don't see the point in trying to make friends because I am a new kid, so I have to make friends with people who are already friends with each other ... I tell myself that the only reason I'm going there is to go to school, and not making friends. Like, I don't need friends because I have my old friends. (Saeeda, 2-27)

Boys and girls also part ways concerning their sense of self or identity salience hierarchy. While the stares and looks or the sense of being the only *hijabi* increase awareness of their Muslim identity and "actions" for the girls, boys "go easy on the identity part." Saeeda explained this phenomenon like this:

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Yes, all of sudden, I was like, "ok, I'm Muslim now [laugh]." It becomes so much more obvious, because you never got those stares before when you were walking. Or, like, you're the only one wearing *hijab* or *jalbab*, you're the only one wearing long-pants and long-sleeve shirts in PE. You are also, like hiding behind in your PE classes or not talking to the boys ... and all of sudden, you're the only one doing those things, and you become so aware of yourself and your actions ... (Saeeda, 2-108)

Ahmed explained the boys' point-of-view or chosen path:

I think that environment plays a vital role, like the school environment. Because you see like for girls, they're *hijabis*. They look obviously Muslim because they have to wear the *hijab*. For us, like boys are relaxed because you know that we don't have to wear scarves. So we're not really visible, we don't really care that much about the identity part, but girls probably do … in high school, you're pretty much choosing your own identity, choosing who you are, that is what boys do I think ... (Ahmed, 2-95)

In a way, the tracks participants choose, be it voluntarily in the case of boys, or forced by the circumstances in the case of girls, dictates how much time it takes them to become familiar with the new environment and the daily and weekly routines. Because girls tend to narrow their focus on classes and avoid participating in sports or extracurricular activities in the beginning, it takes them "first week to get to know things because they are not that many ... anxiety lasts may be one or two more weeks, but after that, it sort of goes away" (Sadaf, 1-111). For those who take PE in the first semester, it

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takes them "weeks or a couple months to get used to wearing pants, and like the shirt over another shirt, and like jumping around the guys" (Maria, 1-112). Boys on the other hand take "like two weeks [to get] the concept" (Mohamad, 2-263) to "a month, to just get used to the process and new environment ... just to know that this is what you'll be doing for your next four years" (Omar, 2-264).

The Redrawing Boundaries Phase—Unfolding Challenges, Shifting Strategies, and Discovering "True Identity"

As participants start to become more familiar with the new environment and its routines, the nature of their challenges and adjustment efforts starts to change. For the girls, the main challenge throughout their freshman and sophomore years is where to draw the lines in different aspects of high school life? On one hand, they want to fit-in and reestablish a new comfort zone. On the other hand, because of wearing *hijab*, they "feel like [they] have to act in a certain way." They often become "frustrated" with their new schools because "their ignorance and weird stuff doesn't make it any easier" for them. Girls are forced to struggle with questions like, how much should I push for accommodation on the issues like prayer, dress code and PE, fasting, and taking time-off for Eid holidays? How do I explain Islamic beliefs and practices to peers and friends other than simply asserting—"As a Muslim, I can't do that" or correcting "the stuff that is not true" without offending some teachers? How do I respond to peer taunts and misbehavior without "starting a fight" or "coming out as mean?" As if that was not hard enough, the most difficult of all, "what would the Islamic thing be" or "how to react Islamically" to violations of Islamic norms in the face of frequent hugs, cursing, "talk of

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dates," and invitations to parties involving dances and drinking as they start to "open up" to peers.

Boys, on the other hand, deal with their own set of challenges. As they increase their participation in sports and start making more friends, invitations to parties and peer pressure start to increase. They frequently run into "awkward" experiences when many start avoiding those parties because of parental restrictions or personal convictions. They also "start slacking on prayers" as their schedules get busier because of sports. However, when their grades "start to get a hit" or "classes get harder" and workload increases because of "sports and [other such] distractions," they gradually start to shift their focus "back to the classes."

Essentially, in their struggles to negotiate and redraw boundaries in order to both fit-in and discover their "true identity," the participants confront five sets of challenges or conflicts: (a) "inadequate accommodations" and incongruent school practices; (b) difficulties in connecting with teachers and making the "right" friends; (c) ignorance, misrepresentation or omission; (d) stereotypes and prejudicial treatment; and (e) new "technology" demands and increasing academic workload. Throughout this phase, which takes months and in many cases goes well into sophomore or junior years, their negotiation and coping strategies shift between active and passive approaches. The following is a description of those challenges and negotiations that take place as the participants in this study redraw boundaries and struggle with discovering "who [they] really are?"

"Inadequate accommodations" and incongruent school practices. As the participants started to get used to their school routines, they began to realize that the accommodations to practice their religious obligations, which they "took for granted" in their Islamic schools, were "not a given." Receiving such accommodations was largely a burden on them. It took them months, and in many cases a couple of years, to "become comfortable to ask." Nonetheless, with few exceptions, their schools did provide accommodations "to practice [their] religion" when they made requests. There was one instance where the school was proactive in providing religious accommodation during Ramadan. However, in many cases, those accommodations were not adequate. As time passed, students in general, and girls in particular, also found many practices of their public high schools incongruent with their religious lifestyle, and therefore, challenging. While in with a mixed PE class in general, and in some cases mixed grouping in class work, they "felt forced to learn" to establish new interactional boundaries in the process. Similarly, they also found out that much of the frequently offered social activity in their schools involved dances, "which was a big no-no," and occasional "attendance, but not participation" in such an activity invited peer "looks and questions" and made them "stick out like a sore thumb."

Religious accommodations—opt for alternatives, ask for, or in-between. The areas related to religious accommodation, which was of concern to the participants, involved: lunch, prayer, Ramadan (fasting), Eid, and dress.

Lunch. Lunch was an obstacle at times for some, but one that they were able to navigate mostly with ease. Eating pork is prohibited for Muslims. Some Muslims do not

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eat any meat if it is not *zabiha* or prepared in the Islamic tradition. At the very least, the

students needed to avoid eating pork while eating school lunch. In general, no participant

found it difficult to get an "appropriate lunch." In some cases, pork products were clearly

marked on the menus or labeled in the cafeteria. In other cases, when the students asked

the cafeteria staff, they were informed about the pork products. If nothing, they could

"get by as vegetarians." Essentially, finding food alternatives "was never an issue" for

the participants.

Prayer. Prayer becomes "a huge issue" for most of the participants during their

freshman and sophomore years specifically. The early afternoon or *Zuhr* prayer and

Jummah prayer on Fridays (Muslim equivalent of the Sunday church service) generally

coincides with regular school timings. Asking for the accommodation depended upon the

participants' level of self-confidence, the number of Muslims who had previously

attended or were attending the school, and personal opinion as to whether the prayer

could be performed sitting or made up later. It was easy for both Maria and Mohamad to

pray at school because their "MSA was strong and had asked for a place" for its members

to pray. Similarly, Ali went to a private school, where many Muslim students who

attended the school in the past had secured a room to pray. Rashida's school, which had

a large Muslim student population, was proactive and provided a prayer room, but only

during Ramadan, and even made announcements about it:

> During Ramadan ... our school would open a student conference room for us, so
>
> that whoever wants to pray can go instead of going to cafeteria for lunch. It was
>
> near the cafeteria, so there was a bathroom where you can make the *wuddu* before

you pray. So, at least during the Ramadan we always had that opportunity.

(Rashida, 1-73)

Omar and Sadaf went to the same high school, where they teamed up and asked for space early in their freshman year. They got permission that particular day but they also got the impression that it was for one time only, and therefore, they did not ask again. Instead, they found an alternative way to pray *Jummah* prayer. For the other four days, they prayed *zuhr* when they got home, which they continued to do so even in their sophomore year. Sadaf explained:

> Prayer was a huge issue. There are two other students from my old school, who go to the same high school ... We went to the office and asked for a place to pray. They said, "You guys can borrow the principal's office for today since he is not here today." So we went ahead and prayed that day but we knew that that couldn't go on for so long, we couldn't keep asking them for a space to pray. Then my dad got involved, and he helped arrange a fourth shift at the *masjid* in Al-Noor for *Jummah*, which was dedicated for high school students when school finished... other days I pray at home. (Sadaf, 1-91)

Others were "shy" or "did not have courage to ask," and mainly chose to pray when they got home during most of their freshman and sophomore years. "Praying at home" also became an issue for many during the time of the year "when the days got shorter" and they "could not make it home on time for the *Zuhr* prayer." During those days, Saeeda chose to pray sitting down in a chair in the library during her lunchtime [which is generally done when someone is sick or in a travel situation where it is hard to

stop or find a clean place]. Rashida, on the other hand, got her "father involved to get the permission to pray in the locker room;" and others chose "to make up for the lost prayer after getting home." Many were "not happy about it." Their reasons for not asking were summed up best by Nadda:

... Praying five times a day is always very important to me, but when I go to school, I feel like no way is somebody going to open up a room for me where I can pray you know ... there aren't enough Muslim people in the school ... I don't know why, but I never found the courage to ask. I guess my feeling of being an outcast, like not fitting-in, made me feel like asking to pray would be something that they would not allow. I don't want to be hated. I don't want to be looked at differently, so I just kind of keep it to myself and pray the moment I walk into the door when I get home ... (Nadda, 2)

In the absence of "adequate accommodation," some boys started skipping prayers as they "got busy" with the sports at school. When I interviewed Abdul early during his freshman year, he prayed regularly. By the time I conducted my second interview with him, he had a "very busy schedule" because of his participation in sports. He prayed a few times and made up for the missed prayers or occasionally skipped those entirely:

It's harder to pray at the school. Lunchtime is the only break I get, and because I've lunch at different times, it gets harder. Sometimes I pray when I get back home. Also, when I get out of school, I got to go to practice. Sometimes I have two practices, sometimes I've got track and wrestling … So, it becomes lot harder to pray with that kind of schedule. Sometimes I make up the missed prayers, and

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sometimes I forget because I'm really tired. I take a shower and go to bed.

(Abdul, 2-98)

Ramadan. Accommodations during the month of fasting or Ramadan was much better than was the case with daily prayers. Rashida's school took a proactive approach during Ramadan perhaps because close to twenty percent of its student population was Muslim. The school would open a conference room where the students could gather during the month instead of going to the cafeteria. The school also made announcements to let its Muslim students know about the arrangements. The students used that opportunity to pray *Zuhr* and *Jummah* prayers in the conference room as well. Similarly, Mohamad and Maria's school also was somewhat proactive in making similar arrangements because their MSA "worked with the school to make the arrangements." Ali's school was in general more accommodating of his religious needs than public schools. Everyone else except Abdul had to ask his or her schools for accommodation. In every case, their schools excused them from the lunchroom and issued them necessary passes for staying in the library or media rooms. Abdul did not feel a need to ask for any specific accommodation because he could manage without permission.

Ramadan became difficult for the students in general, and girls in particular, when it coincided with PE and warmer days. Maria, Nadda, Saeeda, and Omar took PE in their freshman year when "Ramadan came." In general, the physical activity part was "not as difficult" for girls as was their dress and staying in the sun outside. Their PE instructors were considerate however, and offered them leniency, which no one availed. They

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"wouldn't have taken PE" if it was not required in their freshman year. Maria summed up their experiences:

> In PE, like just before it was fall, when it was hot, we had to jog outside around the track. I was the only one wearing long-sleeve shirts, pants, and scarf. It was also Ramadan, and my teacher knew that I was fasting. So he kept asking me if I wanted to sit down because it was hot and I'm wearing all these clothes, I'm fasting, and I'm not drinking any water or anything … I thought it was like, very nice of him, that he would think about that. I told him, "I'm ok. I'm used to it." It was really hard, like the running part, running outside or playing outside was hard for me. But, I didn't want to ask for any leniency ... if I had a choice, I wouldn't have taken PE, but in our school, it was required in the freshman year. (Maria, 1-190)

For Omar, it was a different struggle however. He generally got thirsty, but more than that, it was the PE uniform of her female peers that made it a difficult experience for him. In Islamic tradition, when one is fasting, he or she is required to refrain from gossip, vain talk, temptations, or in Rehana's words, "checking girls out" etc. When he was running behind his female peers, he was worried about that aspect of fasting, i.e., whether he was violating those rules of fasting. Here is how he explained his struggle:

> If we went outside during PE in Ramadan, I would sort of like, get thirsty when I'd see everybody lining up at the water fountain … I just thought, that was the toughest thing, but then, something else was even harder [laugh]. See like when you're fasting, it's fasting for your eyes too; you know what I mean [laugh]. So

like, you've all these girls running in front of you in these tight shorts, like right in

your face. I kept looking up or on the side, and like, I kept saying *Astagfirullah*

[Oh God, please forgive me]. Like that was the hardest thing for me [laugh]. It

was really awkward … (Omar, 1-140)

Others, during their freshman year, either stayed away from their cafeterias or

stayed within the small group of Muslims if they knew other Muslims or had siblings.

They also engaged in activities such as doing homework, or "Ramadan Quran contest"

etc. During their sophomore year, they became more comfortable and many chose to stay

with their friends in the cafeteria.

Eid. Getting accommodation for *Eid* was easier in general. No participant

encountered any obstacle in taking the day off for *Eid*. Everyone reported that they took

the day off for their first *Eid* in high school. However, many participants complained that

they had "a lot to make up for" afterwards. Almost everyone except Rashida reported

coming on an *Eid* day occasionally because of a test or a midterm. Many felt awkward to

come to school wearing traditional celebration clothes:

Yes, most of the teachers know [about *Eid*], and for an excuse we just take the

religious holiday. But, if I did have an exam or test or something, I wouldn't go

for the *Eid* prayer, because it would be hard for me to make it up. I don't like

staying after school. But then, when you dress up for *Eid* and go to school, it's

gets awkward. (Maria, 1-130)

Rashida's teachers would not schedule any important project or test on the day of *Eid*

because almost one-fifth of the student population in her school would be absent on an

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Eid day. She also reported that she could "take the whole week off" if she chose to without any trouble.

Dress. Dress is a non-issue for the boys. Girls, on the other hand, thought that their high school PE uniform conflicted with their religious rules of dress. However, no one reported experiencing any trouble getting accommodations. Burdened by the modified uniform, none of the girls participated in sports activities in their high schools except that which was necessary for their PE classes. Only Nadda, Rehana, and Saeeda reported having swimming units in their PE classes. They chose to opt out and instead write research papers on swimming related topics. In general, they found their modified uniform a "hassle" and "discouraging." Having to wear full pants and shirts "while everyone around was wearing tank tops and spandex or shorts" made them feel "out of place" and "avoid sports." In fact, Maria, Mona, Nadda, and Sadaf played basketball in their Islamic school; however, they did not "bother to play any extra sports" in their high schools.

Gender mixing and dances—*ignore, avoid or manage*. The participants in general and girls in particular, found the two most common practices of their new schools incongruent with the religious lifestyle they were used to in their Islamic schools, and therefore, often challenging. The conflict in both practices had to do with the Islamic etiquette of avoiding inappropriate "free mixing" among non-*moharrams* (males and females who can marry), such as when the contact involves touching, obscenity, meeting alone, sexual contact, etc. Gender mixing in PE (along with mixed group work for those who came from girls-only school) was one such practice, which forced the participants to

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establish new interactional norms that they perceived "religiously appropriate." Not knowing what to do in the beginning, many often chose to deflect, ignore, or avoid circumstances that violate their religious values often at the expense of being "rude." However, they gradually learned to better manage such circumstances over time. School-sponsored dances were the second such practice. Participants avoided attending such events in general, because attendance alone often invited peer "looks and questions" for the girls, and made them "stick out like a sore thumb" because of their *hijab*.

Gender mixing in class group activities was not a major issue for the boys and the girls, who went to the Islamic schools with coed classes, except the minor "awkwardness" they felt in the beginning as highlighted in the previous subsection, primarily because they interacted with new and non-Muslim peers this time. It was particularly hard for Rashida and Saeeda however, who went to girls-only Islamic schools. In the beginning, they did not know how to deal with their male peers in mixed gender classes. They completely ignored or avoided talking to them, and risked being considered as "rude." Gradually, they learned to draw the boundaries and manage their interactions with male peers. Rashida explained that gradual change:

> Like I said, the whole situation of having guys in the class was kind of weird for me. I didn't use to speak to the guys at all, so it was like, even someone would ask me for a pencil or something, I'd ignore them. I'm sure many thought I was rude. In the beginning, it felt just weird but after a while, I mean it comes into your mind that there is a line that you don't cross. For example, like sure asking for a pencil, asking to explain a problem, but we're not buddies and we're not

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going to sit together during lunch or you're not going to have my number at home. So, it was this line that I had to learn to draw because before that I never did interact with guys in school for any reason ... I started talking to them when I became sort of teacher's assistant in our computer class in my second semester. I used to help my computer teacher. (Rashida, 1-108)

Saeeda further elaborated the change and the toll it took on her health:

… The whole environment was different ... I had no idea like how to deal with things in that environment. Like, being also the first one to go to high school, no one in my family or my new school could understand ... like in Iqra, everything was just extreme in terms of gender relations. When I came to high school, I was very extreme in my dealings with boys. I didn't know how to deal with them. I would completely ignore them … First two years, I was very stressed, the first semester it was worst, I almost stopped eating … I got ulcers and gastritis ... But I mean now, if I were placed next to that same boy [see Saeeda's account under "Bad start"], I wouldn't say anything to the teacher. I'd just work with him. When I go to a new class now, I try to find a seat next to girls, and like if there is a guy next to me, I just work with him in a businesslike manner. I don't feel the same anxiety because I know that I'm not doing anything wrong Islamically you know. (Saeeda, 6-8)

Both accounts reveal that the biggest challenge for some of these young women, particularly those who came from girls-only schools, was to figure out where to draw the appropriate boundaries in their interactions with "the guys," and at the same time "don't

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come out rude" or do "anything wrong Islamically"— something it took both Rashida and Saeeda over a year to learn.

Gender mixing in PE was challenging for every group of participants to varying degrees at some point. Some boys felt uncomfortable in the mixed PE classes in the beginning because of their female peers' uniforms and playing sports with them, while others felt uncomfortable during the month of Ramadan when they were fasting. Girls, both from coed and girls-only Islamic schools, found the mixed PE classes challenging for a longtime. In both cases, they were used to having separate PE. And, although they managed to get "the permission" to wear sweatpants and long-sleeve shirts, they felt uncomfortable because many were "not used to wearing pants" in public settings; they often wore *jalbabs* or the long garbs in their Islamic schools. In general, they found their uniform a "hassle" and "discouraging;" it made them feel "out of place" in the midst of "tank tops and spandexes," and they chose to "avoid sports." Rashida described how she felt about attending the mixed PE and wearing the modified dress:

> Well, I'd have preferred not to have that class if I had a choice. Just so that I wouldn't have to worry about, like you know, I'm covered or if I'm doing something in particular, what part of my body will be showing ... (Rashida, 1-94)

The girls essentially used four approaches to manage the challenges resulting from mixed PE, i.e., "stay back," "be slow," opt for low-key activities if given the choice, and "stay away" from other girls to avoid peer stares or "checking out." Rashida described her approach:

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I would basically just stay at the back of the class ... Basically in the beginning, we'd stretch ... and then we'd go outside to run a little bit. I was probably one of the slowest peoples [smile], always behind, and, I'd usually walk faster. And, then we'd get inside ... I would choose ping pong because it doesn't involve that much of running and we just stay around the table ... that's basically what I did in P.E. (Rashida, 1-92)

Maria was uncomfortable with how her peers "stared" at other girls in PE. She chose to "stay away" from her female peers in order to avoid "coming in the middle." She explained:

… I was uncomfortable, because the way guys look at the other girls in tight shorts, they stare at them. I try to stay away from the other girls because I don't want them to be looking at me like that if I'm running by their side ... (Maria, 1-193)

Many female participants felt however that their *hijab* was also helpful in "marking the territories," and kept many such "troubles away." Rahana, for example, described the similar phenomenon (Maria experienced) differently, as she described:

… I would say the guys won't even consider looking at me, you know like, how guys like *checking girls out*? I think when they see a *hijabi*, they just go like, "Ok!" I think because I wear my *hijab*, they don't bother me or *check me out*. They're kind of like, "oh okay, she's a *hijabi*, moving on" [Laugh]. (Rehana, 1-124)

Saeeda further elaborated the same point:

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... *Hijab* also marks territories as well, it like keeps troubles away. Like in PE, many times the guy would be tickling a girl but if I came on, he'd just face you and like, "Good job Saeeda." [laugh] It's like, it does set a limit, and like you do earn respect without actually doing much. (Saeeda, 2-156)

School-sponsored dances were the second incongruent practice, but the most frequent social activity offered at schools. Participants, both boys and girls, avoided attending such events in general because the dances "did not interest" them. Rehana explained:

... Kids who went to public school all their life, they kept hearing, "Oh my God, senior year prom, senior year prom." So, for them that was the most exciting thing that could possibly happen. But, because we went to Islamic school so long, we had no idea what prom was. Also, like not only we understand that it is un-Islamic, but I don't think many of us even knew how to dance. (Rehana, 1-227)

Only Nadda and Sadaf had attended school dances. Nadda went with her friends once, in a small dance, where she "felt out of place" and being stared at by her peers. She explained:

I don't think prom is the big thing for us. I think the small dances are more problematic. They can be more of a pressure when you get to know more people. I remember I went to one dance with a friend. It was so weird. Everybody stared at you. I felt out of place. With like *hijab*, you feel like you've to act in a certain way ... In dance parties, you kind of stick out like, like a sore thumb if you know what I mean. (Nadda, 1-239)

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Sadaf was elected as a class representative in her sophomore year, and as such it was "part of her job" to contact people to "let them know" about the social activities. However, whenever she attended the events involving dances, she experienced feelings similar to her Islamic peers, and was often asked if she should even be there because of her *hijab*:

> Well, as a class representative, you've to call the people and let them know that they've to attend it and stuff like that ... I attend the dances, but I don't actually participate into those. But, the weird thing is, like at dances, I look out of place for a lot of people ... I've been asked like, "Oh, aren't you like, not supposed to be here?" It's funny sometimes, because I'm the one who called them in the first place. (Sadaf, 2-247)

Difficulties in connecting with teachers and making "right" friends. Many participants encountered difficulties in connecting with teachers during their freshman and sophomore years. Girls generally "stayed quiet" in their classes because of their newfound "shyness," and in some cases, "had never interacted with male teachers before." They often avoided interacting with male teachers, and focused on doing their work instead. They felt "more comfortable" in connecting with their female teachers. Boys, on the other hand, did not "care much about being cool with" their teachers, and preferred "to keep a low profile in classes." Making "right" friends was also difficult for many in general, and girls in particular, during their freshman and sophomore years. Girls had fewer avenues for one reason or the other to make new friends, both inside and outside of their classrooms. Gradually, they made a few select friends with whom they

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shared either some "common interest" or background. Boys, on the other hand, easily made new friends because of their participation in sports. However, they, like the girls, also encountered conflicts involving peer pressure, parties, and peer questions. Overall, the ubiquitous departmentalization and tracking practices in high schools made their task of connecting with teachers or making new friends even harder.

Connecting with teachers—avoidance to "closer to female teachers" or *"businesslike dealings".* "Mostly male teachers in classes" or their impersonal "ways" was "a big change" for many participants. Among girls, two out of seven "had never interacted with male teachers before," and all the others except Rehana were used to having "mostly female teachers" in classes. Even the few male teachers in their old schools "were all Muslim" and "knew" about their lifestyle. Rehana "got used to guy teachers" when she moved to public middle school in seventh grade. The change was hard for many girls in general, and Rashida and Saeeda in particular, because they went to girls-only schools before and had almost all female teachers. The girls "mostly stayed quiet" in their classrooms because of their newfound shyness, and therefore, could not connect with their teachers in general, and male teachers in particular. Saeeda, towards the end of her sophomore year, described her experience as:

> … I never really ever make much connection with teachers. It's been almost two
>
> years now. I kind of just stay quiet and do my work, so teachers like me for that.
>
> But, I never go out of my way to like get closer to teachers … (Saeeda, 4-3)

Maria, who was also sophomore, explained her difficulty with teachers as:

I don't talk in my classes, especially when there is a guy teacher. I just sit there

quietly except when someone asks me a question … Sometimes, I just wonder, it

goes through my head that probably they think I don't speak English or

understand what they are saying. It feels awkward sometimes to think about it …

(Maria, 1-181)

Mona went to a small college-prep high school where the majority of the teaching

staff was female, so she had an easy time connecting with her teachers. Sadaf's charter

school was not big either, and teachers in her school were "concerned about every single

student." While she stayed away from her teachers during her first semester because of

her shyness, she was able to connect with many of her teachers afterwards because

"many understood [her] background ... and were always talking to [her]." Rehana, who

had become "more outgoing in middle school, got to know a lot of [her] teachers in high

school." In general, the majority of the female participants avoided engaging with their

male teachers in their freshman and sophomore years, and preferred "to stay quiet and do

work" or act "businesslike." They often felt "comfortable" in connecting with their

female teachers however. Rashida summed up female participants' relations with their

teachers as:

It depended on the teacher. My PE teacher I had the least interaction with, may

be because he was a male PE teacher, and I had never interacted with many male

teachers before. My Chemistry teacher, I didn't really need to speak to him

unless I would absolutely have to for my papers. In general, it was just, the

teacher teaches you in the class and that was it. For computer class, I was closer

to her because I was her assistant, sort of helping her, and I'd ask questions if I was not sure. My English teacher, I never really had to talk to him that much either. Math teacher, she was probably my favorite teacher because she would talk to me personally. I would come to the class earlier and she would ask me how I was doing and things like that … (Rashida, 1-88)

Boys also highlighted the change, especially for those who went to large high schools, such as Abdul, Osman, and Mohamad. Many came from smaller schools where the majority of the teaching staff was female. For Abdul, having mostly male teachers was "nothing new," but he found them quite often to be "not as friendly." Abdul explained:

Well, having mostly male teachers is nothing new for me ... But they are not as friendly, because like at Iqra, you had the same teachers for long, so the teachers were much closer with you, and in public school they are not. (Abdul, 1-48)

Omar, on the other hand, had the opposite experience in his smaller public charter school, where teachers were more involved with their students. Abdul and Mohamad "liked" the more impersonal ways of their teachers, because they felt they had "one less thing to worry about" and "the distance [provided them] more freedom." Osman and Ahmed occasionally found it hard because the teachers in high school were "just talking to a group of people," and "they didn't care as much about [them] as the teachers in the Islamic school did" (Osman, 1-234). In general, the boys preferred "to keep a low profile in classes and stay away from teachers as much as possible" (Mohamad, 2-22).

Making "right" friends—"open to everyone" to selective socialization. For girls, making new friends and fitting-in among peers was "the most difficult" part of their school transitions for a long time. During their freshman year, they stay isolated due to their shyness and because their peers tend to stay within their "cliques" from old schools:

> … I think it is just because I'm shy, I'm not very outgoing, I wouldn't go and introduce myself to people ... My classmates, they know each other from their middle schools, so, they have their own little cliques, they don't really want to may be accept new people. They're fine just the way they are, and that just makes it hard. (Maria, 1-252)

The ubiquitous departmentalization and tracking practices makes their task even harder:

> ... In classes when we have group work, it's usually like, I just talk to you for that group work but I'd never talk to you again. Unless, you've like another class with them, then you probably will know more about them, but most of the time it's not really like that. People change all the time. (Nadda, 1-201)

By their sophomore year, everyone had made a handful of friends; however, their list of woes that inhibit making more new friends grew bigger. Nadda detailed her challenges, which many other female participants also touched upon in their conversations, such as peer misperceptions (like associating them with "terrorists" or doubting their language abilities), questions and curiosity, peer pressure, and favorite topics like "the boyfriend and girlfriend stuff," etc.:

> ... I'm very shy at high school. I don't talk much, and people usually get the first impression that I'm a terrorist; I'm linked to those somehow. [Maria: or you don't

speak English], exactly! ... It's also like you're a minority there in high school, so

you're not sociable as much ... I tried, to become more sociable with other people,

but it's really harder than you think ... you feel a lot of peer pressure about what

you should say or do, like they want you to change for them in a way ... One kind

of peer pressure we go through is that girls ask us to take off our scarf and show

our hair; I don't know why it's such a big deal, but they make a big deal out of it.

They think that the clothes they wear are the only normal clothes, and there is lot

of it, a lot of peer pressure... then you've like hugs and handshakes, also like

cursing ... I have been invited to some parties. I don't go to their parties, and then

they ask you, "Why you can't go?" When you explain to them, they're like, "Oh!

That's weird"... Also, they talk about the stuff that you're not comfortable talking

about, like the boyfriend and girlfriend stuff ... (Nadda, 1-55, 230-3)

Saeeda also reported a perplexing "big deal" about her dress, where "girls [often] would

dare [her] to wear pants or shorts, instead of *abayahs* and skirts." In addition, she

touched upon another side of the problem, and that is, some Muslim youths "can't really

make conversations" with peers because of their different lifestyles and lack of shared

interests. She explained:

… I don't listen to music, for me that is foreign. I don't watch TV, for me that is

foreign. I don't watch movies, to me that is foreign. I don't ever hang out at the

malls, to me that is foreign. Because like all that stuff I don't do, so when people

talk about it, I don't know what to say because I've never done it. I don't know

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that kind of stuff, and I can't really make conversations because of that ...

(Saeeda, 4-16)

It is somewhat easier for the girls to make friends or participate in extra activities early in smaller schools. However, regardless of the size of the school, when they "open up" to peers and start to participate in more activities, they start to worry about making "the right friends," with whom they can share something. For Sadaf, who was pursued by her close "Indian friend" to run for a class representative in her sophomore year and she did become class representative, the major problem was "non-stop questions" and "disrespectful" phrasing. She explained:

> It's a small school, so making friends wasn't a problem for me after like the first
> semester, making the right friends is the biggest problem I guess. Peer pressure
> becomes issue, but for me, the biggest problem is like their questions ... I mean, I
> would answer their questions, and then they ask more questions, and more
> questions, and more questions, until it reaches a limit where I just feel sick and
> tired of answering their questions ... Also, the way they ask questions sometimes
> like, what is the purpose, or why you doing this religion and stuff, stuff that they
> phrase weirdly, in a disrespectful way, and that makes you feel hurt I guess.
> (Sadaf, 3)

In their sophomore year, and sometimes later, girls gradually "open up" to extracurricular activities and peers. However, when faced with the challenges described above, they become selective in their socialization habits and making friends. They only participate in a handful of clubs, and "make friends with people of [their] own kind" or

those who generally stayed away from the common habits they find "inappropriate." While Maria and Rashida stuck to mainly Muslim friends because they felt like they had "much more common to share and talk about," others went beyond Muslim-only friends. Sadaf and Saeeda explained:

Since I'm class representative now, there are some girls who think that they should not associate with me. But, I've a close friend, who is Indian, she is Hindu. I was always with this Indian girl because we do understand each other's culture ... I prefer to befriend girls from those cultures who don't do things like dances, drugs, and dates. My other best friend, she is Mormon, she has lived in Egypt, and we've come close because we've many similar things. (Sadaf, 2-251, 278)

My first two years, I've made three close friends. They're more into doing well in school, and I think that is why we connected really well ... It's really funny because one of them is Chinese Christian, the other one is Seventh-day Adventist, like Jamaican, one is Jewish, and I am Muslim. But like we aren't friends because of religion, we are friends because we all want to do well in school, we don't do the whole like drugs or alcohol, dancing and all that stuff. (Saeeda, 4-19)

While *hijab* makes the girls stand out and often becomes the source for inviting problems, girls thought that it helped them stay grounded during their struggles. Rehana explained the role her *hijab* played, both during "the most difficult year and half in middle school" and in her high school:

It was truly nice that I was wearing *hijab*, it kind of makes you realize that you

can't really do that much bad stuff. It keeps you morally aware of what is right

and what is wrong in a way ... It always reminded me that I was already holding

back so much … Also, like if I'd be doing something un-Islamic, while I've my

hijab on, I'd stand out as a sore thumb you know. (Rehana, 1-234)

In other words, they thought that their *hijab* served like "an anchor" that kept them

"morally" grounded and stopped them from "drifting away in the sea of common

troubles."

It [*hijab* and Islamic identity] actually helps you, because like you always know

that you've something to hold on to. It does make you strong. Because if you

went to a public school and you didn't know who you were, you'd just get really

lost. I faced many many troubles, but I never got lost. I knew that, in just four

years, the whole high school thing would be over. (Rehana, 2-383)

Boys, on the other hand, "don't feel constrained" in making friends or

establishing social circles. They do, on the other hand, find their options limited during

their freshman years due to the prior peer cliques as Mohamad described:

In my school, most of the people came from two three schools. Everybody

already knows somebody, so they don't bother making new friends. Since I'm

the only one from my school that went to this school, it's kind of hard just

stepping into a new crowd and trying to make friends. They are already ignoring

you anyway. (Mohamad, 1-175)

However, they generally "play sports" right from the start during their freshman year, which "helps [them] make new friends." Abdul explained the role sports play in helping them quickly fit-in and make new friends:

> I've friends that are sophomores, juniors and seniors because I'm in sports. That made everything a lot easier. If I've any question or need help, I know who to go to. I also know what to do or what I should avoid. I know freshmen who have been thrown in trash cans or locked in rooms. The fact that with I'm with older students many times, people think I'm a sophomore, junior, or a senior. It definitely helps. (Abdul, 1-196)

However, as they make new friends they often "get invited to parties" and encounter peer pressure and many of the same questions regarding prohibitions that girls faced. In general, for the boys, temptations (because "everything is open"), parties, peer pressure and questions are the main challenges, in addition to the falling grades that is discussed later, in their freshman and sophomore years. Abdul, as a freshman, summed it up the challenges boys faced:

> Everything is open here, everything is accessible. You do feel pressured sometimes. Girls talk to you, they want to hang out with you. But I don't date, I try not to hang out with girls at all ... Sometimes it gets awkward for me because they [friends] party a lot, and I can't make it for the parties many times, because like my mom says like "No, I know what goes in such parties, so I don't want you to go." And, I'd come back to school the

next day, and they'll ask, "Where were you last night man? We didn't see

you." It makes me feel awkward sometimes. (Abdul, 1-156, 160)

Omar, a sophomore at the time of his first interview, made similar points:

I made a lot of friends, but I learned soon that it was not a good thing ... I think

partying would be a good example, because my parents don't let me do anything

like that or stay out late …So it gets difficult sometimes to say no, because then

they ask you questions ... [laugh] see at Islamic schools, it's never been a

problem, because everybody is wearing scarves and you know, it's modest there.

But, here things change, everything is open and more accessible. There is not

much to elaborate on. (Omar, 1-71, 185, 199)

Ignorance, misrepresentation or omission. In their conversations with peers and

teachers, participants got many questions about Islam and Muslims. The questions

regarding dress, socializing, dietary practices, and other practice requirements asked of

them indicate that their peers had little or no knowledge about these issues or topics.

Girls in particular encountered more questions from their peers because of their visible

identity. Conversations between the participants and school staff, as well as questions

posed to the girls in their classes, also reveal that the staff also lacked knowledge about

Islam and Muslims. The majority of the participants felt that in the subjects that cover

world religions or cultures, the information presented on Islam and Muslims was either

"made up" or cursory and superficial. Many ignored or "stayed silent," especially during

their freshman year because of their shyness or "social awkwardness," while some tried

to "educate" their peers and teachers in their discussions or elective presentations in their

sophomore coursework. They often found their teachers in those subjects "nice and willing to listen" to alternative perspectives, occasionally some encountered what they described to be a hostile attitude from a few teachers. In some cases, teachers treated them as a class resource or "expert" on Islam to both verify and help answer questions from other students. While participants "liked to answer questions on Islam" in general, and some gladly played the role of classroom resource or expert, they felt uncomfortable when they lacked knowledge themselves, particularly when the questions asked dealt with geo-political events and not their religion.

"There is a lot of ignorance about Islam and Muslims". Participants reported that their peers asked them many questions or engaged with them in conversations about topics such as *hijab* and dress, socializing, Islamic worship practices, and Islamic beliefs. The questions, they felt, demonstrated that their peers had little or no information about those topics. Although girls were asked more questions because of their visible identity than boys, both felt that many of their peers or friends asked questions out of a genuine interest or curiosity in understanding more about their beliefs and practices. They often "liked" the fact that they could answer their peers' questions. As Nadda and Abdul explained:

> … I learned a lot about Islam at Al-Noor, and I get many questions in high school about it … I can tell some people really want to know about the religion, and most of the time I can easily answer their questions [pause]. I feel good when I do that. (Nadda, 1-30)

At Iqra, I learned about Islam and the stuff like that, so they did give me Islamic

knowledge and training. It helps because I can answer many questions people

ask. (Abdul, 2-184)

Peers and friends asked many questions about the dress requirement including the

hijab and long pants and full-sleeve shirts in PE from the female participants. Mona

described the kinds of questions she and other girls generally got, and that her peers

responded positively when she tried to explain it to them by giving examples:

Many people ask me questions about *hijab*. They ask like, "Why do you wear

it?" "Do you have to wear it at home?" "Do you wear it all the time?" "Does your

mom or dad force you to wear the *hijab*?" "Don't you get hot?" And things like

that. I tell them like, "No, I don't wear it all the time. I don't have to wear it at

home or anything, or nobody forces me to wear it, and of-course I get hot

sometime but I'm used to it. See, many don't understand what *Moharram* [those

whom a Muslim woman cannot marry] means. So I give them examples like, you

can take it off in front of your dad, your brother, your uncle; but not like your

cousin and stuff like that. Many times they would be like, "I always wanted to

ask you that question, but I didn't want to be rude." (Mona, 1-250)

If there were other Muslim girls in their classes who did not wear *hijab*, the question

often asked from the female participants was, "How come she is not wearing and you

are?" Rashida frequently got that question because she always had few Muslim girls in

every class who did not wear *hijab* in her school. She always struggled with that

question herself:

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Because, there were always some other Muslim girls in my class who didn't wear *hijab*, so many times I was asked like, "Why are you wearing this? How come she isn't?" It was always a tough one for me because I didn't want to be judgmental … I remember asking my dad about it once. I learned to deflect that question. I'd answer back with a question like, "Why do nuns wear *hijab* and other Christians don't?" Many times, they'd be like, "Oh, I don't know." But, they'd get the point [smile]. (Rashida, 1-154)

Another area where the participants, both boys and girls, often got many questions had to do with *socializing*. Many noted that their peers' questions and comments revealed that they had little or no understanding about why the participants felt that they could not involve themselves in many of the school related and out of school activities, such as dances, parties, and even dating. Many participants often felt "uncomfortable" dealing with such questions in general, and the questions related to dating and marriage in particular. Every participant avoided school dances except Sadaf, who had to attend those because she was class representative in sophomore year. In general, the idea of a date itself and the dress were problematic for them. Moreover, they avoided out of school parties either to avoid inappropriate contact with boys, drinking, or both, all of which are considered *haram*.

Sadaf, who was class representative in her sophomore year, got many such questions that she would generally respond to at first, but then she started to get annoyed as mentioned earlier. Saeeda was the only participant who "was asked out" in her junior year. She described that experience:

This kid from my class, he called me once for a math problem, so I told him. I didn't give him my number but he found my number from the student directory, and then he was like, "Do you want to go out on Sunday?" I didn't see that coming [laugh]. I was so confused and I was like, "What?" He was like, "Yah, I think you're very nice, I want to go out, and see if you want to go." I was like, "Oh, I don't, I don't do that." I was so confused because I was like, "Why would he even ask me? I never put myself out there you know." I'm only like that person that people would go to, if they'd need help, like with homework and stuff. I said, "No!" (Saeeda, 6-114)

Boys also reported many of the same questions being asked by their new friends. It was easy for them to deflect the questions on dancing by making up "some excuse," such as "I've never done it and I don't know how to dance" or "I don't do it for religious reasons" or simply "I don't like dancing." For them, particularly hard one was avoiding non-school related parties, and dealing with questions the following day. In the beginning, they "would make up excuses," but then some would "find the courage to tell them, like I can't come for religious reasons" or "my parents are strict about partying" or simply "I can't, I don't have to explain." Abdul, who occasionally went to such parties, described his way of dealing:

… I mean, at a normal party, I know that certainly there will be stuff like that [drinking and dancing], so either I do not attend it, which happens a lot or, if I attend, I say no to such stuff. They, my friends, understand that. It's not that hard to say no, but you feel the pressure. (Abdul, 1-158)

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Many participants reported questions from their peers about several Islamic practices, such as fasting during the month of Ramadan, Eid, and praying. Questions by peers about the practice of fasting usually occurred when the peers noticed that the participants were not eating during Ramadan, or in some cases, participants' schools or the MSA in schools would make announcements about Ramadan. The questions related to fasting were the easiest for them to answer. When their peers understood Ramadan, some "would feel bad" about eating in front of their Muslim friends. Rehana described her experience:

> Thankfully our school knew about Ramadan. Back then, our MSA was strong enough to have like posters out about such things, and like people knew about it. So, if I said fasting, they would feel bad for me. They'd be like, "Oh my God! I shouldn't eat in front of you" … (Rehana, 1-112)

Similarly, many participants reported how their peers would ask questions about *Eid* or even greet them. Again, the peers usually asked questions about *Eid* when they noticed that "all the Muslims were absent the day before." Sadaf described her *Eid* experiences as:

> First *Eid* in 9th grade, when all the Muslim girls and boys were missing school, everybody knew. And then, the day after, many would say, "Happy *Eid*" ... Next time, they all knew, and they all were excited about Eid more than, more than some of the Muslims. They were like, "Oh, I want to come to *Eid* prayer and what not." (Sadaf, 4)

When asked about Eid by peers, Nadda described her response as:

... Friend-wise, they'd ask like, "What is it?" I'd tell them like, "It's our religious holiday, something like the Christmas, except the tree and the decoration." Then they'll just, they won't say anything, they'd just keep going. There is a lot of questions about it since Eid is on the agenda ... (Nadda, 1-128)

Prayer was the other religious practice some participants, who prayed at the school, were asked about by peers and friends. Rashida described how her peers respected her choices, such as prayers and covering:

... Some would ask like, "What would you do if the school doesn't allow you to pray?" I'd tell them that I'd try harder to get the permission, otherwise, I'd go with the alternative, where I'd pray when I get home ... I can't tell you how many times people told me how much they respect the fact that we pray five times a day and that we'd get up so early in the morning just to pray. I mean they'd say, "Yah, we pray once a week on Sundays, you know we don't pray five times a day, and we just can't imagine the relationship you'll have with your God if you pray five times a day." And, as weird as it seems to them, they respect that we do that ... (Rashida, 1-144)

Additionally, some participants had to deal with questions from their peers about Islamic beliefs. They were mainly asked about Islamic views on terrorism or suicide bombings that their peers frequently heard in the media. Terrorism-related questions were mainly directed towards the boys, which they generally chose to deflect by responding, such as "how do I know?" or using jokes like "let's call Osama and find out."

Saeeda was confronted with the very same questions in her junior year, and she described how she responded to those questions:

... I remember, I was asked about suicide bombers, like are they justified or something like that. I just said, "I can't justify it because it is not justified in Islam, so how am I going to justify something like that. I told them about what Quran said ... I was also asked about 9/11, something like my views on "Islamic terrorists" ... I said like, "We don't say Timothy McVeigh or what was that guy the Unabomber a Christian terrorist, how can you say Islamic terrorist. I don't think any religion favors terrorists" ... Since Iqra was too much in *Dawah* [outreach], we had practiced how to answer such questions you know ... (Saeeda, 6-118)

Finally, many participants thought that their peers were ignorant about the fact that many Muslims were Americans too. They were also frequently asked the question about where they were from. When participants told their peers that they were born in the United States, they "didn't believe" them in general. Here is how Mona described her response to such a question:

Yah, I don't know why I get asked, but they ask sometimes like, "Were you born here? Are you from here?" I would be like, "Yah, I was born here, I was raised here and everything [pause]." They don't believe you, you can sense that. They'd be like, "Really!" (Mona, 1-262)

The following account from Maria also reveals that the participants not only got questions from their non-Muslim peers, but also from other Muslims who never went to

an Islamic school. Essentially, Maria became a source of Islamic knowledge for her other Muslim friends who were asked questions and did not have the knowledge to appropriately respond to those questions. Maria explained:

> ... I think I'm the only one who went to Al-Noor school, so I know about Islam and all that stuff. They usually, my Muslim friends usually ask me about like, sometimes when people come up to them and ask them questions. If she might not know the answers, she would come and ask me. We talk about that a lot and sometimes we bring like Islamic books and *hadith* that we could talk about, so it's really a lot easier for us to hang out together. (Maria, 1-215)

Misrepresentation or omission in some classes—"stay silent" to educate. Many participants felt that in the subjects that cover world religions or cultures, the information presented on Islam and Muslims was either "made up" or cursory and superficial. Sadaf described her perceptions that there was "a lot of ignorance" of not only Islam and Muslims but also other cultures and religions in public schools because the history and comparative religion classes or social studies classes presented cursory or superficial information on the topics.

Saeeda described how the information presented on Islam and Muslims in her history class was "mostly made up" or not true. She also compared how other religions were covered *vis-à-vis* Islam in her history class during her freshman year.

> I remember in my world history class, I had a Jewish teacher, and we did world religions. Everything on Islam was totally like not true [laughing]. "Girls aren't allowed to go to school." It was just stuff like that, and I was like, in my head,

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"You don't see me sitting here." I stayed quiet that day. Next time, I came up to

the teacher, and I gave her a pamphlet and said to her, "I think this would help" ...

I remember, the interesting thing was, when we learned about Judaism, we always

like watched a holocaust movie. We didn't learn anything else, and all the kids

cried, and that was the end of it. On Islam, it was kind of made up stuff. And,

Christianity and Buddhism and Hinduism, we like did learn some things. It was

totally weird. (Saeeda, 2-181)

Rehana was also "put on the spot" due to misrepresentation in one of her government

classes:

I experienced something in my government class. The teacher put up a slide; it

was a question about like how the media was talking about Islam or something

like that. It was something stereotypical. It put me on the spot because I was the

only *hijabi* there, the only Muslim in that class. It hurt me so much that I went

home [and told] my dad. My dad immediately wrote an email to my teacher …So

the next day, my teacher came up to me, he apologized, and he was like, "Do you

want to say anything?" So then, for 15 minutes, I led the class, and I talked about

Islam ... (Rehana, 1-184)

Some other participants also reported similar observations in their history related

classes. Their accounts also reveal however, that when put in such situations, participants

used different approaches to deal with such misrepresentations or omissions. While

Saeeda was generally shy, and mostly stayed silent in her classes because of her "social

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awkwardness," passing informational pamphlets was her way to indirectly present her point of view:

> … I was generally passive, silent ... Pamphlets was my way of educating others. See, the way they Iqra school made us see was like, "You guys are the ambassadors of Islam. You've to like help them and teach them, and you may be the only Muslim they'd ever see." I mean that was so drilled into our heads … (Saeeda, 2-118)

Rehana, on the other hand, chose to engage her father in order to deal with her negative experience, and as a result, got an opportunity to present her perspective. However, Mohamad chose to stay silent in his history classes because he felt that it was not worth engaging:

> Um, my history, I don't think they know I'm Muslim, so when they were talking about Islam, they said some things wrong, but I just left it. I thought like, why bother? (Mohamad, 1-170)

Becoming an "expert" or on-hand resource on Islam. Several participants described classroom experiences in which their teachers would rely on them as the on-hand class resource or expert on Islam. They were frequently asked questions by their teachers and peers, which they "often liked to answer." With the exception of Saeeda and Maria, who generally stayed quiet during their freshman year, everyone felt comfortable assuming that role. Rehana explained how she became "the Islam-expert" in her class:

Any history class or comparative religions class where questions about Islam would come up, I would automatically be like the Islam-expert. I loved talking about it and explaining to people about it. I was more outgoing, and I told my teachers that I went to an Islamic school. I remember this one teacher, at the end of stuff she would always look at me like, "Am I right? Am I on?" She told me like, "If I ever misspeak, don't ever be afraid to raise your hand in class and correct me." (Rehana, 2-243)

Boys also shared similar experiences. Omar described how his history teacher picked him to be the "favorite" on-hand resource on Islam and Muslims:

For history, it was really fun because my teacher, he sort of picked favorites. When he found out I was Arab and Muslim, like when we got to the topics on Islam or Muslims, he would like call me a lot. Once he was showing the class *Surat-al-Fatiha* [a small chapter in Quran], he made me read it to the class. (Omar, 1-166)

Sadaf also highlighted another aspect of becoming on-hand source of information on Islam. She described how her peers would turn to her for answers on Islam:

Everyone knew I'm a Muslim because of my *hijab*, so it was different. I mean when we got to the chapter on Islam, they would generally ask me the questions instead of teacher. The teacher didn't mind. (Sadaf, 2-121)

Overall, while many enjoyed the opportunity, sometimes they felt uncomfortable when they were asked questions that related more to current events or were political in nature than religious. Mona generally "didn't mind answering" teacher and peer

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questions on Islam as long as they were not political in nature. She described one such encounter:

> Well, all my teachers are nice. They'd ask me questions about Islam and Muslims. I don't mind answering their questions. But, this one teacher, I had like a substitute history teacher for like a month or two, she was Jewish. I think she didn't really liked Muslims. She'd make like these rude and racist comments, she'd just throw out things without thinking. Once like she asked a really offensive and sort of dumb question, she asked something like, "How can Islam justify terrorism? How can you guys kill?" Or something like that. I don't get angry but like that day, I really got upset. I told her, "Islam doesn't tell people to be terrorists. No religion does. You're a history teacher, like you out of all people should know better. Maybe you need to read more like, why many people from other religions do the same thing. You should check about that Jewish guy, Goldstein." I was so upset I just left the room. (Mona, 1-256)

Some of the participants also reported that the school curriculum allowed them to present about Islamic topics in elective presentations in their coursework. Saeeda, for example, reported that in her junior year, she did her paper and presentation on *hijab* for her world religions class. Here is how she described it:

> Well, my first two years, I think I was hiding ... But this year, I wrote my paper on *hijab* and did a presentation. I brought like hijabs for people to try on and pamphlets. They really loved it, even boys in my class volunteered to try it on. [laugh] (Saeeda, 6-185)

Stereotypes and prejudicial treatment. Dealing with stereotypes about Muslims and Islam was an ongoing issue for the participants in general, and the girls in particular because of their *hijab*. While stereotypes and prejudicial treatment by peers was more frequent, only four participants reported such treatment by a teacher at least once, primarily in history or government related classes. Their accounts also reveal their perceptions of being judged (or misjudged). Media and general ignorance about Islam and Muslims were highlighted as the primary sources for perpetuating those stereotypes and prejudices; some also thought that the public school system was also "failing" in educating students about "other religions and cultures." While the prejudicial treatment by peers frequently took the form of inappropriate "side comments" and "taunts," the treatment by teachers involved misperceptions or mischaracterization and occasional hostility. When faced with such treatment or ignorance, participants' responses varied by their gender and the source of the negative treatment. If their teachers were the source, which in general was rare and limited to history or government classes, girls chose to "stay silent," or "give pamphlets," engaged parents, or "tried to correct" them. Boys did not report any such experience involving teachers. However, when the prejudicial treatment was meted out by their peers, boys chose to ignore and used "positive spins" to rationalize such treatment, deflect by using joke-strategy, or actively confronted them. Girls, on the other hand, chose to ignore, avoid, or educate their peers; they generally tried to "avoid starting arguments or fights."

"Most teachers are fine, peers are the problem"—ignore/rationalize to confront/educate. With the exception of Ali, everyone reported experiencing some form

of stereotypes and prejudicial treatment from peers. Such experiences often took the form of "side comments" or open "taunts" and "shouts." There was a qualitative difference in the nature of such treatment across the regions and schools however. While the participants from the Raleigh-Durham-Cary region reported more frequent prejudicial experiences in general, those from the Baltimore-Washington region did report "very bad" treatment in the wake of the events of 9/11. The nature of such experiences also varied depending upon the quality of school, social background of peers, and the number of Muslims present on the campuses. For example, Sadaf who went to a small to mid-size top-ranking public charter school in the Raleigh-Durham-Cary region, often experienced side comments instead of direct or confrontational treatment:

> I've heard side comments many times. Like they'd say whatever the media would
>
> say about us, but they won't say it in your face. But, when you look back, they'd
>
> shut up and look the other way. (Sadaf, 2-11)

Omar, who went to the same school, also perceived his experiences as non-confrontational:

> Sometimes when we're joking around, they'll just throw out like, suicide-bomber
>
> and whatever. But, like I know that they're just joking around, so I just let it pass
>
> or joke back like, "Yah, whatever, you ignorant morons," and I would laugh like
>
> really hard. I know nothing would change their minds, so why bother to explain.
>
> (Omar, 1-164)

On the other hand, Nadda who went to a large high school with only handful of Muslims and "lots of like Southern people ... not rich ... like somewhat average towards

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poor," experienced more hostile and confrontational treatment. She described her experiences as:

> Last year, I heard many comments about the scarf and blowing up stuff. Basically, they just say a lot of stuff, like in your face or shout at you in corridors sometimes, but they [also] make these many side comments in class. I can't remember all of what they said, but I remember things like, "terrorist," "are you gonna blow up our school" or "go back to your country." That is what they said towards me last year. This year, I've had two comments that I remember. One was in my civics class … The second time, people in the class were saying something about Muslims, and this one girl, she goes like, "We don't really need terrorists in the class." I was the only one in the class. I just looked at her, and she is like, "I didn't mean you're the terrorist." (Nadda, 1-203)

Maria, whose school was in an upper-middle class suburban neighborhood (where "most of the people ... [were] kind of rich ... [who] own like big farms ... and they've like newest cars when they're just in 10th grade") and had more Muslim students than Nadda's school, reported experiencing "mostly side comments" in her classes instead of direct hostility. Her brother Mohamad was teased because of his name however. Here is how he described his experiences:

> Some people in my class, they kind of act stupid. They make fun of my name, so I try to stay away from them. My friends, they are good, because they don't like do anything stupid. I try to stay with that group of people who behave nice. (Mohamad, 1-152)

The experiences of the participants from Baltimore-Washington region were more nuanced and less hostile in their schools. With the exception of Ahmed, Rehana and Rashida, who experienced hostility and "really bad" treatment immediately after 9/11, others mainly reported side comments or "jokes." Both Abdul and Osman reported stereotypical "jokes" from their peers. For example, Osman described:

Well, there were some kids who used to joke around. They'll joke about magic carpet stuff, like the magic carpet and Aladdin. They're related to Arabs, and it shows them stupid. I'm not Arab, but I was definitely offended. I told the guys to stop, "just shut up," and they stopped. (Osman, 1-139)

Participants responded to the peer stereotypes and prejudicial treatment in variety of ways. Many of the female participants were often forgiving, and would frequently ignore them or "keep their mouth shut" or just "look at them" to "stop" them. Occasionally, they would also respond to "correct them." Nadda, who experienced such treatment more frequently than the other participants, described her response as:

Sometimes I correct them ... But usually, I just keep quiet, hoping that eventually they'll find out I guess. I just don't want to start a fight, because if you say something to them, sometimes it can start more than just an argument, they may start fighting you and all that stuff. They can be really mean sometimes. I just let it go ... In class, usually, you look at them and they'll stop, they'll be quiet. So I look at them, if they don't say anything, I just keep my mouth shut. (Nadda, 1-207, 209)

Maria, on the other hand, explained how she responded to such situations:

Well, for me, I'd get really mad that they'd say I'm terrorist because of the way I dress. I'd say in a very firm voice and straight face, I'd tell them, "Stop! Just because I'm dressed up doesn't mean that I'm going to blow up the school." They won't talk to me anymore, they'll just leave me alone, and I'd be like, "Ok, whatever." (Maria, 1-208)

Boys, on the other hand, responded in many different ways. They would avoid, ignore, and use the "joke" strategy to diffuse tensions or tell them to stop. Mohamad states that he would avoid getting into such situations and "stay away" from the "troublemakers." While Omar's account revealed how he would "let it pass" or "joke back," Osman would tell them to "shut up." Here Omar and Mohamad described their general attitude, which was shared by almost every male participant: "Well, I'm more of a passive kind of a person. I really don't care what people think. [Mohamad: Same thing for me]" (Omar, 2-165). Nonetheless, as the following account shows, the boys can also take a confrontational approach. Omar described an incident in his school:

Ok, like one time, actually it wasn't about my name, it was about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. There were some Jewish kids, they thought that they were better than us, and like we argued for pretty long time before it got out of hand. The teachers would come and like split us up before we started fighting. Yah, I mean they think that they are right all the time, and they are not. (Omar, 2-230)

Only four participants reported some form of stereotypical or prejudicial treatment at the hands of a teacher at least once. Three such accounts involving teachers, reported by Saeeda, Rehana, and Mona were highlighted in the previous subsection on

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misrepresentation in classes. Maria described how most of her teachers were "nice" and shared her experiences in an interior design class, where the teacher stereotyped her to be "foreign" because of her Muslim dress, and then put her "on the spot" by using her as an example:

> Most of the teachers are pretty nice to me, but I've a friend in school, she says she has one teacher that is really mean to her. She says that she is Jewish. I'm not saying that, like, they're bad or anything, but she says she is kind of racist in her class against Muslims. I don't have that teacher, so I don't have a problem with that. Most of my teachers are fine, it was just one teacher who did think that I was completely different, like I was some like alien or something. It was an interior design class and we were studying the insides of people's houses, like what kind of furniture they would have or decorations. So she turns to me and she was like, "For instance Maria might have different things in her house," and I was just like, "No! I've probably the same exact things like you have." She just looked at me in amazement. I guess she expected that I had some weird stuff because I looked foreign to her. (Maria, 1-174)

Otherwise, everyone characterized their teachers as "very nice," "fine" or "good." In fact, the following two accounts by Nadda and Sadaf, reported how their teachers were "so careful" not "to offend" them or "feel left" out that they could notice and highlight it:

> ... I really felt that in my world history class, my teacher was so careful, sort of scared, to offend me. We were talking about Muslim people, he did not want to offend me in anyway, and it was kind of funny. I mean, he did a good job except

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for one thing, he said something wrong, but it was eventually corrected ... (Nadda, 1-170)

... Yah, I mean when I raise my hand and other kids raise their hands, she sort of goes out of her way to pick me. I guess she doesn't want me to feel left out; she wants me to feel part of the group. Sometimes I can tell. (Sadaf, 2-45)

Overall, the above account by Maria, and the previous accounts involving teachers by Saeeda, Rehana, and Mona reveal different approaches participants took to respond to their teachers, such as ignoring those infractions by staying quiet or passing informational pamphlets (Saeeda), engaging parents (Rehana), and responding to confront and correct (Mona and Saeeda). However, some of these accounts seem to point to another interesting phenomenon at play, particularly in the classes related to history or religion. It is obvious from Omar's account where he mentioned "Jewish kids" that the geo-politics of Israeli-Palestinian conflict manifests in the classrooms between students of Palestinian and Jewish origins. What is more interesting from the three participant accounts, is where they mentioned "Jewish" teachers, and how they perceived and characterized their teachers' behavior in those incidents based on either first-hand experiences (Mona and Saeeda) or second-hand accounts (Maria). While Saeeda highlighted how her teacher treated the different religions differently in the world religions class, she felt no hesitation to pass an informational pamphlet to her teacher. The other two participants characterized their teachers' behavior as overtly "racist," and Mona felt offended enough to confront her teacher and leave the classroom.

Perceptions of being constantly judged. A recurring theme in all of the interviews with the female participants in general, and those in the Raleigh-Durham-Carry region in particular, revealed their perceptions of being constantly judged or misjudged by their peers, and occasionally by their teachers. The following account reveals some fear of *othering*, discrimination and association with negative images of Islam or terrorism, stigma and isolation:

> Yah, just because, like we wear scarf people automatically think we are terrorists. [Nadda: I'll relate to that by the way.] (Maria, 1-204)

> … I don't talk much, and people usually get the first impression that I'm a terrorist, I'm linked to those somehow. [MARIA: or you don't speak English], exactly! And just stay away from you, for the longest time ... (Nadda, 1-55)

> ... My dress, I'd wear an *Abayah* to high school or like skirt or something, the people thought I was foreign, people thought I was from an Arab country even though I'm American or Pakistani or whatever ... (Rehana, 1-19)

> Sometimes, when I walk into a new class and I don't know the teacher, or because I don't talk or anything, I just sit there quietly … I just wonder, if they think I don't speak any English or understand what they are saying. (Maria, 1-183)

After 9/11, public school peers "definitely treated me like the media did". The three participants, who were in public schools, around the time when the tragic events of 9/11 unfolded, perceived that many anti-Muslim and anti-Islam stereotypes portrayed in the media were perpetuated by the public school system. Both Rehana and Ahmed reported very hostile treatment at the hands of their peers in their public middle school

during their seventh grade due to the family relocation. While Ahmed experienced such treatment because of his "skin color," Rehana was targeted because of her *hijab*, as she explained:

> After 9/11, a lot of things changed. So public school definitely treated me like the media did [pause], like the way they talk about the Muslims ... I was name called, I was mocked at. People would attempt to like grab my *hijab*... Kids are not that knowledgeable, so media or whatever their parents say they'll say ... (Rehana, 1-15)

Rashida, on the other hand, reported an event where one of her Muslim peer "was beat up." It shocked her and other Muslims in the school because her school was very diverse, with Muslims constituting almost twenty percent of its student body. Here is how she described the incident, the Muslim students' reactions, and her school's response to the event:

> We never had any problems until after September 11th, a female Muslim student got beat up by a male student ... We were so shocked ... Until that point, everything was peaceful ... No one ever had a problem with someone being a Muslim around. We all got along very well despite how diverse the school was ... The boy was expelled, and the principal reacted very well. He made it very clear that this is not acceptable ... He made announcements for about a week about how they're not going to tolerate ... they responded in a way that I was definitely impressed ... Initially, all of the Muslim boys wanted to beat up the guy, but the girls were scared. I mean, initially we were scared. A lot of us were absent from

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the school for the first few days. We didn't want to put ourselves in a situation like what happened, and we definitely started to walk in groups among ourselves. I mean the girls … There were few people who might have lost someone, who were very emotional about it in their opinions … There were a couple incidents where a couple people used the word "terrorist". In general, I'd say everything returned to the normal. (Rashida, 1-126, 128, 130, 132)

New "technology" demands and increasing academic workload. As the classes pick up the pace, some participants soon realized that they lacked adequate technology skills for making websites and multimedia presentations frequently required for coursework assignments and projects in their high schools. Boys also get further entangled into their new sports engagements and friendship circles. Soon those engagements start to negatively affect their academic performance. Some "take a beating" on grades during their freshman year; many also start to "slack on prayers." After receiving "warnings from mom [or dad]," they are forced to "get their priorities straight." As a result, boys "start to cut down" on their sports to "catch up with the increasing workload." Most of the girls, on the other hand, generally maintain their academic performance because they stayed away from extracurricular activities during their freshman, and often sophomore years. After gaining a foothold on the academics side, they start to "open up" and participate in select extracurricular activities.

"I didn't know how to make websites or multimedia presentations". As the classes started to pick up the pace, participants from Iqra school soon realized that some of their coursework projects required website and multimedia presentation making skills.

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They lacked both because of two reasons. One, their old school was short on computer technology resources; and two, strict internet-use policies were put in place for whatever limited resources the school had in order to keep the students away from "negative [internet-based] troubles." In Saeeda's case, her home also lacked the technology resources. As a result, not only was she forced to deal with many of the challenges described previously, she also had to quickly remedy her weaknesses in the two areas. Saeeda described the academic challenges she faced:

> The only one class that was difficult for me in my first semester was biology GT because it required multimedia power points and a website. I never had a technology class in the private school, so I didn't know how to make power points or websites. So like that was hard for me. I even didn't know how to make a video. I was stressed out the whole first semester because I had to learn technology too. I got a B in biology GT, and I was not happy about it. (Saeeda, 2-256)

While Abdul also faced similar technology specific challenges in his high school, he could stay at the school after regular hours to catch up. However, Saeeda could not do the same. Both Ahmed and Rehana, who also went to the Iqra school for many years, moved to a public middle school due to family relocation, and did not report encountering any such challenges. No other participant also reported facing similar challenges.

"Get your priorities straight"—sports and extracurriculars or grades. From the very beginning, male and female participants took two different paths in their high

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schools. While the study's male participants turned their focus towards sports to fulfill their "love of sports" and fit-in, the majority of the study's female participants limited themselves to classwork and ignored sports and extracurricular activities except whatever was necessary for PE during their freshman year. Only Maria, among the female participants, joined the MSA club during her freshman year, because her high school had an active MSA chapter. As a result, the boys experienced more academic "troubles" than the girls did. Their accounts reveal that many experienced some initial grade slump, and continued to struggle with balancing their academic workload during their freshman and sophomore years. For example, the following excerpts from my first interview with Abdul during his freshman year show the path he took, and the kinds of academic struggles he experienced. In a way, his experiences were typical of the other boys in their freshman year:

> Like, the last quarter, I was doing football and wrestling. I made many friends, but like, my grades, they weren't so good because I was going to school, going home, and practice as much as I could. So I didn't find much time for my homework and that kind of stuff. I started to take a beating in grades ... I'm still worried about grades. I don't know what happened but my grades started going down. I was getting like Cs and Bs instead of As and Bs like I used to ... And, like my father, he says to me, if I see many Cs on your report card, I'll take away some things from you. You won't be able to do sports anymore, you won't go and spend time with friends. (Abdul, 1-46, 104, 188)

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Omar's account further reveals that the boys continued to struggle with managing academic workload well into their sophomore year. He was a sophomore when I interviewed him. He was also a straight A student in his Islamic school, and went to a top ranking public charter high school. Here is how he described his academic struggles during my first interview with him early in his sophomore year:

> I don't think I had a problem making friends. I think the single major challenge for me would be, getting used to the work, getting used to the new routines, especially in the sophomore year, it gets harder. I've heard that junior year is even harder, so staying on track, studying is my single biggest challenge. (Omar, 1-177)

His account during my second interview with him later that year shows how he shifted his focus, which seems to reflects the overall path the boys took:

> Ok, [laugh], well, in the beginning of school, I wasn't worried, because you know I was used to small schools. So I didn't really face any major difficulty. I made many friends, like too many friends, which I know now was a bad thing [laugh]. But then, the school got harder and harder, and you know. It's been tough this year, so I just, I started doing my work earlier, and I started paying more attention during classes. I'm trying to catch up. (Omar, 2-99)

Girls, on the other hand, mainly chose to focus on classes in order to keep themselves preoccupied, and delayed their participation in extracurricular clubs and sports. Both Saeeda and Sadaf reported such preferences in their freshman year. The following account by Saeeda described how she went to school solely for the purpose of

academics, and did not get involved in any extra-curricular activities during her freshman year:

> I kind of go to school to go to school and I come back, like I don't get involved in extracurricular activities or anything. I'd just go to school and come back, and I haven't made any friends because I already have many friends in *masjid* ... I am always very quiet in school, and I stay away from every one. I have not made any friends. I guess I'm good in my class, so people want to be partners with me, and then, after that they wouldn't talk to me. I don't care because I don't go to high school to make friends. I focus on my studies and my grades. (Saeeda, 1-199, 2-248)

The accounts by Maria, Nadda, Sadaf, and Saeeda also revealed that their focus mainly stayed on their academics during sophomore year. Overall, they maintained their grades. While both Nadda and Saeeda were "not into clubs" or extracurricular activities, Maria stayed only with MSA. However, since her freshman year, Sadaf had "opened up" to extracurricular activities. She was convinced by her "Indian friend" to run for class representative, which she did and was elected. She was also participating in the environmental club at her school. Nevertheless, she kept her focus primarily on academics because she was aiming for medical school. Maria and Saeeda describe the general trend among the girls towards the end of their sophomore year:

> I've kept my grades after that Biology class. Academically I wasn't afraid because homework was my life. Making friends, I thought it would be easy for me since, it was easy for me in private school. But it took me like the whole

entire year to actually make three friends in high school ... I guess because I was a new kid, so I had to make friends with people who are already friends with each other. I was kind of different too you know ... I'm not into clubs or sports, only PE. (Saeeda, 3)

Well, like for me academics is not an issue, I think I'm ahead of most people in public schools, because here [at Al-Noor] they did a lot more work with you … I'm doing good academics-wise, so it's not that stressful ... I've MSA, once a week, after school ... I don't do any other sports or clubs stuff ... because I don't like staying after school.   (Maria, 1-130, 155, 265)

In sum, the participants' adjustment efforts primarily revolved around five main areas during the redrawing boundaries phase. Those areas of adjustment include religious norms, "Islamically appropriate" interactional norms, academics, social, and psychological. The first two essentially relate to their Muslim identity nurtured in their Islamic schools. Ignorance, stereotypes, and prejudice was a continuing issue for many. Towards the end of their freshman or sophomore year, participants' level of adjustment varied across four out of those five dimensions. While most of the girls except Rehana were well adjusted academically, boys adjusted well socially before the end of their freshman year. Rehana managed to "get out of the middle school mindset" and adjusted well academically in her sophomore year.

With the exception of Nadda, the girls had established at least a small social circle of "right" friends towards the end of their freshman or sophomore year, within which they interacted without worrying about compromising on their religiously appropriate

interactional norms. Nadda still struggled with forming such a friendship circle within which she interact "right" due to the absence of other Muslims in her classes, or MSA in her school, and experienced no success in connecting with her female peers "who were not into partying, drinking, and dating." Her woes were expected to continue beyond her sophomore year.

All of them had become comfortable at interacting in a businesslike manner with both their peers and teachers in the classroom setting; however, incidents involving stereotypes or prejudicial treatment and the perceptions of being judged still persisted for everyone except Rashida, which caused psychological discomfort for many. With the exception of Maria for whom prayers was a nonissue from the beginning and Rashida who managed to establish prayer routine in her school with the help and intervention of her father, fully adjusting the religious norms of prayers and "avoiding increased workload" when Eid coincided with important midterms was still an ongoing issue. In addition, everyone, except Sadaf, avoided participating in any extracurricular activities or sports beyond PE.

Among the boys, establishing discipline to keep up with their increasing academic workload remained a continuous struggle. Although making friends and interacting with peers and teachers was a nonissue for the boys, adjusting to the appropriate interactional norms became an issue for them due to frequent invitations to parties and peer pressure. Many boys, unlike the girls, did not worry about being constantly judged, the psychological discomfort resulting from occasional stereotypes or prejudicial treatment, and avoiding parties. Parental strictness remained an issue for many towards the end of

their freshman or sophomore year. Similarly, with the exception of Mohamad for whom prayers was a nonissue like her sister, fully adjusting the religious norms of prayers and avoiding the increased workload when Eid coincided with important midterms was still a challenge, albeit not as high a priority as for the girls. None of the boys participated in any extracurricular clubs except sports and PE.

The Equilibrium Phase—"Found My Place" or "Bubble Within School"

Ahmed, Rehana, Rashida, and Saeeda's accounts help further understand the final phase in their transitions from K-8 Islamic schools to public high schools. It is evident from their accounts that no two people follow the same exact transition path. Nonetheless, their paths seemed to converge in the end. In the process, not only did they "find their place and fit in" to their new schools, they also found "out who they really are" and got "to know the society they are going to face." As Rehana aptly put it:

> ... Public school definitely trains you well for this society ... It takes time ... Public
> school does accept you. You can definitely find your place and fit in perfectly...
> You find out who you really are ... You get to know how the society is, like the
> society that you're going to face when you work, when you go to college, when
> you travel ... (Rehana, 1-15)

Right, left, and "back to the middle". Ahmed was well adjusted in his high school except for the religious norm of prayers. He continued to pray when he got home. He was also in the process of "choosing his own identity." In his junior year, when he got his driver's license, his parents, like the parents of many other Muslim youths in his

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school, expected him to "go to the nearby *masjid*" for *Jummah* prayers. When I

interviewed Ahmed and Rehana together, Rehana provided the following:

> Prayer became a very big issue, like two years ago. We had to go to the board
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> because they wouldn't let the kids go for *Jummah* [Friday] prayers. See, the high
>
> school is five or six minutes away from the *masjid*. So, a lot of the juniors and
>
> seniors who could drive, their parents would want them to go to pray. Many of
>
> the Muslim students would want to carpool together and go. There was a big
>
> issue about that but we managed to get a workaround. So, we were allowed to
>
> leave during our lunchtime, but the years before, we definitely did not pray
>
> *Jummah*. (Rehana, 1-94)

While Ahmed started to go for *Jummah* prayers, he continued to pray *zuhr* after getting

home on the other days. Other Muslim students in his school had established MSA,

which Ahmed joined in his junior year. His transition was essentially completed in his

junior year. By that time, he had "moved" from the right to the left and "came back to

the middle." He summed it up:

> ... Family plays a role too, but in high school, you're pretty much choosing your
>
> own identity, choosing who you are, that is what boys do. So, either you stay to
>
> the right [laugh] or you stay in the middle or move to the left. I think many boys
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> move to the left, some come back to the middle. Like, I know I moved to the left
>
> [laugh], but came back to the middle may be like in my junior year when I got my
>
> car and started to go for *Jummah* prayers. I started to hear the reminders in
>
> *Khutabah* [Friday sermon] at least once a week. Joining MSA also helped

because you get to learn many good things from other Muslim students. (Ahmed, 2-95)

"Hijab [helped] set the barrier for me". In many ways, Rehana's journey was intertwined with Ahmed and her twin-sister because they stayed together throughout their transitions. Rehana was already well adjusted in many areas because of her assertive nature. She faced many of her challenges in public middle school when she moved there in her seventh grade, which also coincided with the tragic events of September 11th. Nevertheless, she "came out strong" and more assertive. Although she did not "drift off" to the left because her *hijab* "helped set a barrier" for her, and she had many advantages over her other Muslim female counterparts, she still faced some (if not all) of the same challenges faced by others. By her junior year, the only one thing left for her was the daily prayers, which she, along with her twin sister and Ahmed, continued to pray at home. In her junior year, she started going to *masjid* for the *Jummah* or Friday prayers with her siblings as she described in her account earlier. When I asked her why she continued to pray at home the other days, she explained that for her "the whole *wuddu* [ablution] thing was hard because [she] continued to wear *abayahs* [long dresses] in high school." Here is how she summed up her transition:

When I think about my high school years, like holidays wasn't a problem, Ramadan wasn't a problem, food wasn't that much of a problem because like you can call yourself vegetarian when you're in public school. There wasn't any major challenge for me after may be the first year or first few months, except may be prayers sometimes. Not even the terms like we hear, like peer pressure

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because I had Ahmed and my twin sister with me. We kind of had our own group. Our school was good, like we didn't deal with too many stereotypes. I guess for me, like the year and half of the middle school was the worst time of my life. But I think, like I came out strong. Of-course, like prom and like dances and everything is there, but once you say "no" to it in 9th grade, your friends won't ask you again. Also, because we went to Islamic school for so long, we never heard all that prom nonsense kids in public schools hear all their lives. For them, senior year prom was the most exciting thing that could possibly happen. For us, it just happened, and none of us did go to prom. At first, many friends, they were like asking, and then I'd go like, 'Come on! Don't you see what I'm wearing on my head?" Because of this *hijab*, *Allahmdullilah* [Thanks God], it also set the barrier for us, and that really helped [Laugh]. And my twin sister and I were barriers for poor Ahmed so he couldn't drift off too much [Ahmed: yah!]. (Rehana, 2-232)

From "never had guys in my class" to becoming the vice president of MSA.

By her junior year, Rashida had increasingly become more assertive. Muslim female students in her school had already started MSA in response to "the growing need felt after 9/11," and the beating of a female student described earlier. Rashida started her participation in extracurricular clubs by becoming the vice-president of her school's MSA in her junior year. Her active participation in MSA dramatically increased her social circle and engagements in her high school social life, and thus helped her complete the new comfort zone and sense-of-belonging to her high school. She summed up her closure as:

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When I was a sophomore, others in our school had started MSA. In the beginning, I

was not even a member. I was too busy with my work because I was taking some

advanced classes. I became vice-president of it in my junior year. So, we became

really active in trying to get to a very large population of Muslim students at the

school. I'd definitely say that at least half of the Muslim students at the school were

not practicing. And, it was girls who started the MSA. So, we were trying to just get

them to be aware. There wasn't so much that they weren't practicing because they

didn't want to. It was just that they did not know. They did not know how to pray.

Their parents had never taught them. So, we were trying to get them together, trying

to make it fun for them, trying to teach them, trying to get them to see their Muslim

side. (Rashida, 1-114)

Finally found "the middle path". Saeeda probably had the most difficult

transition than any other participant. However, she also had increasingly become self-

confident in her junior year. With the growing confidence, she "stopped picking

favorites" among her teachers. In other words, while she felt more comfortable with her

female teachers until her sophomore year, gender anxiety in working with her male

teachers was no more an issue for her. Here are her words:

Now that I'm a junior, I've become more comfortable in my classes. I don't pick

favorites among teachers anymore. If they work with me, I work with them. Like

my English teacher, he is an amazing teacher; he tries to get to know everyone

personally. He would talk to me while we're all doing class work, so I don't feel

any hesitation to work with him ... But if they don't pay attention, I still don't

really go out my way to connect with them. (Saeeda, 6-71)

She also got involved in two extracurricular clubs in her school:

I kind of went to school to go to school my freshman and sophomore years, and

I'd come back. I didn't get involved in extra-curricular activities till my junior

year. I participate in tutoring and Red Cross clubs now ... (Saeeda, 6-2)

With her growing confidence, comfort at working with teachers, and participation

in clubs, Saeeda became more assertive and felt more comfortable to ask her school for

permission and a place to pray. The school allowed her to use the music room to pray:

I finally asked for the permission to pray. They said, "Sure, you can pray in the

music room." Now that I pray at the school, I think sometime, I think like if I had

asked, if I had the guts to ask, they probably would have told me the same thing,

but I just never asked. I think I was just uncomfortable during to the first two

years. (Saeeda, 6-82)

In the tutoring club, Saeeda became friends with two Muslim girls, and thus the idea of

establishing MSA was born. The three girls made an outreach effort to reach out to other

Muslim students in her school, and finally, managed to setup a MSA chapter. Similar to

Rashida's experience, Saeeda's circle of Muslim friends has increased because of her

active participation in MSA. In fact, the MSA in her school has become strong enough

that they invite non-Muslim students to their events:

Besides the three friends I told you before, I still have those friends, I've made

many Muslim friends now. We meet like twice a week. We make poster

announcements for Eid, Ramandan, and other events. We set up a *Dawah* table once like a month, and usually invite non-Muslims to come and learn about Islam. We pass pamphlets [laugh] ... I really feel like I've life now, not like outside the school, but inside. (Saeeda, 6-92)

Because of MSA, Saeeda and her group of Muslim friends now reach out to teachers to make sure that no important midterm or test is scheduled around the Eid time. Overall, it took Saeeda close to three years to complete her transition and develop a new comfort zone and sense-of-belonging in her high school. In the process, she "goofed up," spent two years in constant stress, "got sick," and went through a tremendous personal transformation. Not only can she now stay true to her religious convictions and lifestyle, she can work with her teachers and peers with ease. Despite all the troubles, she "came out strong." She summed it up:

My first two years, I think I was hiding. I did not come out strong on things that I know were wrong. I think like I have moved from hiding to being like you know what, they're going to, they just have to accept me ... I'd never want to go through what I've been through in high school [laugh], but the past three years have been really important for me. Because I was by myself, I've kind of found out who I am you know. It's been really hard for me because I was doing it by myself, but I've realized that the *masjid* is so important to me, like the whole Muslim identity is so important to me, and that I was very comfortable around Muslims, but I needed to learn how to cope with the environment that I'm in ... The main thing is that I was in a sheltered environment, which is a good thing and a bad thing. It's

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a good thing because I got a strong foundation. It's a bad thing because I got so

used to it that when I came out, I got really scared. I don't regret going to private

school for eight years, and I don't regret going to high school for these three

years. Because I went to Iqra school, which was one extreme, and my high school

is another extreme. It took me three years to like find the middle path

Allahmdullilah, I think I made it, and next year I'll graduate *insha'Allah* [God-

willing]. (Saeeda, 6-98)

Helpful

Participants' accounts highlight many aspects of their personal and family

backgrounds as well as their experiences in Islamic private schools and other public and

private high schools, which they found helpful during their transitions to public high

schools. Ali's secular private school in general was more accommodating to his needs

than the public high schools other participants attended. It is evident to me that their

transitions were much more challenging and took a longer time than what is currently

understood about such transitions in the existing literature. Those participants who had

more of such helpful resources tended to reach the equilibrium stage faster. Some of

those resources also helped them avoid, or effectively manage, the negative

psychological outcomes of transition including anxiety, stress, and the sense of otherness

or loneliness.

Personal and background factors. Some of the personal factors that the

participants found helpful include "familiar" or non-stigmatized additional social identity,

"outside" exposure, self-confidence, prior public schooling, participation in sports,

discipline to manage workload, and engagement with *masjid*. Among the family and other background factors, having siblings in the same high school was the single biggest helpful factor. Additionally, family members like cousins or friends going to the same school, parental "strictness" and high expectations, open communication between parents and the students, parental awareness of the public school system and active involvement were the other helpful factors.

While Abdul and Ali benefited from their additional African American identity because it helped them "blend in," others who looked obviously Pakistani or Arab, such as Ahmed and Osman, invited more stereotypes. Mohamad and Omar frequently got a pass as whites among the unfamiliar settings; however, their names invited peer "jokes" or "ridicule" in classroom settings. For the girls, their additional social identities were helpful in connecting with other peers who shared similar ethnic or racial identity, for example, Sadaf was able to connect with her "Indian friend" because of shared origin. However, in the case of Maria, who inherited her mother's phenotype and traits, her white identity was offset by her *hijab*. Overall, while many boys experienced anonymity because they could blend in, girls experienced a general sense of "otherness" because of their distinctiveness in the beginning.

Boys generally had more "outside" exposure than the girls. As a result, while "scared" and "out of place" were the common words many girls used to describe how they felt in their new school, boys just felt the sense of anonymity. Girls also experienced increased anxiety in the beginning as a result. While both boys and girls showed higher self-confidence prior to their transitions, many girls found their self-

confidence shaken in the new setting because of the "stares" and growing sense-of-otherness; they "became shy" in the new setting. In general, those who were able to regain their self-confidence quickly experienced less anxiety and stress. While several other factors highlighted in this section helped the girls reclaim their self-confidence faster, prior public schooling was an important factor for both Mona and Rehana.

While participation in sports helped boys establish social circles and relieve anxiety faster, avoidance afforded the girls more time and discipline to better manage their academic workload. Abdul described vividly how he frequently used his participation in wrestling to both make new friends and relieve stress:

I play wrestling with like juniors and seniors, so I get to make more friends. But, also like when I'm stressed out, when I get to wrestling, I hit somebody or something and release my stress [laugh]. (Abdul, 2-128)

Although PE could have been an alternative to sports for the girls to relieve anxiety and stress, the uniform and incongruent gender mixing practices did not afford the girls such opportunities. Instead, many girls used their habit of staying engaged with *masjid* as an alternative to sports, and a source of "refuge" from the stress and anxiety they experienced in their new schools.

As previously mentioned, among the family and other background factors, having siblings in the same high school was the single most helpful factor, followed by having other family members or friends. While parental "strictness" and expectations kept the boys focused on academic outcomes in the longer run and away from "many troubles," girls found open communication with their parents, their parents' awareness of the public

school system and active involvement in school very helpful. Nadda, for example, talked to her parents frequently about any problem she faced, for which her friends could not help her provide answers:

> I go to my friends for any support, my really close friends, not acquaintances, just the people I talk to daily, [Maria: people you've known forever], yah. But, when they can't answer my questions, I go to my parents, and my parents will somehow find answers for me. (Nadda, 1-245)

Similarly, open communication with her father, his own public schooling experience, and active engagement greatly helped Rashida in her transition:

> ... My dad and I, we talked a lot about everything before going to public school ... My father, in the beginning of the semester, came and spoke to my teachers, and told them that this is how it is for Muslim girls, and that I've always been in separate classes. Most of the teachers were very understanding once they knew where I was coming from ... He helped us get the Friday prayers established ... (Rashida, 1-96, 110)

Islamic school factors. Some of the Islamic school-related factors many participants found helpful in their transitions include better transition mentoring as well as preparation support, coed classes, well-equipped and easily accessible computer labs, access to teachers during high school transitions, a gym and a *masjid* at the school. Benefits of the first three factors were glaringly clear when the transition experiences of Iqra students (i.e., Saeeda or Abdul) were compared with those of the Al-Noor students. The former lacked all those and their students faced many more challenges as a result,

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while the later provided all those to its students. Moreover, as the following account by Maria reveals, many students found access to their Islamic school teachers very helpful during their transitions:

> I usually go to my friends for their support, and then I usually come here [Al-Noor], and ask the people whom I know, the teachers here. They'll help me out, they'll really support me a lot ... Friends at my high school, they do help too, just by wearing scarf, they're supporting me. I'm not like I'm the only one who does it, so, it's really nice to have them. (Maria, 1-244)

Finally, the accounts by Iqra and Al-Noor students clearly show how the gym and *masjid* at their Islamic school helped them during their transitions. Both provided the much needed "refuge" and avenues to spend time with friends until the participants managed to establish new friendship circles. For some, engagement with the *masjid* kept them "morally aware of what is right and what is wrong."

Public school factors. Participants' accounts also reveal several public school factors that helped ease their transitions. Some of those factors include orientation sessions, five to ten minutes grace time to find classes, and homeroom activities during the first week or two; neighborhood school; school ranking and code-of-conduct expectations; smaller school size; female teachers; teachers' openness to student viewpoints; teachers' exposure to Muslims and understanding of students' background; proactive accommodation for religious practice requirements; friends or other *hijabis* already in the school and classes; and MSA. Students in general, and those who went to large high schools in particular, found orientation support activities, such as orientation

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sessions, five to ten minutes grace period to find classes and homeroom activities during the first week or two very helpful in becoming familiar with the new school and its routines. Though Abdul did not like his "inner city" school, he also benefited from intact friendship circles because his school "was right next door:"

> Because I knew the school before, it was in the neighborhood, so I did not face many challenges. I had friends. Even my older sister, she went to the same school. She guided me. I was always close to my older sister, so I knew her friends. (Abdul, 1-176)

Everyone who went to a public school that was ranked higher in academics and expected a "professional" code-of-conduct from its teachers and students (i.e., Curie, Wayne, PC and Oxford), found such characteristics helpful in easing their transitions. While PC and Wayne were more conducive because of their smaller sizes compared to Curie and Oxford schools, Wayne offered Mona the additional advantage of having a majority of female teachers. In fact, Mona was the only female participant who, despite being a freshman, better adjusted to her high school than all the other participants. Of course, her prior public school background and having a sophomore sibling were also two other important and helpful factors. Similarly, as the previous subsection reveals, teachers' openness to student viewpoints and first-hand exposure to Muslims were also helpful, especially in the classes dealing with different cultures and religions. Often a small gesture of kindness on the part of their teachers was enough to make the participants in this study feel happy:

In PE ... It was also Ramadan, and my teacher knew that I was fasting. So he kept asking me if I wanted to sit down because it was hot and I'm wearing all these clothes, I'm fasting, and I'm not drinking any water or anything. So he asked me many times if I wanted to sit. I thought it was like, very nice of him, that he would think about that ... (Maria, 1-190)

Rashida's account of her father's engagement with her teachers also makes it clear that once her teachers were apprised of her background, she found them very helpful. In fact, teachers in her high school knew more about Muslims because of a sizeable population of Muslim students in her class, and were more forthcoming in accommodating time-off for *Eid*.

When their public high schools proactively accommodated participants' religious needs, such as in the case of the schools Maria, Mohamad, and Rashida attended, participants were quick to develop comfort zones within which they could function with ease. Of course, an active MSA and presence of other Muslims, especially *hijabis* who often felt the greater need for establishing MSA as Rashida and Saeeda's accounts reveal, were instrumental in getting such accommodations in Maria and Mohamad's school. Above all, having friends and other Muslim students in the school and classes was the other biggest source of reducing anxiety and sense-of-otherness, after having a sibling, for many female participants.

Islamic School Youth Want You to Know

Participants were given an opportunity to tell their parents, Islamic schools, public high schools (including administrators, their teachers and peers), and other Muslim youth

who will be following their footsteps, about anything they would want them to know based upon their own transitions struggles. Not surprisingly, their suggestions and advice were very insightful, and reflected their own struggles, many of which have been described throughout this chapter. Instead of analyzing their feedback too much, I have chosen to give them more space to use their own voice. I had to be selective in order to make sure that most of the distinct voices and advice is represented. The next few paragraphs describe their suggestions and advice.

Parents. When I asked the participants, "What would they want Muslim parents to know?" They responded with the following: "trust them," "talk to them," "stay involved," "stay informed," and "remind them of who they are" were the more frequently used words or phrases in their advice to Muslim parents. Here, for example, is what three participants advised them:

> You know your kids, you've raised them, you just have to trust them. Always stay involved, when you're more involved, teachers take your kid more seriously. Talk to them, talk to them about anything and everything. Everyday they're being bombarded by millions of things. The media, the teachers, the classes, the peers, like everything. Talk to them. Don't just send them to school and let it go from there. Always stay informed. Find out about their MSA, most schools have MSA. If they don't have one, you can help them start one. It's a good thing to have one. (Rashida, 1-148)

> You should always be open and talk to your kids. About girls, about drugs, about peer pressure, about everything, and definitely try to like, remind them of who

they are. I think families in general should talk about Islam, do a *halaqa* at least like once a week. Because when the whole family gathers and they talk about Islam, it's good for everybody, it's a reminder. (Omar, 1-242)

Parents should let their kids go out to see how the real world works, how a real day would go. At Islamic school, they're sheltered, which is a good thing. But, they don't really experience anything. Everything is given to them, everything is handed to them. In public school, they've got to take it. (Abdul, 1-222)

Islamic schools. Participants were also eager to tell their Islamic schools many things. It is interesting to note however, that underlying theme in most of the advice given relates to interactional norms in one form or another, the most challenging aspect for many in their new schools. Here are some suggestions for the Islamic schools by their alumni:

I think teachers in Islamic school should talk openly about how things work outside. They should talk about different situations, for examples, like shaking hands, hugs, peer pressure, and everything else people do in public schools. Our kids should know like how they should react to it. They should know what kinds of questions they'll get. They should know how to answer those, instead of like being lost. (Nadda, 1-48)

Islamic schools should involve students in projects where they interact with community beyond Muslims. It'll help with their social development. Like in my school, we've something called "flexible day," where we go and help out the community around us. We try to give back to the community by like planting

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trees or helping the people living in retirement homes. We get to know them. I think they should do something like that. It'll help students know their surroundings and avoid some anxiety. (Sadaf, 2-262)

I'd take the students on fieldtrip to the schools they were going to and talk to them. I just feel like there should be some sort of program, where public school counselors come to orient kids in the private school. I know it's kind of hard because private school is for all counties. But, there has to be something. (Saeeda, 2-395)

I'd tell them to stop after middle school. K-8 is probably the best choice. After that, the kids, they need to mix with other people. They don't need to be in the same environment their entire life. Same people every day for like eight years is okay when you're young. They should not separate boys and girls too. Many don't learn how to talk to each other. (Abdul, 1-240)

Public schools. Participants wanted to tell their public school administrators, teachers and peers many things. Their advice touched upon many of the aspects that they found troubling in their new schools, such as prevalent ignorance, incongruent or unwelcoming social events, religious accommodation, and misperceptions among many. Here is the select sample:

I would recommend them to try to understand other religions and cultures, not specifically Islam, but all the major ones at least. They don't have full perspective on many things. There is a lot of ignorance, both of culture and religion ... You know what bothers me? We know more about Mayans and Inca,

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who don't exist anymore, but we don't know much about Islam and Muslims. It's depressing, like we live in a globalized world, where one in every five people on this planet is a Muslim ... (Sadaf, 1-264, 266)

Many activities in school are like, yes they're accessible, but they're not welcoming for everyone. If someone goes there and feels like "out of place" or something, you should know that it's not welcoming. Public schools need to realize that we've the same rights, and we've some needs, not many, some. But, it's like our basic needs are drowned out by the wants of the majority people. It shouldn't be like that. (Rashida, 1-246)

We'd love to have a day off on *Eid* as a holiday. It's only two holidays in the whole year. And, if it is too much to ask for, at least don't schedule any important test or project on Eid day. Like, you enjoy your Christmas or Hanukah, we want to enjoy our *Eid*. We want to be with our family and friends. And, like we don't want to worry about making up for anything. (Maria, 1-135)

Well, I think every school should have a room, something like, like at the airport, a room dedicated for everybody to pray, meditate or whatever. Many clubs get rooms for activities, why not the people who want to pray to their God or whatever. (Omar, 2-198)

I think it's just peers, or people, I think people are the big problem. If they can fix people, I mean you can't fix people, but if they can somehow make people understand that you're different. I think that would be, that will solve everything.

[Maria: Yah]. The teachers are fine, the academics are fine, it's just the people.

(Nadda, 1-241)

To their teachers specifically, here is what they had to say:

Just understand that we had different experiences. We'd struggle a bit, you

should try to get to know us first, and then find ways to help us. We don't expect

too much, only a few words will do sometimes. When we come, we don't have

friends, it will take us some time to adjust. If you see kids making fun of us, do

something about it. (Ali, 1-306)

Finally, here is what they wanted their peers to know:

I always feel like the whole public school goes around the Caucasian people. I

mean, I've no problem with that. If you are white, you're like born here, go

ahead, wear shorts, wear anything you feel like it. I respect your choice. But like,

you should know that, some of us can't wear what you wear, some of us can't do

what you do. So, don't just think like what you do or what you wear is the only

normal thing. It's not. (Sadaf, 2-145)

Other Muslim youth. Finally, when I asked the participants, "What they would

advise the other Muslim youth who are getting ready for their own high school

transitions?" Their advice varied from something practical as to "observe your

surroundings" to more nuanced and insightful ones. Here is what they wanted their

Muslim brethren to know:

You should observe your surroundings. Try to stay quiet a little while until you

understand what to do and what not to do, because if you start doing the wrong

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things in the beginning, and you don't know how everything goes, you'll get into

a lot of troubles. (Abdul, 1-202)

I'd tell them that not everybody is as nice as you've seen in Islamic school. But,

you'll always have Muslim friends, and that you've to understand other people's

perspective, their background and their culture. But, also don't forget who you

are. (Sadaf, 1-238)

You should know that high school is what you make of it. Don't let other people

influence you, don't let them make you feel insecure. Don't even bother about

what they would think, you don't even know what they think, you're not inside

their head. Just shake up the world a bit and do things differently, do it your way.

Don't waste four years of your life, letting other people tell what you do? It's your

life! (Rehana, 1-222)

Just keep your Islam, ignore temptations, and stay focused. Never forget who you

are. (Ali, 1-316)

... Keep an open mind. Expect anything, always just keep your priorities in sight.

Remember that you're a Muslim; you shouldn't compromise your values. Trust

me that will always make them respect you more. I can't tell you how many

times people told me how much they respect the fact that we pray five times a day

... They respect me that I cover myself and I don't walk around like everybody

else. Don't think that you can't fit in or won't be comfortable because of your

Muslim values, but in reality you gain respect by keeping your values. (Rashida,

1-144)

Chapter Summary

The students in K-8 Islamic schools receive varying degrees of transition mentoring and support from their families and friends, Islamic schools, and public high schools. Parents are generally the first source of support, followed by siblings and other relatives or friends who are already in the high school. While the level of support varies greatly among the Islamic schools, from "some advice" to "help with almost everything," their efforts do not come close to the mentoring public middle schools provide to their students. Public high schools offer one or more orientation sessions for their prospective students, which they generally announce on their school websites. Their main activities are primarily focused on the students from their feeder middle schools. Overall, the Muslim youth start their public high schools with a strong sense of self-concept, high academic aspirations, general awareness of parental high expectations, and mixed feelings of anxiety and excitement for various reasons.

Participants encountered many organizational and socio-cultural changes the moment they stepped into a public high school on their first day. Thus begins a transition journey that disrupts their psychological "comfort zone," "normal ways of doing things," and established circles of friends and adults "who understood them." Early in that journey, the participants encounter "too many changes" and some specific challenges during the few days or weeks, which they find "disorienting." They experience some combination of excitement, anxiety, exhaustion, stress, and a sense of othering and loneliness as a result. Everyone reacts, albeit impulsively, to cope with the disorienting changes and their outcomes. While trying to become familiar with a new environment

and getting used to its routines, boys and girls part ways. Whereas boys drift towards sports, girls turn their focus to classes; their identity salience hierarchy also shifts.

As they start to become more familiar with their new environment and its routines, the nature of their challenges and adjustment efforts starts to change. Now, they are challenged to adjust their religious and interactional norms (nurtured in their Islamic schools) within the new setup with its often-incongruent practices on one hand, and focus on academics and establishing new social circles on the other. While the former becomes the immediate and long-term challenge for many girls, boys' woes lie in the latter. They also confront ignorance, stereotypes, and prejudicial treatment. The unfolding challenges essentially require establishing new "appropriate" boundaries and norms, which takes months, and in many cases, go well into sophomore or junior years. The students use both active and passive strategies to negotiate those boundaries, reestablish norms, and cope with the resulting conflicts.

When they finally manage to redraw boundaries within which to function, and establish new "autonomous" comfort zones, the participants become more confident and assertive to different degrees. They increase their participation in high school social life within the redrawn boundaries, and develop a sense-of-belonging to their high schools. Not only do they complete their transition by "finding their place" in their high schools, many also "find out who [they] really are," "get to know the society [they] are going to face" and come out "trained for [that] society." Essentially, their Muslim character itself is transformed in the process, from one rooted in a small religious community where it was "natural to be a Muslim" to another in large secular institution on the basis of choices

and autonomy. Throughout the process, they find many personal, family background,

Islamic and public school related factors to be a mixture of helpful or lacking.

CHAPTER FIVE: SYNTHESIS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined high school transitions of Muslim adolescents who move from K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools. It was guided by the overarching question:

> What is the process involved in high school transitions of the Muslim adolescents, and adaptation of their religio-cultural identity and lifestyle in the new institutional setup, when they move from American K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools?

Furthermore, it focused on seeking answers to the following sub-questions:

1) What are some salient characteristics that distinguish K-8 Islamic schools from secular public high schools? How do such characteristics influence students' personal and interpersonal conduct? How do the youths self-identify prior to high school transitions?

2) What kinds of transition mentoring and support do they receive from their families and friends, Islamic schools, and public high schools? Which of those do they find helpful? How can such efforts be improved?

3) What are some key changes and challenges they encounter in their new schools during transitions? How do those affect their personal, academic, and social adjustments?

4) What additional factors related to their personal and family backgrounds, Islamic schools, and public high schools do they find helpful during their adjustment efforts?

To answer those questions, thirteen participants were asked in multiple interviews, follow-up phone calls and emails to share their personal and family lives, Islamic schooling experiences, transition preparations, and experiences as freshmen (and beyond) in public high schools. The participants were selected from two geographic regions, seven from the Baltimore-Washington region and the remaining six from the Raleigh-Durham-Carey region in North Carolina. Among the participants, seven were freshmen, three were sophomores, and three had completed high school prior to the start of this study. From the seven freshmen, two female participants were also interviewed beyond their freshman year, one during her sophomore year, and the other during both her sophomore and junior years. Additional documents related to their Islamic and public high schools, available on the school websites, were also consulted.

This chapter presents a synthesis of the study findings presented in detail in chapter four. It is divided into three sections. The first section synthesizes relevant findings from the chapter to answer the overarching research question and the four sub-questions. The second section provides a general discussion of major findings and contributions of this study to the existing literature. It also highlights some of the study's limitations. The third and final section provides implications for school districts and policy, education practitioners (including education leaders, teachers, and counselors), educator training programs, and suggestions for the future research.

Overarching Question: *What is the process involved in high school transitions of the Muslim adolescents, and adaptation of their religio-cultural identity and lifestyle in the new institutional setup, when they move from American K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools?*

Following Creswell's (2005) advice that a process or a theory explaining a process is easy to identify in a grounded theory study "when the author presents it as a visual coding paradigm," the model depicted in figure 5 outlines essential elements of the process involved in the high school transitions of Muslim adolescents. The central logic of such a model suggests that, when *causal conditions* exist (such as the school system change), and these conditions contribute to a *phenomenon* (adapting to the change), the *context* (specific background and personal as well as public high school factors) and *intervening conditions* (general background, Islamic and public high school factors) influence the *strategies* (*actions* and *interactions*) that are used to bring about certain *outcomes* (to fit-into the new school setup and participate fully).

CONTEXT
1. Schooling, family lifestyle
2. Familiar, stigmatized identities
3. Adherence to religious lifestyle
4. Degree of mentoring, support
5. Inadequate accommodations
6. Incongruent cultural practices
7. Ignorance, misrepresentation, prejudices
8. Prior peer cliques
9. More sports, extracurriculars, increasing academic workload
10. Departmentalization, tracking

CAUSAL CONDITIONS
School System Change
1. *Organizational Changes*:
   a. Climate (size, otherness, less identity safety)
   b. Procedural (rules, routines, practices)
   c. Academics, extracurriculars
2. *Social Changes*:
   a. Loss of friendships and support networks
   b. New/diverse/older peers
   c. New teachers, staff
3. *Cultural Changes*:
   a. Secular, no more Islamic
   b. New youth culture

PHENOMENON
Adapting to the Change
1. Preparing for transition
2. Encountering new setup
3. Adjusting to climate
4. Adjusting to rules, routines, practices
5. Adjusting to academics, extracurriculars
6. Adjusting identity:
   a. Salience
   b. Religious norms
   c. Interactional norms
7. Adjusting socially
8. Participating fully

Acculturation and Psychological

2
4
1
3

ACTIONS/INTERACTIONS
1. *Preparations*:
   a. Evaluate alternatives
   b. Engage in conversations
   c. Attend orientations
2. *Disorientation*:
   a. Encounters, "first time ever(s)"
   b. Go-with-flow, avoid, escape
   c. Compromise, seek alternatives
   d. Make "forced" choices
3. *Redrawing Boundaries*:
   a. Seek accommodations
   b. Avoid, manage interactions
   c. Focus on classes, avoid clubs
   d. Opt for sports, back to classes
   e. Open to all, selectively socialize
   f. Avoid, educate, confront
4. *Equilibrium*:
   a. Join/help start MSA, clubs
   b. Negotiate accommodations
   c. Increase participation

OUTCOMES
1. *Preparations*:
   a. Possible relocation, new stressors
   b. Increased awareness
   c. Mixed feelings
2. *Disorientation*:
   a. Disruption, free or nobody, shy
   b. Confusion, stress, familiarity
   c. Selective acculturation
   d. Part ways
3. *Redrawing Boundaries*:
   a. Hassles, dissatisfaction
   b. Stay alone/low, businesslike
   c. Maintain grades, longer isolation
   d. Friends, grade slump, anxiety
   e. Peer pressures, "right" friends
   f. Anxiety, be-expert, conflicts
4. *Equilibrium*:
   a. Assertive, autonomous cliques
   b. Reestablished new norms
   c. Fit-in, discover self and society

8th grade

2+ weeks

1 to 2+ years

INTERVENING CONDITIONS
- **Background:** First/female child, parental exposure and involvement, siblings in school, prior public schooling, exposure to prejudices
- **Islamic School:** Coed classes, mosque/gym on premises, well-equipped and easily accessible computer labs, accessible to ex-students
- **High School:** Small size, higher academic standing, more female teachers, Muslim students or *hijabis*, MSA, cousins or friends in school or classes, regional diversity, teachers' openness and gestures of kindness, some proactive religious accommodation

Figure 5.0. Paradigm model for "grounded" theory explaining the process involved in Muslim adolescents' high school transitions

Private K-8 Islamic schools share many foundational features and the core mission of educating children with secular public schools. Nonetheless, the two school systems differ in several organizational and socio-cultural aspects due to the Islamic schools' additional mandate of inculcating Muslim identity and religio-cultural values in their students. Muslim families who send their children to such schools also often adjust their family lifestyles and social circles to varying degrees in order to reinforce what their children learn and practice in the schools. As a result, Muslim youths who attend K-8 Islamic schools tend to live in purposefully structured environments both inside their schools and outside. In addition to academic preparation, the environments facilitate a religio-cultural lifestyle that involves following some specific religious and interactional norms in personal and inter-personal conduct. For the Muslim youths who adopt such a lifestyle for years, their move to secular public high schools tends to be abrupt and disrupts their psychological comfort zones, normal routines and ways of doing things, friendship circles, and established support networks of the people who understood them and their lifestyle.

The transitions resulting from such a move essentially involve a multi-dimensional and multi-phase adaptation process that unfolds over time. The adjustments span various dimensions, such as organizational (climate, procedural, academics, and extracurriculars), social, cultural, and personal (psychological, identity salience, religious and interactional norms). The process includes preparation, disorientation, redrawing boundaries, and equilibrium phases. The phases often overlap and unfold at a different pace and times across various dimensions for different students. Alternatively, the

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adjustments in several dimensions often take place in parallel and gradually move across the multiple phases over time. The adjustment outcomes in one dimension or a phase often influence the student responses or strategies used in the next. Their adaptation process may take anywhere from almost a year for some to over two years for others.

The Preparation Phase

Transition preparations often begin during or before the Muslim youths start their eighth grade when families engage in conversations about high school. Many evaluate private or public school alternatives for their first child; some even relocate to nearby localities for better schools. When they choose a public school option for their first child, most parents tend to play an active role throughout the transition. Their mentoring often includes candid conversations, conveying expectations, and occasionally about taking-off *hijab* out of concern for their daughters' safety or isolation in certain regions. Siblings already in high school are the second most important source of mentoring and support. While parents actively mentor their first child, siblings tend to play part of that role for the next child. Cousins or friends already in high school are the next source of support; they also tend to spread the scares and gossip about secular public high schools.

Many new Islamic schools lack well-planned mentoring and support programs. Teachers often take it upon themselves to offer some mentoring in the form of advice or scares, and may engage girls in role-playing to respond to potentially inappropriate social encounters and interactional norms. Some older schools tend to offer better programs for both students and their parents, which often include an orientation session for the parents on high school life in a public school system, support with the admission process for

regular or magnate schools, recommendations for possible course selections, and general

mentoring involving conversation and role-playing. Nonetheless, their programs

generally lack the close coordination with public high schools that is common in public

middle schools, specifically multiple school visits, counseling, and other social activities

when the high school is in session.

Many public high schools offer at least one orientation session for prospective

students and their parents during the spring or summer prior to the new school year, and

often a back to school night for their freshman students, which they announce on school

websites. Nonetheless, their main transition support efforts are primarily tailored for

feeder middle schools. Smaller or high achieving schools tend to offer somewhat better

mentoring and preparation support for their new students. High school orientation

sessions often include some combination of a presentation about various aspects of high

school life and its policies, building walkthroughs, in-class "chats" with teachers,

meetings with counselors, and occasionally, hands-on activities with would-be peers.

Being the first child or better mentoring by the Islamic school increases the likelihood

that students, parents, or both will attend high school orientations.

The Muslim youths often start out their high school journeys with strong self-

concepts and academic preparations, high aspirations, awareness of parental expectations,

and mixed feelings about their new schools. Their feelings range from excitement to

anxiety, and are often based upon their perceptions of high schools due to some

combination of the scares and gossip they hear from friends or teachers, visits during

orientations, awareness of the stigma attached to their religio-ethnic identity, previous

prejudicial experiences, etc. Boys tend to be more excited about the change than girls, except when girls have siblings or friends in the high school. While the real adjustments start in the next phase, the Disorientation Phase, when they encounter the new setup on their first day of freshman year, the various conversations and participation in orientations during the Preparation phase provide the Muslim youths some awareness of the various aspects that will require them to make some adjustments.

The Disorientation Phase

"Too many" organizational and socio-cultural changes, and some specific challenges, overwhelm and disorient the Muslim youths during their first few days or weeks. Girls, who often continue to wear *hijab* in their high schools in general, and those from non-coed schools in particular, encounter more difficulties. Beyond the obvious organizational and socio-cultural changes, they often experience a sense of becoming *nobody overnight* or *the only hijabi* in their classes. For the first time, many encounter stares and the burden of being judged, considered ignorant, subject to prejudices, or put on the spot in a school setting. They also feel awkward when paired up with male peers who often do not know about their religio-cultural lifestyle or schooling background; some girls from non-coed schools may refuse to pair up in the beginning, which can lead to a bad start and prolonged social awkwardness. Because of such experiences, they tend to become shy and silent, which further increases their sense of loneliness. Boys, on the other hand, often feel excited by the change and greater freedom, but they also experience initial awkwardness when their teachers or peers get their Islamic school names wrong.

The religious requirement of avoiding pork in lunch, which is of concern to the Muslim youths from day one, is often easy to resolve when there is labeling, staff help, or vegetarian options. Gender mixing, PE uniforms, and the common practice of changing in locker rooms are often new and uncomfortable experiences for the Muslim youths. Girls always ask for permission to wear sweatpants and long-sleeve shirts under PE shirts; wearing pants in a mixed PE setting itself is a big psychological shift and awkward for many. Most Muslim students delay the early-afternoon prayer even when there may be a place for them to pray due to their initial uneasiness; some may ask for accommodation during the first week, but sensing a lukewarm response by the school staff, they may not feel comfortable asking again.

Boys and girls tend to part ways in two distinct ways during this phase, and in both cases, girls often feel forced by circumstances instead of being able to make voluntary choices. Whereas boys often opt for sports to fit-in outside of classrooms because their peers tend to stay among their old cliques in classrooms, girls set their focus on classes and avoid social interactions and extracurricular activities. Such a focus on sports or classes also becomes an important coping strategy for many. Moreover, while Muslim identity stays low or moves further down in the salience hierarchy for boys due to anonymity and less strict rules in the new setting, it increases for the girls because they often continue wearing *hijab*, which in turn, increases both the likelihood of prejudices and their own sense of acting properly.

The Muslim youths often experience some combination of confusion, excitement, anxiety, stress, and a sense of loneliness during this phase. In rare cases,

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some girls whose families relocate get sick due to the additional stressors, particularly when they are first in their families and may lack adequate support resources in new schools. The youths often react impulsively to the disorienting changes and challenges at this stage. Their responses often include go-with-the-flow, circumstantial self-isolation, self-assurances, avoidance, and escape to the old support networks (particularly when the old school is accessible to its former students and has a mosque or gym). It may take a Muslim youth a few weeks or more to recover from the initial disorientation and stress, and become more familiar with the new setup and its procedures. Girls taking PE often take longer. Some combination of having siblings, friends or other Muslim students in classes; MSA; prior public schooling; active parental involvement; small school size or better transition support (i.e., maps, homeroom, and time to find classes); or some proactive religious accommodations by the school often help them move out of this phase quicker.

The Redrawing Boundaries Phase

As the Muslim youths start to become more familiar with the climate and procedural side of their new schools, their challenges and adjustment efforts started to change. Because they tend to adhere to a religious lifestyle to varying degrees, for Muslim students in general, and girls who wear *hijab* in particular, the unfolding challenges now require drawing new religio-culturally appropriate boundaries in order to both fit-in and reestablish norms in various aspects of their new high school life. Their primary efforts revolve around adjusting obligatory religious and appropriate interactional norms on the one hand, and focusing on academics and establishing social

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circles on the other. Acculturation and psychological adjustments run through all those efforts. During this phase, which often continues throughout their freshman year, and in many cases well into their sophomore or early junior years, the Muslim youths use both passive and active strategies to negotiate those boundaries, reestablish norms, and cope with the resulting conflicts and stress.

Adjusting four out of the five basic *religious norms*—dress, *Zuhr* or early afternoon prayer, fasting during the month of *Ramadan*, and taking *Eid* day off twice a year—remains an issue for the Muslim youths throughout their freshman, and in many cases sophomore years, due to inadequate accommodations and the prevalent ignorance about such practices in public schools. Their high schools do provide accommodations upon request in most cases; however, such accommodations are often inadequate. The modified PE dress situation continues to remain a hassle and source of discomfort for them; it also invites peer questions and misperceptions or occasional prejudicial treatment, and frequently discourages girls from participating in sports. Similarly, prayers continue to remain a major issue for most Muslim youths, and asking for the accommodation depends upon their level of self-confidence, the number of Muslims in school, having an active MSA, and personal opinion as to whether prayers can be performed sitting or made up later. Many continue to pray at home except when MSA or other Muslim students before them had secured a place to pray. A few manage to establish prayer routines in school with the help and intervention of parents. Some boys start to skip prayers due to the inadequate accommodations and their added time commitments in sports.

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While it is generally easy, upon request, to get a necessary pass to avoid the lunchroom during *Ramadan*, fasting becomes challenging for the Muslim youths, at times because of peer curiosity and questions, especially when it coincides with PE and warmer days. Their PE instructors are often considerate when they know about fasting, but girls may not ask for leniency because of their shyness. Similarly, taking a day off for *Eid* also becomes a frustrating experience when it coincides with an important mid-term or a project deadline. This is particularly true when there are not many Muslim students in the school. Many Muslim students resent making up later for the day they take off, or missing festivities and time with family and friends if they choose to attend school. Girls often feel awkward and invite questions if they come to school for a test while dressed in traditional clothes for Eid festivities. Some schools with large Muslim populations may proactively provide a room for Muslim students to stay and avoid the lunchroom during Ramadan, and teachers often avoid scheduling any important test or project on Eid.

The Muslim youths from Islamic schools often find the two most common practices in their high schools, i.e., gender mixing and dances, challenging and incongruent with their *interactional norms*. The challenge has to do with the Islamic etiquette of avoiding gender mixing that involves close physical contact and touching between non-family members of the opposite sex. While having non-Muslim male peers or teachers is a big psychological shift for the girls from non-coed schools, working with the male peers more closely than before can also be awkward for girls from coed schools. Not knowing how to deal with such situations, many tend to avoid interacting with them in the beginning, sometimes at the expense of seeming rude, until they learn to interact

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with them in a businesslike manner, which often takes much longer for the girls from non-coed schools. Furthermore, gender mixing in PE continues to be challenging for both boys and girls. Pairing up with female peers in PE uniforms is new and often awkward for many boys. Mixed PE remains a long-term challenge for the girls due to both uniform and more casual interactions. While boys tend to avoid pairing up with girls, girls opt for low-key activities, stay back or away even from other girls to avoid being "checked out" by their male peers. Their *hijab* also helps set a barrier. Finally, almost everyone avoids school dances because of inappropriate mixing, dress, and music involving sexually suggestive lyrics. Peer ignorance, misperceptions, or questions continue to be an issue because of their avoidance.

Since parting ways early as discussed previously, boys and girls often continue on two different paths. Girls often continue to stay focused on *academics* and avoid *extracurricular* activities due to their struggles with establishing interactional norms during freshman, and in many cases sophomore years, except when their school has MSA, which they often join early. As a result, while their avenues to establish friendship circles remain limited outside of the classes, they consistently maintain their academic performance, and some girls in small or high achieving schools may open up to select clubs early in their sophomore year. Boys on the other hand also continue on their chosen paths. With participation in sports early, they tend to quickly establish circles of friends. However, growing time commitments due to both sports and the increasing friendship circles often distract many boys from focusing on their classes or keeping up with an increasing academic workload until they start to experience some grade slump or

difficulties managing the increase in workload. After receiving warnings from parents, and growing anxiety, they either focus on creating a balance between sports and classes or start to cut down on sports to catch up with the increasing workload during their sophomore year.

Social adjustment requirements of the Muslim youths includes connecting with teachers and peers as well as establishing friendships and support networks. They often find it difficult to connect with their teachers in general, and girls with their male teachers in particular, during most of their freshman years. This is often due to a combination of the new departmentalization and tracking practices, teachers' impersonal ways, and girls' own struggles with establishing appropriate interactional norms. While girls often feel comfortable in connecting with their female teachers, they tend to avoid engaging with their male teachers, and instead prefer to stay quiet and do work, except when teachers pay close personal attention to them. Their retiring behavior may also lead to teacher misperceptions and problematic relations with them. Some girls also experience prejudicial treatment by teachers because of their *hijab* or when their Islamic beliefs are misrepresented in classes like history or comparative religions. Many tend to ignore such treatment in the beginning; they often opt for educating or correcting their teachers when they gain more self-confidence. Boys also tend to keep a low profile in classes and stay away from teachers, focusing, instead, on enjoying their newfound freedoms and sports. Both boys and girls start to feel more comfortable about engaging with their teachers in their sophomore years. Boys do it when they start to focus back on their classes, and girls when they learn to deal with their male teachers in a businesslike manner. Moreover, as

their teachers get to know them, some treat them as an on-hand resource or "expert" on Islam related topics.

The Muslim youths also find it difficult to connect with their peers during freshman, and in many cases sophomore years. In the beginning, their peers tend to stay within their own cliques from middle schools. This seems to be less of a problem for the girls when there are other *hijabis* or their friends in the same classes. The universal departmentalization and tracking practices do not help either because such practices tend to create frequent peer turnover in classes. While boys easily connect with their peers outside the classrooms on the sports grounds, and often do not care much to connect with their peers in classes, girls lack such opportunities because their focus remains primarily on the classes. In addition to their struggles with learning to draw boundaries for establishing interactional norms, other reasons that make connecting with peers difficult for girls include their shyness, peer ignorance and frequent questions about their Muslim lifestyle, peer misperceptions and prejudices, and difficulty in making conversations with them due to different lifestyles and lack of common interests or topics to converse about. Nevertheless, they do connect with some of their female peers when they are grouped with them in classes, particularly when they share ethno-cultural identities or some mutual interests like staying away from the common youth habits of drinking and dating due to religious convictions or some other reasons.

In general, the Muslim youths tend to stay open to everyone in their gender groups for friendships in the beginning. However, as they start connecting with all of their gender peers during their freshman or early sophomore year, invitations to parties,

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peer questions, and peer pressures become issues. Many girls also quickly realize that most of the conversations among their female peers revolve around gossip, dates, relations, and the like, which often runs contrary to their Muslim religious values. Gradually, both boys and girls tend to become selective in their peer relations and look to make "right" friends or among their "own kind" in order to avoid such troubles. Many girls tend to establish at least a small social circle of friends towards the end of their freshman or sophomore year, within which they interact without worrying about compromising on their religiously appropriate interactional norms. They also become comfortable at interacting in a businesslike manner with their male peers and teachers in their classes. Some continue to struggle with forming small friendship circles during their freshman and most of the sophomore years due to the absence of other Muslims in classes, MSA in school, or lack of success in connecting with the female peers who avoid partying and dating. Dealing with peer stereotypes or prejudicial treatment and the perceptions of being judged continue to remain an issue throughout this phase, which may cause psychological discomfort for many. While both boys and girls continue to avoid starting arguments or trying to educate their peers, boys do occasionally confront their peers, which may create conflicts and anxieties. Finally, while the Muslim identity stays high in the salience hierarchy for girls, it remains low for boys except during such conflicts.

The Equilibrium Phase

No two Muslim adolescents follow exactly the same transition path. It is clear however that some quickly adjust across the various dimensions and reach an equilibrium

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state (particularly those with more support sources, such as prior public schooling, siblings, etc.). In many cases, their paths converge and their transitions become complete in their junior year. When they finally manage to redraw boundaries within which to function, and establish small social circles of "right" friends, the Muslim youths become more confident and assertive to varying degrees. Moreover, while the bulk of the issues related to dress and fasting subside for most of them because of no more PE or a decrease in peer questions, the religious norms of prayer and *Eid* still remain an issue for many. Some boys also continue to struggle with choosing their own identity.

With growing confidence, girls start to participate more actively in their schools' social life and select clubs in their junior year. Those from non-coed Islamic schools or more religious families, often experience more difficulties, but feel more comfortable asking for permission and a place to pray. They also reach out to other Muslim youths through their participation in select clubs, and some help start MSA in their schools if there is none. Boys, on the other hand, also start to pray during school hours in their junior years when many parents encourage them to carpool and start going to a nearby mosque for Friday prayers during lunchtime. Some also join MSA as they cut down on sports. Reminders in the weekly Friday sermons, and from other Muslim students in MSA, help them complete their identity exploration and journey from "right" to "left" and "back to the middle." Because of their increasing self-confidence and comfort at interacting with their teachers, or through MSAs, the Muslim youths often reach out to their teachers to ensure no important midterm or project is scheduled around *Eid* time.

With the increasing social engagements in the select or autonomous circles, and better accommodations of prayer and *Eid* in many cases, the Muslim youths' confidence and sense-of-belonging to their high schools continues to grow. Not only do they complete their transition by "finding their place" in their high schools, many also "find out who [they] really are," "get to know the society [they] are going to face," and come out strong and trained for it. Essentially, their Muslim character itself is transformed in the process, from one rooted in a small homelike community where "everything was given" and it was "natural to be a Muslim," to another in a large secular institution on the basis of choices and negotiated autonomy.

Sub-Question One: *What are some salient characteristics that distinguish K-8 Islamic schools from secular public high schools? How do such characteristics influence students' personal and interpersonal conduct? How do the youths self-identify prior to high school transitions?*

The participants' accounts reveal that, while the United States' K-8 Islamic schools share many foundational features and the core mission of educating children with secular public high schools, the two school systems differ in several organizational and socio-cultural aspects. The differences are, in many ways, a direct result of the Islamic schools' additional mandate to inculcate Muslim identity and religio-cultural values in their students, their relative newness, and the internal diversity and geographical spread of American Muslim communities. Specifically, the K-8 Islamic schools: (a) tend to be smaller in sizes and student bodies; (b) offer mandatory religious studies courses—Islamic studies, Arabic, and select portions of Quran—in addition to the core and some

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other courses offered in local public schools; (c) provide some form of character education with an emphasis on creating an "Islamic environment," religiously appropriate dress and codes-of-conduct, and staff role modeling; (d) structure their facilities, schedules, and rules to facilitate such a character education, or practicing the mandatory religious and interactional norms in personal and inter-personal spheres; (e) rely on parents and community, particularly mothers with adequate qualifications, to meet their staffing as well as staff role-modeling needs; and (f) expect parents to play an active role in children's education.

Such characteristic differences not only shaped the participants' personal and interpersonal conduct, but also influenced their homes. Their families also adjusted their own lifestyles and social circles to varying degrees in order to reinforce what their children learn and practice in the schools. As a result, the Muslim youths were more observant and adopted a religio-cultural lifestyle that involved following some basic religious and interactional norms or codes-of-conduct in their personal and inter-personal spheres. Such basic religious norms include praying five times, dawn-to-dusk fasting during the lunar month of *Ramadan*, consuming *halal* food and avoiding *haram* like pork and alcohol, celebrating the two *Eid* holidays, and wearing a modest dress (girls often cover everything except the hands, face and feet in loose and non-transparent garments). The interactional norms, on the other hand, include observing the Islamic etiquette or practice of avoiding inappropriate gender mixing that involves touching between non-family members of the opposite sex, gossiping, cursing, and other inappropriate behaviors.

Living in such purposefully structured environments influenced the participants' worldview and sense-of-belonging to a Muslim community. Nonetheless, prior to their high school transitions, they self-identified in many different ways depending upon the context and surroundings. They used their social identities based upon gender, parents' ethnicity or country of origin, their own birthplace, and religion in that order to construct their identity "salience hierarchy." While they rearranged the hierarchy automatically in different contexts without much thought, their religious identity generally ranked low in the salience hierarchy, and was just one aspect of their being. Furthermore, it was striking to observe how they viewed such multiple aspects of their identity as complimentary and not dichotomous or mutually exclusive. Their responses to the dichotomously framed question that many ask in the media of Muslims—"Do you think of yourself as an American first or a Muslim first?"—included words or phrases, such as "dumb," "ignorant," and "comparing apples ['religion'] and oranges ['nationality']."

Sub-Question Two: *What kinds of transition mentoring and support do they receive from their families and friends, Islamic schools, and public high schools? Which of those do they find helpful? How can such efforts be improved?*

The Muslim adolescents' accounts reveal that they received varying degrees of mentoring and support—both prior to, and after the start of their freshman year, from their families and friends, Islamic schools, and public high schools. Their accounts, as well as their advice to various stakeholders, highlight that, whenever offered, such activities were helpful during transitions; however, more needs to be done to improve those efforts.

Prior to the start of their freshman year, parents: (a) helped ensure timely admission and course selections; (b) frequently engaged in candid conversations about various aspects of public high school, offered advice, and conveyed expectations; (c) in a couple of cases, talked about taking off the *hijab* out of concern for their daughters' safety and social isolation; and (d) almost always attended any information or orientation session offered by one or both schools if and when they knew about such activities. While almost half of the parents attended high school orientations along with their children, others did not know about them in time, and as a result, their children missed them. After the start of school year: (a) many parents stayed engaged with their children's counselors and teachers, especially for their first child; (b) some parents proactively informed staff about their daughter's Islamic schooling background, worked with schools to get them accommodation for prayer, or encouraged them to join or start MSA; (c) parents often intervened when their children experienced prejudicial treatment at the hands of a teacher; and (d) while many boys complained about parental strictness about attending parties; in retrospect, they always found it helpful in avoiding inappropriate behaviors and staying focused on classes.

Siblings (two cases), cousins (one case) or friends (one case) already in high school also played an important role in the Muslim adolescents' transition mentoring and support. Their mentoring often involved providing the "low down" on teachers, classes, and the social scene; the friends also spread some gossip and scares. As the school year started, they also helped keep company during lunchtime, find places or necessary

information, and make new friends. Older female siblings particularly functioned as protectors as well as part of the social network.

Two out of the three Islamic schools lacked any well-structured transition mentoring and support programs. Their teachers often took it upon themselves to offer some mentoring in the form of advice or scares, and engaged girls in role-playing to respond to social encounters that violate religiously appropriate interactional norms. While many found the scares untrue, girls often considered such mentoring efforts and the role-plays helpful, specifically when those involved some sort of outreach information and activities (such as how to effectively answer peer and teacher questions about various aspects of their religious lifestyle).

The third school offered a well-structured mentoring and support program for both students and their parents, which included an information session for the parents covering various aspects of public high schools, support with the admission process and some guidance on possible course selections, and general mentoring involving the advice and role-plays. Nonetheless, they lacked the close coordination with public high schools that is common in public middle schools, such as school visits and on-site activities when the high school is in session. All the schools were accessible to their ex-students during their transitions, which in many cases became "the refuge" after school for some.

Most public high schools offered an orientation session for new students and their parents during the spring or summer prior to their freshman year, and often a back to school night for the students, which they announced on school websites. Their transition support efforts were primarily tailored for their feeder middle schools, however, except

when the school was small or high achieving, which often offered better mentoring and support. The orientation sessions frequently included a presentation about various aspects of high school and its policies, meetings with counselors, building walkthroughs, and in-class "chats" with teachers. Some schools also offered hands-on activities with would-be peers. However, many participants found such efforts pointless and ineffective because of frequent peer turnover in classes due to the universal tracking and departmentalization practices. Moreover, after the start of the freshman year, their support activities were also mixed. Some high schools offered their freshmen building maps, homeroom activities for the first week or two, 5-10 minutes for finding classes after each period. The participants often found such support helpful,

While participants frequently advised parents to talk to their children openly about every topic and more actively engage with their schools, they would have preferred to hear fewer scares or less misinformation from some friends. They also highlighted many inadequacies in the transition mentoring and support provided by their Islamic as well as public high schools. In their advice to their Islamic schools, the Muslim youth often suggested that teachers in such schools: (a) should talk openly about the inappropriate youth practices common in public high schools and how to deal with those; (b) discuss more frequently asked questions of the Muslim youth and how to effectively answer those; (c) involve students in the projects in which they could interact with the communities beyond Muslims to help with their social development; (d) take them on fieldtrips to their respective high schools; (e) and "have some sort of program where public school counselors come to orient kids in the private school." Participants

suggested that their public high schools: (a) provide better social support activities and help with establishing social networks; (b) provide more outreach to, and coordination with, the Islamic schools or Muslim families; (c) put more effort in getting to know their new students and their schooling and family backgrounds; and (d) offer more culturally congruent mentoring and support activities, such as opportunities for better introductions, gender-sensitive groupings, etc.

Sub-Question Three: *What are some key changes and challenges they encounter in their new schools during transitions? How do those affect their personal, academic, and social adjustments?*

While some of the changes and challenges participants experienced in their new schools are not uncharacteristic of normal high school transitions, others were unique to their situation because of their Islamic schooling background, family and personal religious lifestyle, and frequently "stigmatized" identities. They were challenged by many commonly experienced organizational and social changes in the beginning, such as unfamiliarity and otherness of the new setup; guards and security checks; large buildings with many floors; frequent movement through crowded hallways; ID badges, lunch codes, scheduling practices; occasional system hiccups; no more homeroom; anonymity; role loss; and new peers and teachers. Nonetheless, adjusting to many of those changes was not an issue for them beyond their first few days or weeks. It was the following specific challenges that often prolonged their personal, academic, and social adjustments beyond their freshman, and often, well into early junior year.

Less "Identity Safe" Environment

Whereas participants' Muslim or religio-ethnic identities were cherished and very much part of the environment in their old schools, they became "foreign" and potentially "risky" for many to manage in the new environment. Girls continued to wear *hijab* in their new schools, and most experienced a sense of becoming "nobody overnight" or "the only *hijabi*" in their classrooms. For the first time, many also encountered "stares" and the burden of being judged as "terrorist" or "foreign" by peers in a school setting. Many became "shy" and "silent" in their classes, and experienced persistent anxiety and a nagging sense of loneliness as a result. They often responded by limiting their focus only on classes in order to stay preoccupied and avoid social engagements, which also prolonged their isolation. Boys, on the other hand, experienced anonymity, except when they stood out because of their phenotype or different-sounding names, and experienced some of the same challenges as the girls. They also experienced "awkward" encounters when their peers or teachers got their names wrong. Such experiences often became a factor in their decision to keep a low profile in classes and shift their focus toward team sports instead, which in turn, helped with their social adjustment outside of classes, but adversely affected their grades during their freshman year.

Inadequate Accommodations for Basic Religious Norms

Loss of built-in accommodations for the five basic religious norms (i.e., food, dress, prayers, fasting during *Ramadan*, and *Eid*) was another key change that the participants encountered in their new schools. Their high schools did provide accommodation upon request in most cases; however, such accommodations were often inadequate except for food. As a result, adjusting their basic religious norms remained an

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issue for the Muslim youths throughout their freshman and sophomore years. While dress was a nonissue for boys, girls did get permission to wear sweatpants and long-sleeve shirts in PE, which became a "hassle," invited peer questions and misperceptions, and discouraged participation in sports.

Adjusting prayers remained another major issue for many participants until their junior year. While some managed to get accommodations early with the help of MSA or parents, many delayed prayer until after school. Fasting during Ramadan also became difficult when it coincided with PE and warmer days. Similarly, taking a day off for Eid was problematic when it coincided with a mid-term or a project deadline, which burdened many to either make-up or miss festivities.

Incongruent School Practices

Participants often found two of the most common practices in their high schools, i.e., gender mixing and dances, incongruent with their religious lifestyle and challenging. The challenge was based on the Islamic etiquette of avoiding gender mixing that involves close physical contact and touching between non-family members of the opposite sex. Having non-Muslim male peers or teachers was a big psychological shift for girls from non-coed schools, and working with male peers more closely than before also became awkward for the girls from coed schools. Furthermore, gender mixing in PE continued to be challenging for both boys and girls. Pairing up with female peers in PE uniforms was often awkward for many boys. PE remained a long-term challenge for the girls due to both uniform and more casual interactions. Finally, almost everyone avoided

participating in school dances because of inappropriate mixing, dress, and music

involving sexually suggestive lyrics.

Universal Departmentalization, Tracking and Prior Peer Cliques

While understanding and adjusting to the procedural aspects of ubiquitous

departmentalization and tracking practices in their public high schools was not a major

issue for the participants, their negative effects on social adjustments were felt by many.

Such practices often led to the teachers' impersonal ways and a general lack of interest in

understanding students' backgrounds in large high schools, which made it harder for

many participants to connect with them during most of their freshman year. The

practices also caused frequent peer turnover in classes, and thus led to added difficulties

in connecting with peers and establishing friendship circles for many participants. While

most of the participants lost their friendship and support networks with their transitions,

their peers from feeder middle schools often came with intact friendship circles, and

frequently stayed in their own small peer cliques in the beginning. This, in turn, further

diminished participants' chances of connecting with their peers and establishing

friendship circles, except when there were other *hijabis* or students who relocated and

shared an ethnic identity with them.

Incongruent Peer Lifestyles or Interactional Norms

The female participants in general and those from non-coed schools in particular,

also encountered difficulties in connecting with their peers due to incongruent lifestyles

or interactional norms. While they generally avoided interacting with their male peers

until they learned to interact with them in businesslike manner instead of the prevalent

hugs and handshakes, and usually "did not befriend them," they stayed open to their female peers. However, when they connected with their female peers in group work or "by chance," many realized that most of their conversations often revolved around gossip, dates, broken relations, and many other topics that did not interest them. In many cases, increased acquaintances also resulted in invitations to parties, which they mostly avoided. Their avoidance frequently led to increased peer questions and pressure.

Ignorance and Misrepresentation

Prevalent ignorance about Islam and Muslims, and misrepresentation in classrooms or textbooks, was another major challenge for the participants throughout their freshman and most of the sophomore year. In their conversations with peers and teachers, they frequently got questions about Islam and Muslims. The questions regarding *hijab* and dress, diet, socializing (specifically dances, parties, dating), their nationality, Islamic worship practices (i.e., fasting, *Eid*, and praying) and beliefs (specifically related to terrorism and suicide-bombings) indicated that their peers had little or no knowledge about these issues or topics. In addition, conversations between the Muslim youths and school staff, as well as questions frequently posed to girls in classes, also revealed that the staff generally lacked knowledge about Islam and Muslims as well. The majority of the participants felt that in the subjects that covered world religions or cultures, the information presented on Islam and Muslims was either "made up" or cursory and superficial. In some cases, their teachers used them as a class resource or "expert" on Islam to both verify and help answer questions from other students. While many liked helping, they often felt uncomfortable when questions dealt

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with geo-political events and not religion, or they lacked knowledge on a topic, or when the "manner of questioning was inappropriate and offensive." Some participants also got "annoyed by nonstop questions."

Stereotypes and Prejudices

Dealing with anti-Muslim/Islam stereotypes and prejudices was an ongoing issue and a persistent source of anxiety for the participants in general, and a source of long-term isolation for the girls in particular. While stereotypes and prejudicial treatment by peers was more frequent, only four participants reported such treatment by a teacher at least once, primarily in history or government related classes. The prejudicial treatment by peers frequently took the form of inappropriate "side comments" and "taunts." Such a treatment by teachers often involved misperceptions or mischaracterization, and occasional hostility. The female participants, who often wore *hijab*, also felt constantly judged or misjudged by their peers as "terrorists" and "foreign," and occasionally by their teachers. Such feelings and perceptions often caused anxiety, and many female participants often chose to stay isolated during most of their freshman year instead of interacting with their peers and deal with such a treatment. Participants frequently mentioned media and general ignorance about Islam and Muslims as the primary reasons for such stereotypes and prejudices. Some also thought that the public school system was also "failing" in educating students about "other religions and cultures."

More Sports, Extracurricular Opportunities, and the Increasing Workload

While increasing academic workload was a nonissue for the female participants because they often continued to stay focused on classes and avoid extracurricular

activities and sports during their freshman and sophomore years, keeping up with the increasing academic workload often became a challenge for many boys during most of their freshman year. Many struggled with keeping a balance between their classes and the time-commitments for sports and new friendships. They experienced some grade slump in the beginning. As a result, boys often "started to cut down" on sports to manage the increasing workload during sophomore year.

Sub-Question Four: *What additional factors related to their personal and family background, Islamic schools, and public high schools do they find helpful during their adjustment efforts?*

Throughout their transition process, participants found several factors or resources related to their own personal and family background as well as Islamic and public high schools helpful. Those with more helpful resources seemed to adjust faster in their new schools. Some of those resources also helped them avoid, or effectively manage, the negative psychological outcomes of the transition including anxiety, stress, and the sense of otherness or loneliness.

Among the personal and background factors that the participants found helpful include: (a) "familiar" or non-stigmatized social identities—which often helped them connect with other non-Muslim peers with whom they shared such an identity; (b) prior public schooling; (c) engagement with *masjid*, which provided an avenue for social support and "refuge" for some during the early phase of transitions; (d) *hijab* for girls; (e) having siblings, family members like cousins or friends going to the same school; (f) parental "strictness" and high expectations; (g) open communication between parents and

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the participants; (h) parental awareness of the public school system; and (i) their active involvement in high school.

The Islamic school related factors that many participants found helpful during their transitions include coed classes, gym or a *masjid* on the school premises, and access to teachers during transitions. Among the public high school factors that the Muslim youth find helpful, included (a) neighborhood school; (b) school ranking and code-of-conduct expectations; (c) smaller school size; (d) female teachers; (e) teachers' openness to student viewpoints and small gestures of kindness; (f) teachers' exposure to Muslim students and understanding of their background; (g) proactive accommodation for some religious practices; (h) friends or other *hijabis* in the school and classes; (i) MSA; and (j) diversity of the region.

Discussion

This study explored the process involved in high school transitions of the Muslim adolescents who move from American K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools. In doing so, the study has made several important contributions not only to the existing research on high school transitions, but it has also complimented the few studies that have assessed American Islamic schools, Islamic or religio-cultural identity development in such schools, and some specific challenges Muslim youths encounter in public schools. The discussion in the next few paragraphs elaborates some of the insights offered by the key findings of this study.

Extending the transition research to a rapidly growing, but largely overlooked new kind of a private feeder school and student demographics, has been the single most

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important contribution of this study. Additionally, heeding the growing calls from some researchers (see Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007), the study took a process-oriented approach towards conceptualizing such transitions, and has contributed an elaborate process model to provide an integrative view of the basic components involved and how those interact over time to produce various outcomes for different students. In such perusal, the study has also (a) identified some additional dimensions requiring adjustments during such transitions that are specific to the Muslim youths and institutional-discontinuities between the two school systems, (b) introduced the concept of adjustment phases, and (c) made explicit the unfolding nature of adjustments and the time dimension.

One key finding of this study was that the Muslim students who attend K-8 Islamic schools often live in purposefully structured environments both inside and outside the school, and as a result, adopt a religio-cultural lifestyle that involves following some specific religious norms and codes-of-conduct or interactional norms. This is consistent with the findings from some other studies that investigated Islamic schools, their influence on family lifestyle and socialization habits, and the religio-cultural identity and observant lifestyle Muslim youths often adopt (see Cristillo, 2004; Joseph & Riedel, 2008; Zine, 2007). The finding is interesting in the context of school transitions involving Islamic and public high schools, however, because it underscores the additional personal and institutional dimensions (that do not apply to the public middle to high school transitions), which require adjustments on the part of the Muslim youth.

At the institutional level, while the existing transition studies have often focused on organizational—climate, procedural, and academics—and social discontinuities (see Barber & Olsen, 2004; Reyes et al., 2000; Rice, 2001), the present study introduces a new dimension involving cultural discontinuity that requires adjustments. Similarly, at the personal level, while most of those same studies often focused on the psychological dimension, the present study introduced identity salience, religious norms, and interactional norms as additional dimensions.

The second key finding of this study highlighted the fact that Muslim adolescents' transitions from K-8 Islamic schools to secular public high schools involve a multi-dimensional and multi-phase adaptation process that unfolds over time and continues through the early junior year for many students. The finding is important in many respects. While the idea of multiple dimensions requiring adjustments is not new in high school transition literature, this study introduces the concept of phases. In some ways, the idea of some phases is implicit in the transition literature, especially the preparation phase (see Mac Iver, 1990; Anderson et al., 2000; Mizelle, 2005). However, such a lack has to do with two likely causes. First, most of the existing transition studies are primarily quantitative in nature. Second, among the few qualitative or mixed method studies, where the concepts like phase or stage are likely to emerge, none took a process-oriented approach to studying such transitions (see Kinney, 1993; Cushman, 2006; Cooper & Liou, 2007). In general, while the adjustments in several dimensions often take place in parallel and gradually across the multiple phases and over time, the awareness of specific phases can facilitate targeted transition support activities.

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Additionally, the idea of unfolding challenges and adjustments over time is almost absent in the existing transition literature except in Benner and Graham's (2009) study, where they found that Black and Hispanic students who transitioned to racially incongruent urban high schools felt increasingly lonely across the first two years of high school, and the high levels of anxiety they experienced across the transition did not diminish with time. This finding is consistent in some respect with the present study, where the incongruence was not racial but religio-cultural instead, and most of the female participants experienced similar feelings well into their junior year.

The third important finding of the present study revealed that Muslim youths receive varying degrees of mentoring and support from their families and friends, Islamic schools, and public high schools. However, the mentoring and support is often inadequate due to some combination of: (a) inadequate parental exposure to public school system (in many cases), (b) no coordinated or joint mentoring and support programs between the two school systems, (c) feeder middle school focus of high school transition mentoring and support activities, and (d) the general lack of awareness on the part of high school staff about the Muslim youths' schooling background and prolonged isolation for the girls and social support needs during the transition.

Lack of understanding on the part of high schools about the Muslim youths' background is understandable, because the literature on the Islamic schools is slowly emerging. However, it is disheartening to find such a dismal situation when some of the same transition support needs were highlighted over two decades ago, and continue to emerge in more recent literature (see Anderson et al., 2000; Mac Iver, 1990; Mizelle,

2005). Mac Iver, and the others, have frequently recommended to: (a) provide students with information about the new schools; (b) involve parents in the new schools; (c) give students the social support; and (d) bring middle and high school faculties together to learn about each other's curriculum and requirements. In fact, the female participants of this study frequently reported the need for bringing the two schools together and social support, because social adjustment remained the single biggest challenge for them throughout their freshman and sophomore years.

The other most compelling findings of the present study however have to do with some of the specific challenges the Muslim youths faced during their transition for an extended period of time, especially girls. In particular, five specific set of challenges were found that magnify the negative effects of the transition on student adjustments across various dimensions throughout the Muslim students' freshman and sophomore years: (a) incongruent school practices (specifically gender mixing and dances); (b) inadequate religious accommodations; (c) incongruent peer lifestyle and interactional norms; (d) ignorance and misrepresentation; and (e) stereotypes and prejudices by peers and (occasionally) teachers. Similar findings have been shared by many other researchers (see Abu El-Haj, 2007; Carter & El Hindi, 1999; Douglass & Dunn, 2003; Haddad & Smith, 1996; Hodge, 2002; Jackson, 2010; Mahmoud, 1996; McBrien, 2005; Morgan, 2008; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Sabry & Bruna, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2007; Smith, 1999; Zine, 2007).

Limitations of the Study

While several design features contributed to the strength of the current study (see chapter three for details), some limitations and caveats should be noted. First, qualitative research acknowledges the impact of the researcher in shaping data collection, analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2005; Maxwell, 2005). This limits the study's potential applicability to other researchers in other settings. As far back as 1985, Lincoln and Guba discussed this limitation when they wrote, "The burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The investigator's role is to provide sufficient descriptive data to make those judgments possible" (p. 298). However, "sufficient descriptive data," as is the case in this study, allows for an internal validity that in turn allows for "transferability" of the results to similar settings (Lincoln & Guba).

Another limitation of the study has to do with the timing of the first set of freshmen interviews. The first set was conducted when the participants had already started their freshman year. Ideally, those interviews with the freshman participants should have taken place prior to their first day of high school to better capture their pre-transition perceptions instead of relying on their memories. Logistical delays in getting approval for this research prevented the timely data-collection. Nonetheless, the broad cross-section of participants and multiple interviews and follow-up efforts helped mitigate such limitations and the pre-transition participant perceptions were a very small aspect of this overall study.

Finally, the study was also limited by the primary reliance on youth-reported data. However, the adolescents themselves are the best reporters of their subjective

experiences. In addition, due to better design features, such as better rapport and multiple interviews and follow-ups (as was the case in this study), some of the potential risks were also mitigated.

Implications

To provide preliminary guidance, this study explored how institutional discontinuities encountered during the transition from K-8 Islamic to secular public high schools affect the personal, academic, and socio-cultural adaptation of the Muslim adolescents. The major contribution is not to outline specific policy recommendations but rather to identify clear targets for policies, programs, and actions that might ease the transition for the Muslim youths. The latter is a fundamental prerequisite for the former; a clear sense of the underlying problem is essential prior to the generation of its solution. Participants' accounts reveal five specific issues that were problematic for them, and need attention by various stakeholders: (a) insufficient transition mentoring and support (especially social support), (b) inadequate religious accommodations, (c) incongruent practices (gender mixing and dances), (d) ignorance and misrepresentation, and (e) stereotypes and prejudices. In the light of these clearly defined problems, it is my hope that the following discussion will help identify ways to lessen the magnitude of the difficulties the Muslim youths face, and ease their transitions. Some possible directions for future research that may emerge from the current study findings are also discussed.

Implications for Policymaker, School Districts, and Education Practitioners

"... Young people do not 'shed their constitutional rights' at the schoolhouse door ..."

Justice White—*Goss v. Lopez*, 419 U.S. 565 (1975)

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Education about religious cultures and the needs of students is about more than just tolerance and understanding. Part of it is also about meeting the requirements of the American Constitution and federal law. More important, it is about working towards providing a positive learning experience in public schools in this country and ultimately embracing the diversity of our nation while trying to successfully integrate students into our nation. School districts that are aware of diverse constituents and their specific needs are likely to be better able to positively influence student learning. They will also be better equipped to develop a school culture that engages in a pedagogy of caring. As the numbers of diverse cultural minorities increase in public schools, principals, teachers, and other school policy makers must make the effort to understand the students and families that they serve. This study reinforces the importance of being proactive in addressing the needs of students in order to avoid their marginalization in public schools. It is important to reiterate that secular schooling cannot pretend to be an ideologically neutral space when it affirms certain identities and discourages or marginalizes others (Zine, 2007).

Targeted transition mentoring and support. Although it is unrealistic to believe that schools alone can eliminate all the transition related challenges different sub-groups of students might face in public high schools, the findings of this study suggest additional steps educators can take to help ease the transition related difficulties for the Muslim youths. While orientations and other information sharing activities frequently offered by public high schools are helpful, this study makes it clear that additional programming is needed to provide better social support and bring the types of schools identified in this study together. The transition into high school often disrupts friendship

and social support networks at a time when both are particularly important for adolescents. Such disruptions are particularly hard for the Muslim youths because they do not come with the intact peer and friendship circles that is common in the case of feeder middle schools; the Islamic schools often serve students from multiple school boundaries. Therefore, transition programs should include activities that give the Muslim youths opportunities to develop positive relationships with older students, other incoming students, and school staff.

Additionally, the challenge for both public and Islamic educational systems is to develop ways to work with each other in order to help ease the Muslim youths' high school transitions. Families choosing a more spiritually centered educational experience by selecting faith-based alternative schools is a circumstance neither new nor unique to Islamic schools. Bringing the two school systems closer would not only help ease high school transitions (see Mac Iver, 1990; Mizelle, 2005), it would also help to avoid the segmentation of schools into separate cultural and religious enclaves that have no connection with one another. More cooperation and interactions between the various religious schools and public high schools would provide an opportunity for everyone to grow and learn. It is by recognizing religious pluralism as an intrinsic and a positive aspect of society, a truly inclusive public school system would withstand the challenge of any social split along racial and religious lines.

Proactive accommodations for basic religious needs. Regarding religious practices that observant Muslim students who reach puberty often seek to comply with in our country's non-Muslim public school culture during the school day, the most common

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areas of conflict for Muslim students are the performance of ritual prayer, fasting, *Eid*, dress, and, for Muslim students of any age, dietary restrictions. The participants in this study discussed all of these areas. It is important to reiterate that, because of powerful special interest groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union, many school officials misunderstand the concept of "separation of church and state" and believe that public schools cannot allow religious expression (Flesher, 2001 as cited in Hodge, 2002). However, the free exercise clause of the United States Constitutions protects students' right to freely express their faith. School officials may not discourage students from participating in religious activities or expressing religious viewpoints as long as such activities do not disrupt normal school functioning. Moreover, under the Equal Access Act (P.L. 98-377), Muslim or any other religious students have the same right to school facilities as secular students (Clinton, 1995; Riley, 1999).

The United States Department of Education has issued guidelines summarizing the federal constitutional and legal requirements allowing students to pray in public elementary and secondary schools, following Section 9524 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. In order to receive funds under the ESEA, the school must certify in writing to the appropriate state agency that it has no policy that "prevents, or otherwise denies participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary and secondary schools as set forth in this guidance" (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Accommodation of Muslim prayer and Ramadan is mentioned as a specific example. Furthermore, on more than one occasion, the United States Department of Justice has

sided with, and intervened on behalf of, Muslim students to receive religious accommodations—for example, the case of Nashala Hearn in Muskogee, Oklahoma, who was suspended twice from her public school for wearing her *hijab* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004); or the case of Muslim students in the Lewisville Independent School District in Texas, who were denied an accommodation to pray (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).

An observant Muslim student performs the Muslim ritual prayer five times a day at specified times, with one, the early afternoon prayer, falling during normal public school hours. The observant Muslim student needs a relatively quiet, clean place where he or she can pray for 5 to 10 minutes without fear of being disrupted. In addition, before the prayer, the Muslim student probably will need permission to go to a washroom for a few minutes to engage in a ritual washing of his or her hands to the elbows, face and feet immediately before prayer (symbolic wiping of the top sides of the socks is permissible instead of washing the feet in most Muslim traditions). Federal law, as discussed above, protects an accommodation for voluntary student prayer such as this. Conversations with school leaders regarding identifying potential places for prayer in advance of student or parent requests is a way to be proactive in meeting the needs of these diverse students and making them feel welcome to be who they are as part of the public school culture.

Observant Muslims who have reached puberty are also required to fast during *Ramadan* (the ninth month of the *Hijri* or Islamic religious lunar calendar). The basic rules require that fasting Muslims not eat or drink anything, including water, from break of dawn to sunset. The month should be noted on school calendars for planning if there

are Muslim students in the district, reminders should be sent to staff, and adequate accommodations should be provided. Specifically, students who are fasting might request to be excused from the lunchroom during the month of Ramadan or strenuous physical activities. However, tracking of Muslim students who are fasting on a day-to-day basis, especially adolescent girls, by school staff, should be discouraged as one of the exemptions from fasting is menstruation.

Calendaring of the two Islamic holidays is also important. The Islamic religious lunar calendar moves up 11 to 12 days every year against the solar calendar. While some Muslim communities in the United States use "astronomical new moon," others still rely on the old Islamic tradition of the visual sighting of a new moon after sunset for the start of the new month. As a result, first of the two Islamic holidays, which celebrates the end of the month of fasting, might not be known until the night before it occurs. The second holiday is keyed into the annual Pilgrimage ("*Hajj*") to Mecca, and is often not known until approximately one week in advance. This may cause some frustration for school administrators dealing with Muslim students and families who desire to take the holiday off from school, but are unable to make their request in advance. However, the task is not as impossible to plan for as it might seem, as the holidays will be known for years in advance to fall on one of two potential dates. A local or national Islamic organization could be consulted if there is difficulty retrieving this information off the internet. It is strongly recommended to at least avoid those potential holidays for major school-wide testing in order to avoid the necessity of make-up dates for Muslim students who choose to take time off for their holiday.

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Observant Muslim youths may follow traditional Islamic guidelines in their choice of dress. Typically, an observant Muslim male once he reaches puberty wears clothing that covers from his navel to his knees. The observant Muslim female once she reaches puberty typically covers everything except her hands, face and feet. Modest Islamic dress requirements create issues in public school environments in the context of gym classes and with school district adopted athletic uniforms as evidenced in this study. Students in public schools may ask for accommodations around dress for gym classes or to be excused from swimming in mixed gender classes. School administrators need to encourage and hold staff accountable for making the necessary accommodations for students when there is a request, and utilize appropriate guidelines issued by state athletic associations that serve public schools and are in agreement with the law. Again, school policies informed by a community's constituents are recommended. In order to be proactive, school districts might consider offering all male or all female swimming classes if swimsuits are to be worn. It is important to note that observant Muslim females, even in a class of all females, may refuse to swim if there is a male teacher present even if the class consists of all females.

Dress code policies and education about the *hijab* are other issues that schools districts need to address. While interviews with the participants revealed only a few instances of administrative staff being confused about whether a Muslim girl was wearing a scarf on her head as a matter of religious obligation, all educators should be well past making this kind of mistake. This points out the need for adequate cultural training so that administrators and teachers are aware of the legitimate religious dress requirements

for Muslim girls. Again, this goes back to good policy making informed by a community's constituents. While not an issue in this study, any school dress code policies that do not allow accommodation for religious-mandated headwear should be updated to comply with current law as evidenced in the Nashala Hearn case mentioned earlier. The Hearn case and specifically the Department of Justice's memorandum provide a roadmap for Muslim girls to gain the right to wear a *hijab* in public schools.

Dietary restrictions of observant Muslims are also important to know about. In general, the Islamic dietary laws prohibit eating any food that is derived from a pig and anything containing alcohol. Additionally, some observant Muslims will not eat meat that has not been prepared following traditional Islamic law. School menus that indicate entrees containing pork and contain vegetarian or other options helps families and especially young children feel confident in their selection when buying and eating their lunch at school. Taking notice of diverse students' food restrictions, especially at school events, also is a way to remind students and their families that a school wants to see all children participate in school life and school sponsored social events. Although the participants in this study were able to navigate the lunch line with some ease, it may be more difficult for a younger child.

Mitigating incongruent practices. Islamic rules also prohibit touching between non-family members of the opposite sex beyond the age of puberty. Observant Muslim adolescents may feel uneasy about shaking the hand or accepting a hug by a teacher of the opposite sex or participating in coed physical education classes involving physical contact with the opposite sex, while other Muslim students may be indifferent about such

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physical contact. School leaders need to ensure that teachers and staff members are aware of cultural and religious sensitivities such as these when interacting with students. This can be achieved through professional staff development as well as through ongoing communication with parents in school communities.

Addressing ignorance and misrepresentations. The participants in this study encountered a general lack of knowledge about, and often misrepresentation of, Islam and Muslims among peers and educators. As school communities become more diverse, school leaders can play a critical role in making sure that informed conversations about religions and cultural diversity become a part of the school curriculum. Informed rather than superficial kinds of conversations in classrooms about religion and cultural diversity will foster understanding among the students themselves. The knowledge construction process is one dimension of what Banks (2006) has identified as dimensions of multicultural education.   He identifies content integration, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction and an empowering school culture as the other dimensions (p. 146). According to Banks, "Multicultural education fosters the public good and the overarching democratic goals of the United States" (p. 146).

The solution would seem to require a two-pronged approach. With respect to peers' lack of knowledge, public school leaders need to evaluate district curriculum to determine the scope and sequence of curriculum related to Islam and Muslims and indeed other religious and cultural minorities. Because "the knowledge in the school curriculum and textbooks has a powerful influence on how students view and experience the world" (Banks, 2006, p. 147), curriculum that does not provide adequate education about religion

and cultures impacting our society needs to be improved. Staff also needs to be educated about the needs of diverse students through in-service and ongoing training and education. Particular attention should be paid to minorities present in the school district. Additionally, teachers need to know their content well in addition to encouraging students to share their life experiences and perspectives and directing class discussions where knowledge is constructed. New and experienced teachers need to recognize their role in knowledge construction and its benefits.

Reducing stereotypes and prejudices. Muslim Americans, like many other marginalized groups, are forced to deal with a gamut of challenges, prejudices, and stereotypes. While adults may have the social and emotional tools for compartmentalizing their lives and still maintain a strong sense of self, this balancing act can be far more difficult and even toxic to the healthy development of an adolescent or young adult. Tackling the ignorance and misrepresentation (as highlighted above) is the first step in dealing with stereotypes and prejudices. However, school leaders can help make schools a safer place for students of all backgrounds by actively addressing stereotypes and prejudices head on. One way, they can address the issue by encouraging middle and high school teachers to openly talk about stereotypes and prejudice, their origins, and likely negative effects on people in their classrooms. Teachers can engage their students in various projects to investigate different stereotypes, their source, and how they influence people's views of one another. Through such efforts, students can gain a better understanding of the dangers of stereotyping and the unfairness of prejudices involving an entire group of people.

The way forward. There are several other things school districts can do to protect themselves and the rights of their students. School district board members can make certain that their policies are up-to-date and reflective of the needs and rights of their constituents, including reasonable religious accommodations. America's schools are changing and school boards need to focus on hiring administrative and teaching staff that are or are interested in becoming culturally competent in dealing with the changing diversity of schools, as well as hiring a diverse staff that reflects the student body and school community. This task is simplified when school districts actively engage community members, students, and community leaders in the development of policies, procedures and curriculum sensitive to religious and ethnic minorities. This approach is both proactive and collaborative, and beneficial to the entire school community and society.

Another way in which school districts can be proactive in assessing the needs of their students and making reasonable accommodations is to make available an optional form or add a statement to current enrollment forms giving parents the opportunity to indicate that they want to request an accommodation for their children. As school districts survey parents and students with such a tool, they will become more aware of the diversity of their school population and begin to recognize and anticipate need for accommodations rather than relying on remaining reactive to requests of diverse students or possible litigations. Muslim parents, students and Islamic communities are a growing part of public school districts' constituencies.

Implications for Schools of Education and Training

Participants' experiences glaringly reveal that there is across the board ignorance about religion and culture in public schools, both among the staff and the students. In fact, many participants complained that the public school system is failing in adequately educating the citizenry about religion and culture in general and about Islam and Muslims in particular. Their concerns are not farfetched however. The teaching of Islam in the United States has been characterized by numerous stereotypes, distortions, omissions, and textbook inaccuracies. (see Said, 1978, 2001; Sabry & Bruna, 2007; Moore, 2009; Morgan, 2008; Jackson, 2010). In fact, the problem goes beyond the public schools. Reflecting the massive secularization of American's political, economic, and social institutions, educational institutions including colleges and schools of education have almost completely eliminated religion from the curriculum (Nord, 1995).. Such a removal is unfortunate because religion remains a central force in both American society and world politics (Moore).

Most Americans are woefully ignorant of the importance of religion in American and world history, and have great difficulty in understanding geo-politics involving regions where religion is central to daily life (Findley, 2001). Indeed, as Nord (1995) asked rhetorically, if students do not know "how Islam traditionally fuses the sacred with the secular, how are they going to understand the politics of the Middle East?" (p. 207). Of course, without understanding religion (both Islam and Hinduism) as well as geography, students cannot comprehend the Pakistani and Indian conflict over Kashmir, or the other religious and political tensions in other parts of the world. If we aspire to provide students with a comprehensive liberal education, religion must be tied to the

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humanities and social sciences, because any intellectually honest examination of art, architecture, philosophy, jurisprudence, and the social sciences reveals the central role religion has played in the development of these disciplines (Nord).

No one can deny that teaching about religion presents educators with difficult decisions regarding curriculum and instructional approaches. For example, like any other major religion, Islam has a long and complex history; an elaborate theological foundation; highly developed legal system; divisions among adherents over theology, law, and practices; and a long list of achievements in philosophy, literature, art, architecture, geography, medicine, mathematics, and science (Findley, 2001). Moreover, the teaching of Islam in secondary schools, like many complex issues that are often framed as "controversial," has not been immune from intense political pressures from various actors with competing ideologies and goals (Moore, 2009). The task is further complicated because there is widespread disagreement among scholars, educators, and policymakers over curriculum philosophy and content in general (Nord, 1995). Nonetheless, scholars and educators have a responsibility to develop a historically accurate curriculum and instructional programs that comply with constitutional law and are pedagogically sound.

Despite the above highlighted challenges, scholars generally agree that there are some core values, beliefs, historical events, and practices that characterize Islam and should be part of the secondary school curriculum (Wheeler, 2003). Most scholars agree that students should know the theological meaning of Islam, the transcendence and indivisibility of Allah (God), the role of Muhammad and his deeds (*sunnah*) and sayings

(*hadith*), the importance of the Quran to Islam, *Shariah* (law), the Five Pillars of Islam,

the Six Pillars of Faith, the contributions of Muslims to world civilization, and the

reasons for the rapid expansion of and the divisions within Islam (Nord & Haynes, 1998;

Wheeler).

Given the global position of Islam, the high birth rates in Muslim countries, the

fusion of Islam with political and nationalist causes, and the rapid increase of Muslims

within its own boundaries, it is in America's best interests to educate citizens about this

diverse and dynamic religion (Moore, 2009). America's education institutions must take

the role of religion in history and contemporary politics seriously, and help students

develop a better understanding of major world religions and their roles in American and

world history, law, and geo-political relations (Nord, 1995).

Implications for Muslim Parents and Islamic Schools

The findings of this study also highlight several implications for Muslim parents

and Islamic schools. Parental involvement plays a vital role in students' transition and

successful adjustment. Specifically, open communication between the youths and their

parents is the single most helpful factor outside the two schools systems. Moreover,

active parental engagement in public high schools can not only facilitate staff attention,

but also help get much needed accommodations. However, it is crucial for the Muslim

parents to become better informed about the United States public school system, their

rights as citizens, and the rights of their children under the United States Constitution and

various federal laws in order to better help their children.

K-8 Islamic schools must focus on developing better mentoring and transition support activities. Some of the activities they can institute which can help support their students transition to public high schools include: (a) engaging students in more open conversations about high school life, socio-cultural differences, and some effective strategies for responding to the commonly experienced challenges illuminated by this study; (b) providing both students and their parents information about various aspects of local public high schools; (c) reaching out to local school districts and public high schools to institute shared transition support programs; (d) arranging student visitations their local public high school; and (e) engaging the students in projects that involve more community service and engagement in order to facilitate their social development and exposure to the larger society.

Implications for Future Research

Much of adolescents' high school transition experiences in general, and about the Muslim youths from the growing number of the K-8 Islamic schools in particular, remain to be explored. Recognizing the difficulties that students often face as they progress from one level of education to the next, particularly when they belong to frequently marginalized groups, or move across school systems that are built upon somewhat different goals and values systems, school administrators and teachers need to develop a better understanding of those challenges, and develop appropriate interventions that meet the needs of the transitioning adolescents during different phases of their transitions. Research can play a stronger role in guiding such efforts.

The process model for the Muslim youths' transitions developed in this study makes theoretical and empirical contributions by linking together various basic components involved in the Muslim adolescents' transitions, and how those interact over time to produce various outcomes. Specifically, the model has identified: (a) various discontinuities between the two school systems, (b) institutional and personal dimensions requiring adjustments (many of which are also grounded in the existing transition literature), (c) a set of possible adjustment phases, (d) the unfolding nature of adjustments over time, and (e) many contextual and intervening factors that shape or influence the Muslim adolescents' transitions. Further work should continue to build upon and revise this model to better reflect the reality of how school transitions unfold for Muslim youths from different backgrounds (and regions) so that research can play a more useful role in both informing school districts and education practitioners as well as guiding their support efforts as they continue to wrestle with transition related issues in their day-to-day work. A similar process model should also be constructed and tested for the public middle school to high school transitions for various student populations. In fact, the model opens the door for operationalizing many variables, and provides ready-made hypotheses to be tested in follow up quantitative and mixed-method studies.

This study has also identified several aspects that continue to be challenging for Muslim youths in public high schools, such as incongruent practices and inadequate religious accommodations, ignorance and misrepresentation, stereotypes and prejudice, etc. Additional research about Muslim youths in American public schools needs to be done to further understand the nature, source, negative effects, and possible remedies for

those challenges. In the past few years interest in, and research on, Muslims and the increasing *Islamophobia* have multiplied, but there remains much work to be done in this area. We are only in the initial stages in many ways. Additional studies on Muslim youths at the middle and elementary school levels in also needed in order to understand how younger Muslim boys and girls are faring.

With regard to teacher training and curriculum, research on how universities' teacher and administrative leadership preparation programs are preparing future educators and administrators to effectively lead schools with increasingly diverse students and school communities is also important.   Further studies on how and what non-Muslim youths learn about Islam and Muslims as well as how they process the information they encounter at school, in their communities, through the media, and through Muslim and non-Muslim peers would also be informative in designing effective curriculum and education policies regarding Islam and Muslims, or for that matter, many other religio-cultural groups.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A—DEFINITION OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Academic Tracking
> Academic tracking is the practice of placing students in different classes based on perceived differences in their abilities.

Adaptation
> Adaptation is defined here as the process of altering one's behavior to fit in with a changed environment or circumstances.

Adjustment
> Adjustment is defined here as the subjective experiences that are associated with, and result, from attempts at adaptation.

APA
> American Psychological Association

Culture
> Culture is defined here as a shared system of beliefs, values, and attitudes that influences both perceptions and behaviors (norms) of a particular social group.

Cultural Discontinuity
> Cultural discontinuity is defined here as a school based behavioral process where the cultural value–based learning preferences and practices of many ethnic minority students (those typically originating from home or in the case of present study from K-8 Islamic schools) are discontinued at school.

Cultural Norms
> Cultural norms are behavioral patterns that are typical of specific groups. Such behaviors are learned from parents, teachers, peers, and others whose beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors take place in the context of their own group.

Cultural Values
> Cultural values identify those objects, conditions or characteristics that members of a society or a cultural group consider important; that is, valuable.

Eid

Eid in Arabic means a festivity, a celebration, a recurring happiness, or a feast. In Islam, there are two *Eids*, namely *Eid Al-Fitr* (the feast of Ramadan or breaking fast) and *Eid Al-Adha* (the feast of sacrifice). The first *Eid* is celebrated by Muslims after fasting the month of Ramadan as a matter of thanks and gratitude to Almighty *Allah* (God). It takes place on the first day of Shawwal, the tenth month of the *Hijri* (lunar) calendar. The second *Eid* is the Feast of Sacrifice and it is celebrated for the memory of prophet *Ibrahim* (Abraham) trying to sacrifice his son *Isma'il* (Ishmael). This *Eid* lasts four days between the tenth and the thirteenth day of *Zul-Hijjah*, the twelfth month of the *Hijri* (lunar) calendar.

Hijab

Hijab literally means *cover* in Arabic. While the term is commonly used to refer to the headscarf worn by Muslim women; however, *Hijab* includes not only covering one's hair, but also wearing modest (loose and non-transparent) clothing commonly referred to as *Abaya* or *Jalbab* in order to avoid unwanted attention of men outside of one's immediate family. *Hijab* here is used to refer to the Muslim headscarf.

Hijri (Lunar) Calendar

A lunar calendar is a calendar that is based on cycles of the moon phase. The only widely used purely lunar calendar is the Islamic calendar or *Hijri* calendar, whose year always consists of 12 lunar months. According to *Wikipedia*, a feature of a purely lunar year, on the Islamic calendar model, is that the calendar ceases to be linked to the seasons, and drifts each year by 11 days (or 12 days in case of leap year), and comes back to the position it had in relation to the solar year approximately every 33 Islamic years.

HSRB

Human Subject Review Board

Interactional Norms

Interactional norms are defined here as the "religiously appropriate" behavioral patterns that the Islamic school youth adopt in their personal and interpersonal conduct; specifically, avoiding physical contact and touching between non-family members of the opposite sex, gossip involving backbiting, dates, extramarital relations, and etc.

Islamic Identity

A Muslim adolescent is said to have developed Islamic identity when he prefers to identify himself as a Muslim; demonstrates awareness of basic Islamic teachings and positive attitudes towards Islamic life-style; and tries to conduct his daily life accordingly.

Islamic School

Islamic School is an educational institution, which is funded and administered by Muslim parents or a Muslim community, to teach their children the core subjects offered in public schools, Arabic language, and basic Islamic teachings. It is generally structured to facilitate Islamic practices, both ritualistic and the ones dealing with day-to-day personal and inter-personal conduct, in order for the Muslim children to develop Islamic identity and religio-cultural lifestyle.

Islamophobia

Islamophobia is prejudice or discrimination against Islam, Muslims, or Muslim looking.

Modest (Muslim) Dress Code

The basic principle behind the Muslim modest dress code is that the clothes have to be clean and do not draw undue attention by revealing the shape of body. In practice, for men this means *at minimum* they must cover middle section of the body from navel to knee; and women must cover the body completely, with non-transparent loose clothes, leaving only the hands and face visible. See also *Hijab*.

MSA

Muslim Students Association

PBUH

Peace Be Upon Him—A phrase that observant Muslims often say after saying or hearing the name of one of the Prophets of Islam.

Ramadan (Muslim Month of Fasting)

Ramadan is the ninth month of Islamic lunar or *Hijri* calendar. During this month, every Muslim (who has reached the age of puberty) is required to fast—abstain from food, drink, and "lawful" marital sex from dawn until sunset.

Religious Norms

Religious norms are defined here as the religious ritual practices that the Muslim youth adopt in their Islamic schools and homes, and which require adjustments in public high schools; specifically, (a) consuming *halal* or lawful food and avoiding *haram* or prohibited (such as food involving pork, drinking and drugs), (b) modest dress code, (c) daily prayers (at least the *Zuhr* or early afternoon prayer), (d) fasting during *Ramadan*, and (e) a day-off for *Eid*.

Salat or Mandatory (Muslim) Prayer

Mandatory Muslim prayer or *Salat* is one of the "five pillars" of Islam practiced by Muslims in supplication to God. It is obligatory for all Muslims once they attain puberty, and is performed five times a day—before sunrise (*Fajr*), early afternoon (*Dhuhr* or *Zuhr*), afternoon (*Asr*), after sunset (*Maghrib*), and nightfall (*Isha'a*). The five pillars include: *Shahadah* or the Islamic creed, *Salat* or

mandatory five daily prayers, *Saum*/*Sayam* (plural) or month-long fasting during *Ramadan*, paying annual poor-due (*Zakat*), and *Hajj* or once-in-lifetime pilgrimage to *Mecca* (if one is healthy and can afford to travel).

School Culture

School culture reflects a set of shared beliefs, values, and assumptions that give an organization its identity and standard for its expected behaviors (norms).

SWT

Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala or "Glory to Him, the Exalted"—Observant Muslims use these or similar words to glorify God when mentioning His name.

APPENDIX B—FLYER FOR INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

Did your child attend a private K-8 Islamic school? Is s/he in or planning to go to a public high school?

Asslam-Alaikum!

My name is Br. Bashir Shaikh. I am working on a research project for completing my Ph.D. in Education at George Mason University. I have been working with Islamic schools for the past 8 years, and my own children attend an Islamic school.

❖ My research is aimed at understanding "**the transitions of Muslim students, like your son/daughter, who attend K-8 Islamic schools and later move to public high schools for further schooling**."

❖ The findings of this study will help:

✓ Educators in Islamic schools put together effective transition mentoring and support programs to help Muslim students make smooth transitions.

✓ Educators in public high schools to understand the religious, cultural, and educational background of the Muslim students and their reasonable needs. Better understanding on their part will ensure smooth transitions for the Muslim students.

✓ Muslim parents like you to understand what to expect when your children move to public high schools and be prepared to offer them meaningful help during transitions.

❖ The study will involve two or three 60 to 90 minute interviews with each participant over the next four-to-six months period.

❖ Privacy of each participant and confidentiality of his/her interview responses will be strictly guaranteed according to the George Mason University's ethical standards for such research.

❖ The researcher will accommodate each participant's schedule and concerns.

❖ Participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime and without any reason or a concern for any consequence.

❖ Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. No compensation will be provided to the participants for taking part in this study.

If you are interested in allowing your son/daughter to participate in this study, and help Muslim students like your child succeed in public high schools in the long run, please call me at 703-626-7863 or email me at bshaikh@gmu.edu.

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C-1: PARENT CONSENT FORM

PROJECT PURPOSE AND RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The purpose of this research project is to understand the transition experiences of the Muslim youth, like your son/daughter, who attend K-8 Islamic schools and later move to secular public high schools. If you agree to allow him/her to participate in this study, s/he will be asked to participate in two or three 60 to 90 minutes audio-taped interviews.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

There are no risks or direct benefits to your son/daughter for participating in this project. Findings from this study will produce better understanding of the Muslim youth's transitions into the secular public high schools, which may benefit you if you have another child in an Islamic school, and many other Muslim parents who send their children to the similar schools. The findings will also be very helpful for the educators in both K-8 Islamic schools and public high schools, and in various teacher training programs. Better understanding of the Muslim youth's experiences on their part may result into more helpful transition support programs for the Muslim youth.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data collected in this project will be confidential. A made up name will be assigned to each participant and his/her school to ensure his/her privacy. Only the researcher will know the participants' original identity and school information. The identity information and the audiotapes will be kept in a safe place at all times and properly destroyed after the research project is over.

PARTICIPATION

Participation of your son/daughter in this project is voluntary, and s/he can withdraw from the project at any time and without any reason. If you decide not to allow your son/daughter to participate or if you choose that s/he withdraws from the project at any time during the research project, there is no penalty for you or your son/daughter. This project is not connected to any school, and therefore, will not affect his/her grades.

CONTACT

This study is being conducted by Bashir Shaikh in order to complete his Ph.D. in Education at George Mason University. The research is supervised by a committee led by Dr. Dennis R. Dunklee. You can contact Mr. Shaikh by calling him at 703-626-7863 or Dr. Dunklee at 703-754-0699, if you have any question or a problem to report.

This research has also been reviewed according to George Mason University's procedures for this kind of research. You may also contact the University's Office of Research Subject Protections at 703-993-4121, if you have questions or comments regarding your rights or your child's rights as a participant in this research project.

CONSENT

I have read this form and I agree to allow my child to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Name   Date

C-2: PARTICIPANT ASSENT FORM

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this research project is to find out how the Muslim students like you, who attend K-8 Islamic schools, adjust into public high schools. If you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to spend about one hour or bit more talking to me, may be two or three times in the next four to six months.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

You will not lose anything by being part of this project, except may be your time. There are no rewards or money paid for being in this research. But the things I find out may help teachers in both Islamic and public schools and the Muslim parents like yours to understand what it is like to move from an Islamic school to a public high school and adjust there. When they understand that, they will be better prepared to help other Muslim students like you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will be taping our talk, but I will be keeping that tape in a very safe place. Everything that we will say on the tape will be written out on paper. But your name, where you live or what school you attend will be changed with made up names so that no one will know who you are. I may use some of your words when I write my report, but I will never tell anyone your name.

PARTICIPATION

You don't have to talk to me if you don't want to. If you change your mind after we start talking and want to stop that is OK. I won't mind and nothing will happen to you. This project is not linked to any school, and therefore, will not affect your grades.

CONTACT

My name is Bashir Shaikh, and I am studying to get a Ph.D. in Education at George Mason University. You can call me at 703-626-7863 if you have any questions about this research project. You can also call my teacher, Dr. Dennis Dunklee, a professor at George Mason University, at his phone number 703-754-0699.

The George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections knows all about my research and said that it was OK for me to do it. You can call them at 703-993-4121 if you have any questions about being a part of this research project.

CONSENT

I have read this form and I agree to be part of this research project.

_____   _____
Name   Date

APPENDIX D—INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

D-1: PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONNAIRE

(FIRST INTERVIEW)

Assalam Alaikum!

Before we start, I would like to thank you for volunteering to share your experiences as a high school freshman in a public high school. My name is Bashir Shaikh. I am a student at George Mason University; I am working on this project to complete my degree program. The main purpose of this project is to understand experiences of someone like you, who moves from a K-8 Islamic school to a public high school.

Is it ok with you if I use a tape recorder to record what you say so that I don't miss anything important? I will also use the recordings to write down what you say and to make sure your interview has a made-up name to guarantee your privacy and to analyze what you tell me and make sure I do that accurately.

Remember—the interview can be stopped any time you choose and no one other than the two of us will know what you say during this interview. I will convert the interview recording into the text myself; however, if I seek help, I will erase from the audiotapes all names and identifying particulars. Before we start, would you like to hear how you sound on tape? (If a student indicates interest, have him/her say something, and then play the tape back).

During this first interview, I would first like to spend a few minutes getting to know you and to know about your average day at your previous school. Then, I am going to ask you to tell me about some of your experiences as a freshman in public high school. At the end of this interview, I will schedule a second interview with you. During the second interview, I will ask you to reflect upon some of the things you said during this interview – this is to make sure that I have accurately and fairly represented what you said. I will also ask you about some of the things I may miss in the first interview. At that time, you may also ask that I delete any information that may make your identity known or that is an unfair representation of your comments. Finally, I may contact you for a brief third interview to verify what I hear you say during the first two interviews. We can skip the third interview if you prefer to talk over the phone or communicate through an email.

Are there any questions you have for me before we begin?

To protect your identity, I would like to assign you a made up name. Do you have a name preference? _____.

One last item, I want to read this assent form with you [hand over the participant assent form], and if you agree to what it says, I want you to sign it. As we read it, you will see that it is mainly to ensure your privacy and your rights. Your mom/dad has also signed one such letter in order for me to interview you, but remember – if you don't want to participate, that's okay.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself and your family?
   - Probes: You said _____, can you elaborate more?
                     Do you have school age siblings? Do/Did they go to the same Islamic school? Public high school?
                     Can you tell me bit more about your parents' educational background?
2. Tell me what the K-8 Islamic school experience was like for you?
   - Probes: You said _____, can you elaborate more?
                     You say you liked/didn't like your previous school, can you tell me some example of what you liked/didn't like?
                     Can you tell me more about your daily routines?
                     Can you tell me about your parents' involvement in the school?
3. Now, I want you to recall something for me, can you recall how you felt few days before your first day at your new high school? Tell me how you felt about going there?
   - Probes: You said _____, can you elaborate more?
                     Can you tell me more about some of the reasons that made you feel that way?
4. Tell me about any preparations you made before moving to your new high school?
   - Probes: You said _____, can you elaborate more?
                     Did your previous school or teachers talked about what you may expect at your new school or some of the things you should or should not be doing?
                     Did your previous school or teachers helped you with your high school application forms and/or course selections?
                     Did you attend any information session at your new school, before or on the first day of your school?
                     - Probes: How did you feel after attending the information session? Do you think it was helpful? If yes, how? If not, why not?
5. Do you remember your first day at your new school? Can you walk me through your first day? Also, it would be helpful, if you can tell how you felt during that time?
   - Probes: You said _____, can you elaborate more?
6. If I were a high school freshman in your situation, being a Muslim coming from a K-8 Islamic school, what would a typical day be like for me in your new school?
   - Probes: You said _____, can you elaborate more?
                     Can you tell me more about what it is like for you on campus when you are not in a class?
                     Can you tell me about some of the daily routines you were used to at your old school that changed in your new school?
                     Can you tell me about how you adjusted to those changes?
                     Probes: You said _____, can you elaborate more?
7. Tell me something about your high school teachers.
   - Probe: You said _____, can you elaborate more?
   - Follow-up: How do they compare to your previous school teachers?
8. Tell me something about your peers (other students) at your new high school.
   - Probe: You said _____, can you elaborate more?
   - Follow-up: How do they compare to your peers at your previous school?

9. What are/were some of the challenges you've faced in your new school? In, ninth grade?
   Probe: You mentioned _____ as a (big) challenge; can you tell me more about why it is a challenge for you?
   Can you tell me bit more about how you handled it/those?
10. Tell me who the people are … who are supportive of you at your new school or outside of your school?
    Probe: You said _____, can you elaborate more?
    Follow-ups: What do they do to help you adjust? Succeed?
    What other kinds of things do they do to help you succeed?
11. Who are the individuals you turn to when faced with challenges?
    Probe: You said _____, can you elaborate more?
    Follow-up: How do they help you?
12. What do you think it takes to successfully adjust to a public high school? Succeed academically and socially [alternative: in class and among your classmates]?
    Probe: You mentioned _____ as something that helps students like you to adjust successfully in public high schools; can you tell me more about that?
13. If you could make your public high school a better place, what would you change?
    Probe: You said _____, can you elaborate more?
    Follow-up: What would you keep the same?
14. What would you advise eighth graders in Islamic schools about, as they get ready to go to a public high school?
    Probe: You mentioned _____ as something that would help them as they get ready for a public high school, can you tell me how you think that will help them?
15. If you could send one message to your peers [classmates and other students] at your new school, what would it be?
16. If you could send one message to your teachers at your new school, what would it be?
17. If you could send one message to your teachers at your old school, what would it be?
18. If you could send one message to Muslim parents, what would it be?
19. Is there anything else about the move from a K-8 Islamic school to a public high school that I have not asked you that you would like to tell me?

D-2: SOME SAMPLE PARTICIPANT SPECIFIC FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

(SECOND INTERVIEW)

1. You mentioned last time that you **missed the information session**, which made it difficult for you to find your classes sometimes. Does it mean that your school didn't have any **alternative arrangements** for students who missed the information session during summer?
2. You mentioned last time that your **grades started going down**. Are they still going down or you have recovered by now? What do you think was the reason for the slide in your grades? Was it because the stuff in your high school was hard?
3. Also, you mentioned that you were placed in advanced classes. How did that experience go? I was not clear, if your grades started going down, how were you in advanced classes? Was one before the other?
4. You also mentioned that it is generally crazy at your school. Did you ever think about moving to a new school? Why or why not?
5. Now I remember, you mentioned that you wanted to go to XYZ school, what happened? Why did you not go there?
6. Do you think that with your current school you've a shot at better academic opportunities in college?

D-3: SOME SAMPLE QUESTIONS USED IN SECOND INTERVIEWS AND FOLLOW-UP CALLS OR EMAILS

Personal:

Perceptions/self-concept/LOC/preparedness

- What were some of your concerns/worries before your transition as a Muslim, as an African American, and as someone coming from an Islamic school?
- How did you view yourself before starting your transition to public high school? Were you confident that you were prepared to make the transition and deal with any new challenges? Did you think you were in control of your situation?
- Did media and general perceptions against Muslims or African Americans play a role in making you uncomfortable in some ways? How?

Aspirations

- What are your academic and longer-term career plans? Do you think you are on track?

Coping

- What are some of the major problems you have faced in your transition to a public high school? How do/did you deal with those?
- If something bothered you, did you try to proactively take care of it? Or, chose to give it some time, hoping that the things will work out on their own? Can you give an example of such situations and how you handled those?
- Why do you think many Muslim students, who pray at their Islamic schools, do not actively seek for opportunities to pray at their new schools, particularly during the first year?
- Do you think you're comfortable with your Muslim identity in your school by now?
  - o Are you more aware of it now or you were aware of it more when you were in your Islamic school? Can you elaborate?
  - o Do you think you've compromised on some of the things that were part of your daily routines in Islamic schools? For example, your prayers?
  - o Do you think you have lost part of what you had when you were in Islamic schools?

Organizational:

Academics

- Your academic schedule, how did you figure it out in the beginning as what courses to take?

- If assigned by your counselor, how do you know it is the right choice for you? I mean, if the counselor does not know much about your Islamic schooling, do you think s/he has enough information about you and your academic background to make better decisions for you?
- Do you have clear idea about your potential choice of subjects, what semester to take those, and potential consequences?
- Does orientation or counseling help you figure it out?
- If yes, do your parents worry (based on their experiences) that you may be discriminated against or short changed because of your racial and religious background?
- Does your school have GT/AP classes? If yes, have you been told that you can take those? If not, why not?

Social:

- Do you think you've adjusted socially?
  - How did you feel about no longer being the most senior/mature or top athlete/scholar?
  - Your teachers, are they mostly open to students' feedback? Were some of them biased against Muslims in some subjects?
  - How about your peers? Have you been successful in making friends you wanted to?
  - Do you think the way classes are generally scheduled in your new school; it makes it easy or difficult to make new friends because everything is constantly changing?
  - What specific kind of peer pressure has been more/most difficult for you? How do/did you manage it?
  - Have you been made fun of? Bullied? How did you deal with it?

Cultural:

- What are some of the old habits or things (you used to do in Islamic school) that you have dropped completely?
- How about the ones you've modified somewhat? For example, like dress code and etc.
- How about some of the new ones you've adopted in your new school?
- Was it stressful? How did you manage or cope with the stress?
- How about the new youth habits (drugs, dancing, partying, dating, whole dressing culture, and etc.) and secular culture (no religion in your school life)?
- How much you've adopted the new youth culture?
- In your PE classes, how was your locker room experience?
- In PE, how was the experience of pairing up with girls? Specifically, the ways of dressing you were not used to?

Background:

- Do your parents' background/experiences as African Americans/Muslims create unnecessary conflicts with them for you? How?
- Do you think your Muslim identity has helped you in your transitions? Hurt you?
- Do you think your Islamic school background has helped in your transitions? Hurt?

Miscellaneous:

- Overall, how would you describe your transition experiences? Follow up: What influenced your transition the most?
- Do you think you have successfully adjusted to your new school psychologically? I mean do you still feel any anxiety or stress? Did you feel it in the beginning? Why?
- Did you struggle with new building or school schedule in the beginning? Do you think you're over it now?
- How about new school/classroom rules and routines?
- How about academics? Do you have a fairly good understanding of your academic track choices? If yes, what makes you so sure? If not, why?
- Do you participate in extra-curricular activities? Which ones? What makes you interested in those?
- Do you think you've adjusted socially? Have you been successful in making friends you wanted? Was it hard or easy? Do you think the way classes are generally scheduled in your new school make it difficult to make new friends because things constantly change?
- Do you think you had to establish boundaries for interaction? I mean like ... ok, this is my line ... I don't want to cross in such and such. Can you elaborate?
- Have you been successful in meeting groups that support you, for example, MSA or etc.?
- What did your Islamic schools, families, or public high school do to help ease your transitions?
- [For girls] When I ask the boys, one thing all of them tell me is that sports helped them make friends/connect with others, and therefore make their transitions somewhat easier. How about you? Do you feel constrained because of how you dress? What else constrains your choices?
- [For girls] In PE, I remember a boy made a comment about the awkwardness of changing in the locker rooms, what was your experience? How you felt about it? Any pressure or unwanted attention as a result of that practice?
- How do you deal with school related stressors? For example, a bad day at school. Follow up: What makes a bad day at school for you?
- How long do you think it takes for someone like you to adjust completely to the public high school? Follow up: classes? Teachers? Peers? Muslim practices?

From: Nadda <nadda@fictitiousmail.com>
Date: Tuesday, April 28, 2009 4:44 pm
Subject: Re: I hear you won't be able to continue. Two quick questions

Wa alikum Asalam!

No problem. You can email me your questions anytime.

I am attending Einstein High (www.einstein-fictitious.edu)
Al-Noor did share many things with us from many high schools that most of us were attending
such as Lee, Wayne, TJ, Einstein, and PC Charter. They made us fill out our classes and had
approved them so all we had to do was drop of the packet at the school. Also Al-Noor made us
get all the requirements that were needed ahead of time. We did have an orientation that was
welcome to both parents and students as well informing us on basically what to expect, how to
register, ...etc.

I hope this answers your questions...
Salams

_____
> From: Bashir Ahmed Shaikh <bshaikh@gmu.edu>
> To: Nadda <nadda@fictitiousmail.com>
> Sent: Tuesday, April 28, 2009 4:20:22 PM
> Subject: I hear you won't be able to continue. Two quick questions
>
> Salam Nadda,
> Hope you're doing well! I do understand your situation. And, thank you for

> your willingness to respond to my email questions. I've two quick
> questions for now. I will be emailing you other questions later if that is ok.
>
> 1. What high school do you go to? (I think I missed it. I need to write a
> small profile of your high school. I'll visit their website to get some info).
>
> 2. Did Al-Noor share information about potential high schools for
> you during your 8th grade? Make you fill forms? Some kind of
> orientation with regards to HS choices and what to do?
>
> I look forward to hearing from you soon.
>
> Bashir

APPENDIX F—CODING CATEGORIES AND SUB-CATEGORIS

Category/ Sub-Category	Properties	Dimensions (Continuum)
"Life in the bubble"—Islamic schooling and its outcomes		
Climate/ atmosphere	Small-campus	10–22 rooms;
	Small-student body	120–200 students;
	Small student-teacher ratios	1 to 8–1 to 16
	Home-like	somewhat–totally
	Sense of brother/sisterhood	classroom–school wide; ok–always
	Sense of privacy	boys: not much–ok; girls: ok–great
	Muslim identity "safe"	ok (boys)–definitely (girls)
Daily operations (5/6-8 grades)	Restructuring of school facilities	common; space setup–wall decorations
	Mandatory prayers in daily schedule	1–2 times depending upon long–short day
	Modified routines, schedule, and workload during Ramadan	no lunch–long prayer break; short daily schedule–reduced workload
	Two Eid holidays in school calendar	week–10 days long
	Co-education	shared (separate seating)–separate classes
	Gender-based accommodation	separate spaces for prayers, PE, and sports
	Gender-mixing	none–very little (group work or student government body
Academics	Core curriculum in English, math, science, and social studies	local, state, national standards–mixed
	Religious education (Quran, Arabic, and Islamic studies)	varying degree of focus on some–all components
	Character education (focus on conducive environment, code-of-conduct, and role modeling)	Explicitly stated as part of school mission–implicit in the goal of fostering Islamic identity among students
	Islamic perspective integration in core curriculum	Muslim contributions–religious importance of learning
	Class switching	never–some (health/PE)
	Homeroom teacher	always; 1–3/4 years
	Departmentalization	some subjects; same teachers 1–3/4 years
	Homework	always–a lot
Socio-cultural Setup	Muslim values/norms–organization	climate–rules and routines
	Muslim values/norms–personal	modest dress code–religious rituals
	Muslim values/norms–interpersonal	care–respect; no profanity–modesty
	Diversity (gender, racial, ethnic, national origin, and class)	many groups–countries; diverse–very diverse
	Female teachers and students	majority–all (shared classes); none–all (separate classes)
	Parental involvement	financial–teach, volunteer, or administer
	Same faces in school, local mosque, and	sports–family get-togethers;

	community	regular–on/during Fridays/Eid/Ramadan
	Relationship with teachers	close–very close ("older brothers/sisters")
	Peers (same every year)	best friends–"like real brothers or sisters"
	Peer pressure, cursing, fights, or racism	very little–non-existent
	Other "social troubles" like drinking, drugs, and dating	taboo–non-existent
Outcomes	Academic preparedness	strong–very strong in core subjects
	Basic Islamic knowledge	comfortable–strong
	Habits of praying daily and fasting during Ramadan	school: always; home: often–always
	Self-discipline and time-management skills	somewhat–a lot; forced–habitual; more among girls–somewhat lax among boys
	Modesty in dress code and inter-gender interactions	school: always; home: often–always
	Friendship circles	Muslim only–Muslims and neighborhood; strong–strong sense of brother/sister-hood
	Relations with teachers	good–"like older brothers and sisters"
	Avoidance habits from mainstream youth "distractions"	always–excellent
	Sense of belonging to community	strong–very strong
	Muslim identity	foreclosed/given–stable; "not obvious"–visible
	School influencing family socialization	somewhat–a lot; limited to school and mosque–beyond
	Exposure and contact with outside communities and youth culture	very little–regular; none–"knew a lot"
	Exposure to "mainstream" media	"never a TV watcher"–"more than enough"
	Stereotypical/prejudicial encounters	none–some; in public schools (before)–public places

Preparing to "survive outside the bubble"—Transition mentoring and preparations

Islamic Schools	Organizational transitions	none–very little or "brief talk"
	Academic transitions	some advice–"help with everything"
	Socio-cultural transitions	none–somewhat; advice–"role plays"
	Coping with stereotypes/prejudices	none–advice: "make Dawah [inform]"
Family and Friends	Parents	little–open/candid talk; caution–raise expectations; "gave choice to remove Hijab"–"never occurred, it's part of me"
	Siblings	not applicable–"told everything"
	Friends and relatives	not applicable–great help
Public High Schools	Outreach	none–school website or "the time of registration"
	Orientation sessions: Covered organizational aspects; Covered academic aspects; Covered social aspects	missed–one/more; before school–first day; gave map–showed around; gave–explained schedule and rules; nothing–group activities
Outcomes— Pre-transition Perceptions and Feelings	Feelings	ambivalent–excited; not worried–"really scared"
	Expectations-academic success	strong–very confident
	Expectations-social integration	confident–"may not fit in"/temptations
	Expectations-cultural integration	boys: "didn't care"– "worried about

		openness and temptations"
		girls: "didn't know what to expect"–"scared"/"anxiety about PE and mixed group activities"
	Expectations-religious accommodation	"didn't think about it"–"knew it would be hard"
	Expectations-stereotypes/prejudices	"didn't anticipate"/"never a TV watcher"–"afraid" of racism due to prior encounters
	Thoughts on visible identity and removing headscarf	"never thought about it"–"was conscious"; "had a choice"–" never, it's part of me"

"The new pond"—Simultaneous changes and challenges in the new institutional setup

Organizational changes and challenges

	Size	small–"huge"; ok–"intimidating"
	Unfamiliarity and "otherness"	"ok, other Hijabis"–very different
	Anonymity	"not that bad"–out-of-place; had siblings/friends–"felt like outcast"
Climate	Impersonal	somewhat–"felt like I didn't belong there"
	Sense of privacy	"don't care" (boys)–"not much" (girls)
	Personal safety concerns	"not worried"–"really scared"
	Muslim identity "safe"	"oh! no, no, no"–"ok, there is many of us";
	Guards and searches	no–yes; "didn't notice"–"intimidating"
	Formal counseling	during orientation–first day; rare/infrequent–weekly/"as needed"; not helpful–very helpful
	New rules of behavior	few/relaxed–many/strict
	Transportation/busing	parents drive–take a bus; comfortable–"don't like it"
	Class/building switching/changing	some–"almost every class"' "got lost"–"hard, confusing first"
SOPs	Cafeteria/lunches	no–yes/one–four lunches; "bring lunch"–"eat at school"; "feels like fish market"–"see cool faces"
	Lockers and IDs	universal; cool–"feels different"
	Badges and hallways monitoring	some–strict/all the time
	Secular/Judeo-Christian holidays	built-in–"Christmas but no more Eids"; "left out"–"hard to deal with extra work"
	Accommodate modest dress code, prayers, fasting, and Eid	some–reasonable; difficult–"resent something everyday"
	Use of race/ethnicity in forms	universal; ok–confusing
	Core courses, electives, and choice	fixed (early)–"always choose"
	Extracurricular programs/choices	some–a lot; cool–"another headache"
	Mixed PE and group activities	universal; cool–awkward/uncomfortable
	Tracking	universal; ok–"confusing in the beginning"
Academics	Departmentalization	Universal; ok–"don't like it"
	Flexible scheduling	fixed–"A days and B days"; ok–"hard in the beginning"
	Secular curriculum/no more religious education	universal; "saw it was coming"–"miss it"

	Gap in core courses (topics or subjects not covered in K-8)	none–some subjects (technology, Art, and biology); non-issue–"problematic"
	Workload	normal–ever increasing; manageable–non- sometime
	Sex education, and dance/drama classes	"have a choice"; none–awkward
	Representation in curriculum	"we don't exist"–stereotypical; balanced–"didn't notice"; ignore–"it really hurts"; "try to correct"–"teacher consults with me"
	Perspective-deficient instruction	common–"some good teachers"; challenging–"feel left-out sometime"; "try to correct"–"teacher consults with me"

Social changes and challenges

	Role loss	ok–hard; intimidating
	New peers and forms of diversity	new–"feels very different"
Peers Networks	Peer clicks and intact peer networks	many–everyone; "knew someone"–"stayed by myself"
	Loss of friendship circles and support networks	none–some friends; difficult–"very hard"
	Making new friends	boys: easy–"somewhat difficult"; girls: "never tried"–"very hard"
	New teacher styles/expectations	easy–pushy; ok–hard
	Teacher demographics	mostly male–mostly female; hard (girls)–ok (boys)
Teachers	Friendly	some–mostly
	Closeness with teachers	not much–some/"girls with female teachers"
	Understand my schooling background	none–"very few know or do"
Parents	Reduced/diminishing involvement	no–definitely
Other school adults	Familiarity with school adults	none–some (coaches/counselor)
	Community representation	none–one Muslim; ok–"it's different"
	"Stares" and "different looks"	"didn't notice"–"a lot"; "don't care"–"makes me really mad"
	Stereotypical/prejudicial encounters	common–occasional; foreign–"whether I knew English"; hard–"really hurts"
Becoming the new "other"	Peer taunts, arguments, and fights: "Terrorist"/"go home terrorists" "Where is your gun/bomb?" "Go back to your home/country" "Towel-head" "Are you going to blow us up?"	common–occasional; very hard–"makes me mad"; ignore–"didn't know they'd be that mean"; repeat–"increase when something happens somewhere or a whacko blows up something"
	Low teacher/counselor expectations "I didn't expect you'd handle it"	none–"it does happen"; "didn't notice"–"felt hurt"

Cultural changes and challenges

School culture	Secular/Judeo-Christian values/norms Loss of prayer norms Loss of fasting/Ramadan norms Loss of Eid norms Loss of modesty norms	universal, "saw it coming"–very hard; total–somewhat; total, easy–hard-to-easy; total, easy–very hard; total–some; easy–hard
	Ownership instead of "told to you"	universal; ok–difficult;

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		"didn't know"–"knew about it"

	Cultural "misfits"/"miscounters"
	  "Why are you wearing this?"
	  "What?"[hard to say school/name]
	  "Paired up with a guy on first day"
	  "Handshake with male/female"
	  "Paring with girls in shorts in PE"
		more in beginning–becomes infrequent;
		girls: dress code- –boys: names-related;
		ignore–"felt awkward";
		difficult–"puts you on the spot"

	Celebrity obsession/imitation	common, "don't care"–"its messed up"

Youth culture	New youth habits/norms
	  Cursing and casual hugs and pats
	  Partying, dances, drinking/drugs
	  Girls in tights/small shorts in PE
	  Changing openly in locker rooms
	  Hanging out and "talk of a date"
	  "Talk of who-broke-with-whom"
		different–totally different
		  very common–strict rules;
		  ignore–"hard to avoid sometime";
		  "cool"–weird/awkward;
		  weird–"not unusual"/"seen it before";
		  "feel out of place"–loneliness;
		  avoid–"feel out-of-place"

"Surviving in the new pond"—Gradual adaptation to the simultaneous changes and challenges

	Intimidating guards and school size	none/ok–"was scary first day"/"felt small"
	"Different crowd" and "stares"	"didn't notice"–"a lot"; ignored–"felt out of place"
	Meeting with a counselor	"couldn't meet"–"first thing"; hiccup–"was nice/helpful"
	Schedule, finding classes, and trying not to "bump into others"	"not bad"–"hard to focus"; "followed crowd"–had sibling(s)
Experiencing the first day	Facing hiccups and hazards of missing orientation	none–"it was horrible"; "followed crowd"–"spent the whole day in library"
	Cultural "miscounters" and awkward moments	one–many; ignore–"embarrassing"; "lack of understanding"–"hard to say names"
	Introduced to rules and expectations	"usual stuff"–"too many"; "not a trouble-maker"–"tried hard to remember"
	Known peers/friends/Muslims	few–none/"was by myself"
	Coming home exhausted/stressed	somewhat–a lot; "looking for tomorrow"–"didn't want to go back"
	Praying after getting home	"forgot to pray on time"–"felt bad for delaying"
	Accept/cope with initial anxiety and stress	first day–two weeks; "felt stressed out all the time"–self-assurance: "I had a life beyond school"
	Accept/cope with loss of seniority, Islamic education and Muslim friends, teachers, and norms	easy (boys)–difficult (girls); few days–months; "refuge with" MSA–Islamic school/Masjid
	Accept/cope with increasing workload	"used to it"–"had to work harder/discipline myself"
Adjusting psychologically	Accept/take ownership	easy (girls)–hard (boys); "used to it"–"took time"
	Expect/cope with cultural "miscounters"	"not bad"–very hard; ignored– confronted/"tried to correct"
	Expect/cope with acculturation stress	easy–very hard; "naturally being a Muslim vs. have to try harder now"
	Expect/cope with occasional stereotypes/prejudicial encounters	seldom notice–"hurts bad"; ignore–"had to confront sometimes"
	Expect/cope with peer taunts/pressure	ignore–maddening; avoid–"hit back";

		"limit interactions"–inform
	Expect/cope with increased workload and stress due to taking time-off for Eid	"feel left out"–very difficult; "worth it"–"don't want to work to catch up afterward"; "go with the flow"–resent
	Growing confident and sense-of-belonging	month–year; "slowly you draw a line"–"try to stay with own kind"; "you get used to them and they get used to you"–"nice teachers mean peers"
	Expect/cope with anxiety of "blamed for being a Muslim"	stressed–"get very mad"; ignore–"can't ignore! I fight back"/"never knew it would be that bad"
Adjusting to the new climate	Struggling with schedule and finding classes	1–2 weeks; map/siblings–follow crowd; "10 minutes help"–"move faster and don't waste time"
	Observing and keeping a low profile	"watch"–"stay by myself"; "look for people who are new"–"find my own kind"
	Getting used to the place	week (organizational)–months (socio-cultural); "not big of a deal"–"can't sit back at home"
Adjusting to new SOPs	Adjusting to guards and searches	not applicable–"try to follow the rules"; "follow evaders"–"befriend with guards"
	Interacting with the counselor	first day/infrequent–frequent; "don't see the need"–helpful; "can misguide"–useful
	Explore/adjust to new rules of behavior	follow the crowd/rules–"never been a trouble-maker"; siblings–old friends "help adjust or give advice"
	Transportation/busing	parents drive–"take bus because I go with cousins"
	Adjusting to class/building switching	hard–gets easier; "follow the people in the same classes"–"use map"/"10 minutes helpful with long walk between classes and buildings"
	Explore/adjust to cafeteria lunches	no cafeteria–follow crowd; bring lunch–eat/order there; food labeled–many choices
	Getting used to lockers, ID/badges	share–separate locker; "don't carry often"–"can't move around without it"
	Adjust to badges/hallway monitoring	no–strict monitoring; intimidating first–becomes routine; need badge–"detained without it"
	Adjusting to Secular/Judeo-Christian holidays	Just a day off–helps catch up; wish–don't wish friends; sometimes–"often asked questions about not celebrating Xmas/Ester"
	Explore/avail/adjust to accommodation for dress code, prayers, fasting, and Eid	"no problem"–"hard in PE, use long-sleeves and sweatpants"; "have a place to pray because of MSA"–"pray when I get home"; easy–"fasting hard with PE, instructors understand"; "always take time off"–"sometimes don't if mid-terms or projects ... resent it"

	Getting used to the questions of race/ethnicity in school forms	"put anything"–"always choose other"/"always write Muslim"
Adjusting academically	Explore/adjust to core and electives	counselor–dad helps choose; choose–don't choose (electives the first semester); siblings guide–"go with whatever counselor tells"
	Explore/take GT/AP/IB/Honors	one–many subjects; "not first semester, want to go slow"–"jumped right in"
	Explore/avail extracurricular options	early (boys)–months/year (girls); boys/sports–girls/clubs
	Struggle/adjust to increasing workload and time commitments	Hard (some boys)–easy (girls); lazy– organized/"used to working hard"
	Experience/struggle with initial grade slump/rebound	Not applicable–one or two subjects; new curriculum–weird teaching style/grouping; hard–takes time to rebound; some worries–stressful
	Encounter/cope/adjust to inappropriate seating/grouping	"don't care"–"awkward, ask for accommodation, teachers understand"
	Encounter/cope/adjust to teacher stereotypes/biases	avoid/ignore–confront/correct; "they don't know better"–"makes me really mad"; think "we're foreign"–"we don't know English"
	Encounter/cope with stereotypical images/misinformation in history, comparative religions, or civics/government classes	"mostly not true"–balanced; solicited perspective–"treated as expert"; ignore–try to correct; don't correct–tell peers or friends afterwords; give pamphlets–involve father

Adjusting to extracurricular activities	Explore/avail/avoid extracurricular activities beyond PE:
	  Boys prefer participating in sports
	  Girls prefer other non-sports clubs
		participate in one–more; participate during first year:
		  early (boys)–none/late (girls);
		participate after hours:
		  few (boys)–none (girls)

	Having MSA in high schools
	  Join when available
	  Take initiative to start one
		3 out of 8 schools;
		everyone;
		none (boys)–two (girls)

Adjusting socially	Understand/adjust to new teacher styles and expectations	few weeks–months; "just do my work"–"[girls] close to female teachers"
	Observe peer norms and start socializing with them	days (boys)–months (girls); "look for own kind"–"look for those who are shy or new"/"sports/group work helps socialize"
	Socializing patterns-boys	stay in touch with mosque–Islamic school/old friends; selective socialization–"go with the flow"; avenues: sports–group work
	Socializing patterns-girls	stay in touch with mosque –Islamic school/old friends; selective socialization–look for Muslims or "your own kind" or "people who are new" or "interested in studies only"; avenues: clubs–group work

	Make/seek new friends/support groups	boys: easy; avenues: sports–group work; girls: hard–very hard; avenues: MSA, group work with female peers, multiple social identities, and extracurricular clubs
	Encounter/cope with peer taunts, stereotypes, and prejudices	passive early–active later; ignore/avoid –"deal with it" ; "straight face"–"shout back" or "inform"
	Encounter/cope with teacher stereotypes and prejudices: Misrepresent/misinterpret Assume "we are foreign" Assume "we don't speak English"	ignore–correct; "give pamphlets"–"involve parents" or confront/correct; boys: passive; girls: passive early –active later
	Encounter/cope with negative peer pressures: Temptations ("open"/"accessible") Offer drugs/"hook up with girls" Absence/avoiding parties/dances "Want me to show them my hair" "Ignore us like we don't exist" "Don't believe we're American"	easy–"hard to deal with"; few–increase–become less; avoid–"week sometimes"; avoid–"don't befriend" or "tell them I can't for religious reasons"; ignore–"don't get what's the big deal?"; "don't care"–"I say … oh, whatever"; ignore–"who cares"
	Encounter/benefit from positive peer pressures: MSA Encouragement for positive stuff Others who're focused on studies	not much–plenty; MSA helps some–a lot; "friend asked to run for class president"–"Mormon/ Hindu with same interests"
Adjusting culturally	Encounter/cope with cultural "miscounters"	too many earlier–occasional afterwards; ignore (passive)–inform/correct (active); boys (passive)–girls(passive-to-active)
	Acculturating selectively/gradually Observe new cultural norms Learn/adopt some new norms Shed/loose/adjust some old norms Keep/preserve many old norms	easy–hard; quick (boys)–slow (girls); early (some)–later (others); ignore–"avoid what others do"; "adjust dress code in PE"–"cross-gender group work"; "casual interactions" (boys) –"business-like dealings" (girls)
Adjusting identity salience	Skipping prayers or praying at home after school in the beginning	early: skip sometimes/often (boys)–pray at home (girls)
	Explore/avail accommodations for mandatory prayers after some time	weeks–months/year; MSA–family attitude/involvement helps
	Explore/avail food alternatives	easy–many choices
	Explore/adjust to new fasting schedule norms	easy–difficult; long days–more workload; peer questions–sympathy; sit in cafeteria–library; Muslims/MSA help–"fasting with PE hard"
	Explore/seek dress code accommodation in PE/sports	mixed PE awkward–hard; sweatpants–long-sleeves; understanding–flexibility; gets easier–comfortable over time; peer questions–sympathy; "stares"–admiration
	Explore/adjust to loss of Islamic education	hard–"really miss it"; internet–Friday prayer as substitute or "Masjid daily"
	Explore/adjust to loss of Eid holidays and	sometimes–always "take the day off";

	new norms	"dress up for Eid prayers and come school"–"resent coming on Eid days"; more work–"once I took three midterms"; easy–very hard to catch up
	Adjust/maintain/assert Muslim identity in the face of stereotypes and prejudices	non-visible (boys)–visible (girls); "doesn't bother me"–hard; boys: avoid–assert; girls: ignore–assert/pushback; "all of sudden you become more visible"–"can't just sit home, have to pushback"; limited interactions–"selective circle"; "slowly things get better, until off-course, something new happens somewhere"–Masjid/old school as a refuge
Adjusting beyond 9th grade	Getting more comfortable staying in selective circles feeling more integrated some/new challenges re-emerge or persist	girls: more interactions–join clubs; increased peer pressure–more questions; changing peers–stereotypes boys: more workload–"time-management becomes hard"; winding down sports–less extracurricular activities

Adaptation or integration outcomes		
First day	"The world turned upside down"	somewhat true–very true
	Overwhelmed, lonely, and "lost"	somewhat–definitely
	Hiccups and hazards of missing orientation	none–"terrible day"
	Chaotic crowds and confusing place	no–yes
	Cultural "misfits"/"miscounters"	yes, one–many
	Missed/delayed prayers	no–yes; MSA helped get a place–forgot
Psychological	Sense of loss, stress, loneliness, getting used to "the new place", comfortable	religious education–"knew the drill"; somewhat–a lot; weeks/boys–months/girls
	New worries, hopes, confidence, and resolve	workload–PE/group work; Muslims–caring counselors; high/academics–low/social; increasing self-concept–mixed aspirations
	Occasional confusion and growing self-contentment	boys: temptations–gradual stability; girls: alone–got life outside
	Insider-outsider dichotomy and redrawing of borders	boys: not much–some; girls: "life beyond school"–selective circle; interests mismatch–"stay with own kind"
	Negative visibility, stereotypes, prejudices, and omission or misrepresentation	resent–become more assertive/"burdened with being a role-model"
Organizational (climate and SOPs)	Rules, norms, other bells/whistles	accept–resent; days–weeks
	Scheduling, class switching, counseling, and tracking	ok–confusion in beginning; days–weeks; some bad–mostly positive
	Dress code, prayers, fasting, and Eid time-off	skip/resent–delay/demand/avail; demand: days–months/year

Academics and extracurricular	Cores, electives, and choosing special or accelerated programs	dad–counselor helps choose; all in some GT/AP/IB; boys/delay–girls/"jump right in"
	Choices and constraints of sports and extracurricular participation	boys/sports–girls/clubs; boys/early–girls/late (delay); with time: girls/increase–boys/reduce; afterhours: some (boys)–none (girls); help make friends–peer pressures increase
	Increasing workload, grade-slump and rebound, and re-disciplining	hard to manage–"used to working hard"; some subjects–curricular mismatches; lax–ownership/"comeback"
	Omissions, misrepresentations, and deficit perceptions	none–some consequences; avoid/ignore–confront in various ways
Social	New and "lone" kid on the block	peers with intact networks–none/few familiar faces
	"Making friendships": "Fitting in" to isolation-by-choice	boys/quick–girls/take time; boys: sports and after-hours; girls: delay extracurricular and don't stay
	Peer pressures, incompatible interests, and selective socialization	more: friends–peer pressures; some–"no common interests"; "don't see the point"–"stay with own kind"
	Taunts, prejudices, and conflicts	all: some less–others more; more–"Muslim looking"; more from peers–less from teachers
	New triangle—home, high school (MSA, Muslims, or others of own kind), and mosque (old school)	boys/some–girls/always
	Additional social identities	help–can create more problems
	Teacher/counselor/peer relations and gender preferences	none–some; not as close as in old school; boys/male–girls/female
Cultural	Culture shock to sojourning	low/boys–high/girls; uncommon/boys–common/girls
	Secular/Judeo-Christian norms	"don't care"–stressful to adjust sometime; ignore–selective; adjustment: quick–long; mixture of rejection–integration
	Loss/adjustment of Muslim norms	time: weeks–months/year; prayers: loss–adjustment; fasting: loss–adjustment; Eid: adjustment–stressful; dress code: maintain–adjust; interactions: maintain–adjust; dietary: maintain–adjust; Islamic education: loss–alternatives
	Cultural "miscounters"	time: more early–diminish later; ignore–shorten names to "make it easy"; awkward–understanding
	Youth culture	adjust: somewhat–ignore; boys: openness/tempted–ignore girls: grouping/mixed PE/ peer pressure–increases/ignore;

		dates/dancing/"mismatch in choices"–increase/ignore/selective socialization/"stay with your own kind"
Identity Salience	Muslim identity salience/ "Burdens of visible Muslim identity"	boys: decrease–non-visible/stable; stereotyped–increase/assert; girls: increase–maintain; headscarf–"anchor"; assert–"burdened with being a role model"
	Skip/delay prayers to demanding accommodation	boys/skip–girls/adjust; delay/pray at home–demand accommodation; days (MSA)–months/year
	Fasting, avoiding cafeteria, and inquisitive peers	difficult–hard first/gets easy; hard: with PE/summer–workload; avoid cafeteria–comeback after some time; alternative: library–internet; peer questions: more/less
	Dress code and challenges of PE/sports and mixing	mixed PE: hard–easy; girls: long dresses–avoid paring with boys; boys: temptations–avoid pairing with girls; group work: avoid–adjust
	"To take or not to take Eid day off"	easy/always–gets hard/resent/skip
	MSA as a "new oasis"	don't have one–"big help"; ignore (some boys)/join (girls always)
Beyond 9th grade	Sense-of-belonging	less–high/fluctuating
	Academics and extracurricular Increasing workload Academic achievement GT/PE/AP/IB Dropouts/retention Curriculum misrepresentation Sports Clubs	none–some challenges; boys/hard–girls/easy; moderate–high; all: some more–others less; none; none–decreases/continues; boys/yes–"start reducing over time"; girls/yes–"increasing participation"
	Cultural Miscounters Organizational norms Youth	somewhat–difficult; decrease–diminish; selective adjustment/resent–don't care; selective–ignored/stayed away or "stay among your own"
	Identity salience Muslim identity Accommodation for prayers Ramadan Eids Mixing	girls: high–more practicing; boys: mixed–fluctuates; demand–avail if available/others ask; easy–adjusted except when PE/summer; easy/early–hard later/increases work; adjusted–manageable
Helpful or hurtful—Factors influencing the gradual adaptation process		
Family and personal	Prior public school exposure	helpful, few–none
	Siblings in high school	helpful, 1-3–none
	Islamic/other social identities	helpful–not helpful
	Strong self-concept	academics: always–very high; social: low–mixed
	Strong coping skills	avoidance, mixed, active

	Parental support	helpful, none–a lot
	Social/cultural capital	helpful, some–more
	Selective socialization/isolation a.k.a. "second bubble"	helpful (i.e., in shielding from anti-Muslim stereotypes/prejudices or in avoiding common youth troubles of drinking, partying, and etc.)–hard (i.e., in making friends due to disconnect from "mainstream" youth culture or norms)
Islamic schools	Orientation/transition support programs	helpful, some–a lot
	Affiliation with a mosque	helpful, some–always
	Gym and sports	helpful, some–a lot
	Separate vs. mixed but separate seating	helpful/not, some–both
Public schools	Orientation/transition support programs	helpful/attend–hard/miss
	Organizational diversity/attitudes	helpful, exposure–openness to view points
	Nature of subjects	hard, PE and history
	Inclusive/biased curriculum	hard, history/comparative
	Teacher attitudes about student viewpoints or feedback	helpful/open–hard/not accepting
	Teacher/counselor prejudices/racism	hard, not common
	Teacher compassion/accommodation	helpful, always
	School size	helpful/small–hard/large
	School state/national ranking	helpful/top schools–hard/others
	Female teachers	helpful, girls/more–boys/ "don't care"
	School expectations	helpful, always
	MSA	helpful, always
	Muslims/IS peers in classrooms	helpful, always
	PE and Ramadan	hard, teachers understand
National and geo-political situation	Media portrayal	hard, always–"don't care"/"not a TV fan"
	National political climate	hard, always–"don't care"/"don't follow"
	Geo-political events involving Muslims	hard, always–"don't care"/"can't change it"

APPENDIX G—SAMPLE AXIAL CODING PARADIGM MODEL

Causal Conditions
[*School System Change*]
Organizational Discontinuities
- New climate (size, anonymity, less identity safe)
- New rules, routines and academic practices (SOPs)
- New curriculum and instructional approaches

Social Discontinuities
- Role loss and loss of established friendship circles
- Diminished active parental involvement
- New/older/diverse peers, teachers, counselors, and other adults
- Becoming the new "other"

Cultural Discontinuities
- Secular/Judeo-Christian cultural values and norms
- New youth culture

Context
- Islamic schooling ("the bubble")
- Family lifestyle ("the second bubble")
- Social identity (Muslim, gender, ethnic or racial)
- Parental expectations of maintaining Muslim identity and succeed
- Degree of mentoring/preparations for the "bubbles-to-pond" transition
- Self-concept and aspirations, feelings, and perceptions of new school

Phenomenon
[*Adapting to The Change*]
- Preparing for the transition
- Encountering/exploring
- Adjusting psychologically
- Adjusting to organizational rules and routines
- Adjusting academically
- Adjusting socially
- Adjusting culturally
- Adjusting identity salience

Actions/Interaction/Strategies
- Strong self-concept but mixed feelings prior to "the pop"
- Start with varying degrees of transition mentoring/preparation
- Experience/deal with challenging first day and awkward encounters
- Experience/cope with climate changes, role loss and sense of isolation
- Explore/adjust to new organizational rules/routines
- Explore/avail new curricular/extra-curricular options
- Struggle with/adjust to increasing workload/time commitments
- Experience/struggle with initial grade slump and rebound
- Understand/align with new teacher styles/expectations
- Understand/adjust to new peers, peer norms and peer pressures
- Make/seek new friends and support groups
- Adjust to new cultural norms and cope with acculturation stress
- Experience/cope with curiosity/prejudices and curriculum stereotypes
- Explore/avail accommodations for Muslim norms
- Draw appropriate boundaries for peer interactions
- Encounter/cope with fallout from negative media coverage and national/geo-political events/conflicts involving Muslims
- Grow confident and develop sense of belonging

Intervening Conditions
- Personal factors
- Islamic school factors
- High school factors (additional)
- National and geo-political factors

Adaptation Outcomes
- First encounters/day outcomes
- Psychological outcomes
- Organizational outcomes
- Academic outcomes
- Social outcomes
- Acculturation outcomes
- Identity salience outcomes
- Beyond 9th grade

APPENDIX H—SELECTIVE CODING OUTLINE FOR "THE STORY LINE"

I. Life in "the bubbles"—Background and preparedness prior to "the [system] change"
   a. Inside "the bubble"—Islamic schooling and its outcomes
   b. The "second bubble"—Family lifestyle and selective socialization
   c. Glimpses of "the outside world"—Occasional prejudicial/stereotypical encounters
   d. Preparing to "survive outside the bubbles"—Mentoring and preparations
   e. Before "the pop"—Self-concept and aspirations, parental expectations, feelings, and perceptions about the new school

II. "The new pond"—Simultaneous changes and challenges in the new system
   a. "Stares", "intimidation", "awkward" encounters, "rush", and "loneliness"—First day a.k.a. "the pop"
   b. "It's huge [not always]!" "It's different!" "It's fast!"—Organizational discontinuities
   c. "The new fish!" Big ones, small ones, and the "[not so] out-of-place" ones—Social discontinuities
   d. "Things I never knew," "thought about" or "expected"—Cultural discontinuities

III. How did I "survive in the new pond?"—Adapting to "the changes" ambivalently
   a. Had to absorb "the shock from the pop"—Experiencing the first day
   b. And deal "with my own head and heart first!"—Adjusting psychologically
   c. Then, with "*the Kahuna*!"—Exploring and adjusting to the organizational setup
   d. And, with "the new and grownup people," "the weird ways," "the curiosity," "the ignorance," and off-course the *prejudices and stereotypes*!—Adjusting socially
   e. And, with "the *Islamic* stuff!"—Adjusting identity salience
   f. And, with "the extra-curricular activities and the peer pressures!"—Adjusting to the new organizational, social, and cultural *trio*
   g. And, with "the stuff that was *Not True*!"—Adjusting to the curriculum inaccuracies and stereotypes
   h. And, off-course with "the ever-increasing workload!"—Adjusting academically
   i. Finally, "I was no more the newbie!"—Beyond 9th grade
   j. But, you know what was "helpful or hurtful"?—Influencing factors

IV. After all that, "what happened?" or "how am I doing?"—Adaptation or integration outcomes

APPENDIX I—SAMPLE MEMOS AND MEMO MANAGEMENT

I-1—SAMPLE MEMO 1: COMPARING PARTICIPANTS

```
MEM_Comparisons_Profiles_1.2.txt - Notepad
File  Edit  Format  View  Help
Dated: 03-27-2009
Memo Type: Comparisons--Emerging Profiles
Boys
----
Type 1 (Ali) -- strong education and identity focus
Type 2 (Omar, Osman, Ahmed) -- strong academic focus but identity ambivale[
Type 3 (Abdul, Mohamad) -- average academics and identity focus but more s[
Girls
-----
Type 1 (Saeeda, Nadda) -- fish out of pond, stressed out, non-assertive, y[
Type 2 (Rashida, Maria, Sadaf) -- self-aware, inward looking, content, and ]
```
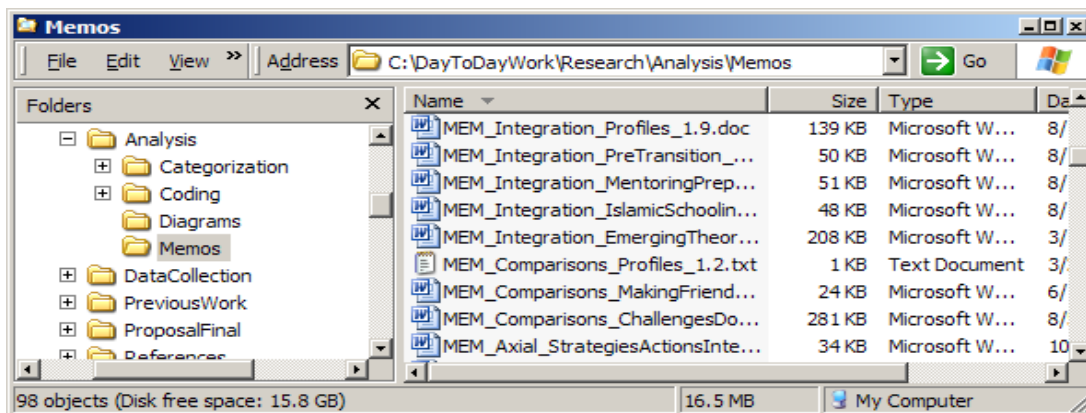
I-2—SAMPLE MEMO 2: FINAL INTEGRATION AND WRITING

```
MEM_Integration_PublicSchools_FirstDay_1.7.doc - Microsoft Word
File  Edit  View  Insert  Format  Tools  Table  Window  Help     Type a question for help

Memo Type: Integration
Focus: Public Schools—First Day
                          Going to public high schools
First Day at High School

    I don't know [long pause].  I was kind of excited and really scared at the same
    time [Pause].  When I first got to school, I saw a student with orange hair and a
    Mohawk, wearing baggy jeans, and long ear rings.  It was just weird thing.  I
    don't know, it was just [long pause].  I saw different people that I had never seen
    in my life.  It was totally new.  I came in late, a week behind, to a completely
    different school.  A public school for the first time, and it's a high school.  And it
    was, it was also my first time in a mixed class, and with male teachers.  So, it was
    a lot, a lot [stretched]! (Rashida, 1-78)

    All the participants started their first day with mixed feelings ambivalence.
    Parents drove majority of them (11 out of 13) to their high schools on their first day

Page 1      Sec 1      1/4      At      Ln      Col      REC  TRK  EXT  OVR
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I-3—MEMO NAMING, ORGANIZATION, AND STORAGE

```
Memos
File  Edit  View  »  Address  C:\DayToDayWork\Research\Analysis\Memos            Go

Folders                    ×   Name ▼                          Size    Type            Da
   Analysis                     MEM_Integration_Profiles_1.9.doc    139 KB  Microsoft W...  8/
      Categorization            MEM_Integration_PreTransition_...    50 KB  Microsoft W...  8/
      Coding                    MEM_Integration_MentoringPrep...     51 KB  Microsoft W...  8/
      Diagrams                  MEM_Integration_IslamicSchoolin...   48 KB  Microsoft W...  8/
      Memos                     MEM_Integration_EmergingTheor...    208 KB  Microsoft W...  3/
   DataCollection               MEM_Comparisons_Profiles_1.2.txt      1 KB  Text Document   3/
   PreviousWork                 MEM_Comparisons_MakingFriend...      24 KB  Microsoft W...  6/
   ProposalFinal                MEM_Comparisons_ChallengesDo...     281 KB  Microsoft W...  8/
   References                   MEM_Axial_StrategiesActionsInte...    34 KB  Microsoft W...  10

98 objects (Disk free space: 15.8 GB)              16.5 MB      My Computer
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