

---

Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository

---

8-19-2021 2:00 PM

## Muslim girls' experiences with Islamophobia, sexism, and anti-Black racism in Ontario secondary schools: A case study

Sarah Halabi, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Rezai-Rashti, Goli, *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education

© Sarah Halabi 2021

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Liberal Studies Commons](#), and the [Secondary Education and Teaching Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Halabi, Sarah, "Muslim girls' experiences with Islamophobia, sexism, and anti-Black racism in Ontario secondary schools: A case study" (2021). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 8026.  
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/8026>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact [wlsadmin@uwo.ca](mailto:wlsadmin@uwo.ca).

## Abstract

This qualitative case-study explored the experiences of 20 Muslim girls who attended public secondary schools in Ontario, Canada. The main objective of this research was to understand how Muslim girls' intersecting identities shaped their school, family, and community experiences. Drawing on anti-racist and postcolonial feminism, this study builds upon existing research conducted on Muslim girls by exploring how other categories of social difference, in addition to gender and religion, converge and influence their educational experiences.

The findings from this study uncovered the impact of racial diversity in Muslim girls' school and community experiences. Namely, anti-Black racism was central to some of the participants' lives which provided valuable insight into the unexpected ways in which religion, gender, and race converged and informed participants' educational experiences. Furthermore, participants who were relatively new to Canada and came from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds were more vulnerable to educational challenges in some circumstances. This research also provided important contributions regarding how geographical location influenced participants' school experiences. Finally, the findings of this study show that while the participants experienced challenges within their homes, they viewed their families as an important source of support for reaching their educational pursuits.

Given the gaps in the research and the limited studies that examine Muslim students' experiences in Ontario secondary schools, policymakers and educators aiming to meet the needs of racialized youth within Canadian schools can draw on this research for insight into Muslim girls' experiences.

**Keywords:** Racism, Sexism, Gendered Islamophobia, Antiracism, Feminism, Canadian Education

## Summary for Lay Audience

This qualitative case study of 20 Muslim girls who attended public secondary schools across Ontario explored how they experienced their schools, families and communities in an age of heightened Islamophobia. The main purpose of this study was to gain critical insight into the unique experiences of Muslim girls within the education system. The research findings were contextualized by the theoretical frameworks of anti-racist feminism as well as postcolonial feminism, which provided important insights into how the intersecting differences of Muslim girls shaped their school experiences.

This study revealed how gendered Islamophobia impacted the lived realities of Muslim girls, while also uncovering how race, ethnicity, immigration status and socio-economic status further informed their experiences. Indeed, while Muslim girls shared similar experiences with one another, racial, ethnic, immigration, and class differences revealed many differences among girls with regards to experiences of gendered Islamophobia. Furthermore, participants in this study lived in three different regions in Ontario, which provided insight into how some schools, based on location, may be more effective at catering to Muslim students than others. The findings of this study also addressed contradictions in the body of literature on Muslim girls' educational experiences by revealing how the role of teachers and families influence Muslim girls' lives.

Most importantly, this research has filled critical gaps in the literature by examining Muslim students' experiences in Ontario in a time of increased Islamophobia. This research provides significant research contributions which translate into important policy recommendations aimed at ensuring organized efforts that meet the needs of racialized youth within Canadian schools.

## Acknowledgments

I thank my supervisor, Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti, for her wisdom, intellect, and guidance. She has significantly broadened my knowledge of issues related to equity, inclusion, and diversity. I also acknowledge Dr. Shirin Abdmolaei who has generously and selflessly provided me with critical feedback. I am deeply indebted and grateful for all your support, Shirin. I extend my gratitude to Dr. Shelley Taylor who has reviewed my work and offered me valuable guidance, as well as to my fellow classmates who have enriched me with positive experiences throughout my time as a PhD student. To the professors and teachers who believed in me: you made a difference in my life.

I would not have been able to embark on this journey without the support of my family, who always believe that I can achieve great things and often remind me of my potential. I am forever grateful for my mother, Rawda Halabi, my father, Rageb Halabi, my brothers, Mohammed Halabi and Ahmad Halabi, and my late sister, Mona Halabi. Specifically, to my mother, thank you for being an inspirational role model; I strive to reach your greatness and light. To my father, without you I doubt I would have made it this far. I also acknowledge my dear nieces and nephews, Suleiman, Yasmeen, Yasin, and Danya, who have brightened my days and brought me much joy and laughter. Furthermore, I thank my friends who have been there for me and loved me unconditionally (you know who you are)—I greatly appreciate your kindness, integrity, selflessness, and inspiration. More importantly, thank you for cheering me up in times of doubt.

I extend my gratitude to Western University for providing me with opportunities and a scholarship to assist with this journey. I also thank Fanshawe College for the opportunity to teach courses I love.

To the participants in this study, you have greatly inspired me with your wisdom that reaches well beyond your years. Thank you for sharing your stories; I have learned a lot from you, and I wish you much success in all of your future endeavors.

Finally, and most importantly, I express my gratitude to God. Without my faith, I would not have overcome my trials and tribulations in life. Through my faith, my challenges were transformed into pertinent learning opportunities that have resulted in strength, light, and positivity.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Summary for Lay Audience .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Acknowledgments.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Tables.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of Appendices .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Rationale for This Study.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Research Questions .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Research Gaps .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Research Significance .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Anti-racist Feminism.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Postcolonial Feminism.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<b>Overview of Chapters .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Islamophobia: Is It a Form of Racism?.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>The Politics of the Veil .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Muslim Students' Experiences in Schools.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Qualitative Case Study.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Research Design.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Data Analysis .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Ethical Considerations .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Muslim Girls' Experiences in Schools.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Experiences of Islamophobia.....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Experiences of Gendered Islamophobia.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<i>Intersectional Differences Among Muslim Girls.....</i>	<i>96</i>
<b>Coping Strategies.....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Experiences With Accommodation.....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Muslim Girls' Views on the Veil, Family &amp; Community .....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Significance of the Veil.....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Perceptions of Family.....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Views on Community .....</b>	<b>152</b>
<i>Experiences With Institutionalized Spaces of Community.....</i>	<i>155</i>
<i>Anti-Black Racism in the Community Space.....</i>	<i>159</i>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>169</b>

<b>Chapter 6: Conclusion .....</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>Revisiting the Research.....</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>Research Limitations .....</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>Future Research .....</b>	<b>182</b>

## List of Tables

1.1 Participants.....	67
-----------------------	----

## List of Appendices

Social Media Recruitment .....	205
Poster .....	109
In-Person Recruitment Verbal Script .....	207
Letter of Information and Consent Form .....	208
Debriefing Form .....	212
Interview Topics .....	213
Ethics Approval .....	215
Curriculum Vitae .....	217



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### **Introduction**

This qualitative case-study explored how Muslim girls experience gendered Islamophobia in Ontario secondary schools. To address this inquiry, 20 secondary school students in Ontario participated in semi-structured interviews. By drawing on postcolonial and anti-racist feminist frameworks, critical insights regarding participants' intersecting identities came to light, revealing how race, ethnicity, socio-economic status (SES), and immigration status converged with gendered Islamophobia to inform Muslim girls' experiences at school, with their families, and within their communities. As such, this study contributes to an existing body of research on Muslim girls' educational experiences in the Canadian context.

The chapter begins with the rationale for this study, followed by the research questions. Next, it addresses the research gaps and the significance of this study. Then, the theoretical frameworks used for this study are discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a chapter overview.

### **Rationale for This Study**

While the definition of the term is contested,<sup>1</sup> most scholars would agree that *Islamophobia* is a fear and hatred towards Muslims. The tragic events that took place on September 11th have reinvigorated Orientalist tropes which depict Muslims as terrorists and threats to national security. To demonstrate this, a report by the Ontario Council of Agencies Servicing Immigrants ([OCASI] 2017) indicated that Islamophobia is an epidemic given the alarming statistics of hate crimes that target Muslims. Moreover, Statistics Canada reported that Islamophobia increased by 253 percent from 2015 to 2017

---

<sup>1</sup> This will be elaborated on in the literature review.

(Minsky, 2017). Islamophobia not only consists of violence against Muslims in the form of verbal abuse, vandalism, and physical assaults, but also it includes overt and subtle discrimination in employment, the education system, the media, and the government (Sway, 2005). For example, while there are laws in place that protect individuals from employment discrimination, Muslims in Canada face a disproportionality higher unemployment rate relative to the overall population even though they tend to have higher educational credentials (Hamdani, 2015; Zine, 2012). However, there has been a rise of blatant Islamophobia in Canada. For example, in 2017, one of the most tragic incidents of Islamophobia in Canadian history occurred. Known as the Quebec City Mosque Shooting, a self-proclaimed White supremacist<sup>2</sup> opened fire on a group of worshippers, killing six innocent people and seriously injuring five others (McKirdy & Newton, 2017). Furthermore, in 2021, a man wearing a bulletproof vest, a military-style helmet, and swastika-designed clothing ran over a Muslim family of five with his truck, killing four of them in London, ON (Juha et al., 2021). Such acts of violence experienced by Muslims, including those who “look” Muslim, are not confined to the Canadian context and are arguably a consequence of increased backlash towards Muslims and immigrants, especially in the aftermath of 9/11. However, while 9/11 has contributed to increased Islamophobia, researchers highlighted how the media coverage of ISIS has also contributed to anti-Muslim hatred in Western society and around the globe (see Von Sikorski et al., 2021). In line with this, highlighting the global prevalence of increased Islamophobia, a United Nations human rights expert proclaimed that Islamophobia has reached “epidemic proportions” (United Nations, 2021).

Islamophobia, however, is not limited to acts of overt dehumanizing violence as reported above. As Zine (2017) noted, Islamophobia includes ideological, individual, and systemic practices (Zine, 2017). From an ideological standpoint, Zine (2017) argued that aside

---

<sup>2</sup> The perpetrator was sentenced to life in prison, and even though he was motivated by extremist right-winged ideology, he was not charged with terrorism, revealing how Western hegemonic discourses reserve this label for Muslims only.

from being subjected to images that cast Muslims as inherently violent, barbaric, and backward, Muslim women and girls also experienced a distinct form of Islamophobia, which she referred to as *gendered Islamophobia*. As defined by Zine (2017), gendered Islamophobia refers to a unique type of Islamophobia where Muslim women and girls are assumed to be oppressed and in need of saving. Zine (2017) suggested that gendered tropes central to the colonial project, where colonizers morally justified violence under the guise of *rescuing* Muslim women, had been shaped into a rescue narrative still used today as a catalyst for *intervention*. Specifically, Zine (2017) contended that this rescue narrative was a response to the racialization of Muslim men as violent and fanatical, which was amplified post 9/11. Pertaining to individual practices, Elmir (2016) explained that veiled Muslim women have been experiencing the brunt of Islamophobic violence and discrimination, where they are subjected to physical and verbal abuse. She reported that approximately 69 percent of veiled Muslim women reported at least one discriminatory incident, whereas about 29 percent of non-veiled Muslim women did. Elmir (2016) explained that veiled Muslim women are visible representations of Islam and, therefore, “face a significant risk of exposure to discrimination, harassment and attacks” (p. x). Elmir (2016) also brought to light that reports of Islamophobia globally are primarily provided by veiled Muslim women. Pertaining to systemic practices, Muslim women face Islamophobia across various institutions in society (Zine, 2006a). Relevant to this research, Muslim girls experience Islamophobia, including gendered Islamophobia, within the social institution of the education system (see Khosrojerdi, 2015; Mirza & Meeto, 2018; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008).

Generally, while the research concerning the experiences of Muslim students revealed that they experienced challenges with Islamophobia in Ontario schools, the research is scant (Hindy, 2016). As Hindy (2016) identified:

While some feel that, under the Trudeau government, Islamophobic rhetoric would lessen compared to the Harper years, societal Islamophobia is likely to remain widespread. Regrettably, in spite of equity policies, Islamophobia is alive and well in the Ontario public school system. Not enough is known about how it manifests itself in different schools across the province. It is even possible that the

Islamophobia experienced by Muslim youth in Canada will escalate due to anti-Muslim rhetoric generated by Donald Trump's 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, widely covered and discussed in Canada. (p. 14)

Hindy (2016) went on to mark the urgency for more research to be conducted on Muslim students in Ontario. Considering this, I was compelled to understand how Muslim adolescent girls from diverse racial, socio-economic, and ethnic backgrounds challenge and resist gendered Islamophobia in their schools. I was also eager to explore how gendered Islamophobia impacts their school experiences. Furthermore, I was interested in contextualizing their school experiences by understanding the role of their families and communities in their lives. Finally, I aimed to conduct a study on Muslim girls in Canadian education given that little research has focused on their educational experiences.

### **Research Questions**

This study considered personal, local, global, and historical contexts which influenced the lives of Muslim girls in Canada. Such complexity was examined through the primary research question of this study:

- How do Muslim girls experience gendered Islamophobia in Ontario public high schools?

The follow-up questions of this study were:

- What are Muslim girls' experiences with teachers, administrators, and other instructional staff in their school?
- How do Muslim girls' intersecting identities impact their experiences in schools, families, and communities?
- Are there differences regarding how students experience schooling based geographical location?

### **Research Gaps**

This study builds upon existing research conducted on Muslim girls by exploring how categories of social difference, in addition to gender and religion, converge and influence their educational experiences. Previous research, although limited in number, has

provided significant insight into the experiences of Muslim girls by specifically focusing on how gender and religion interact and inform their experiences. However, a major gap in the literature is that there is a lack of attention paid to how the intersecting identities of Muslim girls shape their school experiences. Drawing on anti-racist feminism as well as postcolonial feminism allowed for the possibility to look beyond gender and religion to investigate how other aspects of participants' identities shaped their everyday experiences. Aside from addressing the major gap in the literature, this research also built on the few studies that have focused on Muslim girls' secondary schooling experiences by considering the post 9/11 context (see Zine, 2006b),<sup>3</sup> by recruiting both veiled and non-veiled participants (see Diab, 2008; Kassam, 2007), and by considering participants' experiences with their families and communities (see Ali, 2012). Furthermore, this research considers whether Muslim girls experience their schools differently based on their geographical location. This is important to consider as demographics of a location as well as local school board policies may influence how marginalized youth contend with their school experiences. To address this gap in the literature, I recruited participants from three regions marked by varying demographics within Ontario as a starting point for future in-depth comparative analyses. Most significantly, this research uncovered the role racial diversity plays in Muslim girls' school and community experiences. Namely, anti-Black racism was central to some of the participants' lives which provided valuable insight into the unexpected manner in which religion, gender, and race converged and informed participants' experiences within their schools, families, and communities. With such critical insights, policymakers and educators can work towards ensuring equitable and inclusive environments for racialized youth.

### **Research Significance**

According to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a Canadian individual has the *fundamental freedom* of belonging to any religion without being discriminated against

---

<sup>3</sup> Although the date of publication was 2006, Zine's data was collected prior to 9/11.

(Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982). Unfortunately, based on the past research conducted on racialized youth, this section of the Charter is not entirely being upheld in Ontario's public schools. By analyzing the possible ways Islamophobia has intensified in education as a result of new global, political, and social shifts, critical insights can be gained to prevent increased marginalization of vulnerable communities and to uphold the fundamental freedoms outlined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

As Sirin and Fine (2007) asserted, studying Muslim youth is “a historical and cultural survey of the times in which we are living” (p. 22). Through generating knowledge on the experiences of Muslim youth, educational stakeholders can develop a better understanding of how they can support their students. As Watt (2016) asserted:

Through witnessing how particular minority youth negotiate their lives and identities in between family, school, and public and school discourse, teacher educators, teachers, and teacher candidates are better positioned to respond to difference in ways that create equitable school curricula and classroom practices. (p. 22)

Thus, the current research makes an important contribution regarding how current global, national, and local forms of gendered Islamophobia, in relation to other forms of oppression, shape the experiences of Muslim girls in Ontario secondary schools. This timely and necessary research will offer perspectives into how institutional oppression can be more effectively resisted.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theory is an indispensable aspect of any doctoral research. Without theory, an explanation of findings alone is inadequate to explain social oppression (Anyon, 2008). As my goal is to look beyond what just occurs in between school walls, it is necessary that I draw on the work of critical social theorists. Historical realism is the ontology of the critical social theory paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). This paradigm maps how outside events, past and present, impact the participants of my study. Freeman and Vasconcelos (2010) argued that critical social theorists “view society as a human

construction in need of reconstruction” (p. 7). As such, critical social theory’s epistemology is that knowledge is historically and socially constructed. Indeed, critical social theory enriched my data with increased critical, liberatory, and explanatory power. As Anyon (2008) contended:

...critical social theory can be a powerful tool with which to make links between educational “inside” and “outside,” between past, present, and future, and between research design and larger social meanings. Theory allows us to plan research that connects the ways in which social actors and conditions inside of school buildings, districts, and legislative offices are shaped and changed by what happens outside the classrooms...they inhabit. Conversely, theory can point us to the larger political and social meanings of what occurs in educational institutions and systems. As well, theory can embolden youth and community participants from whom theoretical engagement in general has been withheld. (p. 4)

As such, I drew upon anti-racist feminism and postcolonial feminism to contextualize my research in a meaningful way.

### ***Anti-racist Feminism***

Anti-racist feminism highlights the complexities associated with explaining the experiences of Muslim girls. Specifically, utilizing anti-racist feminism is important to contextualizing my findings given how Muslim girls and women have been essentialized for centuries. This is especially important to address as Muslim girls are a remarkably diverse group, composed of multiple races, cultures, ethnicities, and national backgrounds. More importantly, drawing on anti-racist feminism encouraged me to recruit a diverse sample of Muslim girls. The literature on Muslim girls’ educational experiences thus far has provided and disseminated significant insights into the common challenges they have faced with a particular focus on religion and gender (see Ali, 2012; Diab, 2008; Kassam, 2007; Mirza & Meetoo, 2018; Rezai-Rashti, 1994; 1998; 2005; Zine, 2008b). This research builds on such significant work by revealing how anti-Black racism, ethnocentrism, immigration status as well as SES shaped the experiences of Muslim girls within their schools, families, and communities. A detailed explanation of what anti-racist feminism is and how it contributes to this research will be discussed below.

Anti-racist feminism emerged in the 1980s and was one of the first movements to shake the foundation of second-wave feminism which emerged in the 1960s and was largely unconcerned with race and racism (Rezai-Rashti, 2005b). Rather, second-wave feminism's primary concern was centered on the gendered issues of middle-class White women, ignoring the discrimination women of colour (WOC) experienced at the intersections of their racial, class, and gendered identities (Rezai-Rashti, 2005b). hooks (2014) asserted that:

Every women's movement in America from its earliest origin to the present day has been built on a racist foundation. The first white women's rights advocates were never seeking social equality for all women; they were seeking social equality for white women. (p. 124)

By the same token, hooks (2014) reminded us that "in the United States maintaining white supremacy has always been as great if not a greater priority than maintaining strict sex-role divisions" (p. 52). Under these circumstances, hooks (2014) argued that issues of race should be at the core of feminism and that feminists who are uncritical of racism harm the feminist movement given that sexist and racist oppression are complementary and intersecting and not mutually exclusive. That is, issues of race and gender cannot be explained alone; rather, each explain the other.

Therefore, one criticism of second-wave feminism is that it ignored issues of racism, including other important forms of oppression such as classism (Rezai-Rashti, 2005b). In agreement, hooks (1981) argued that such omission has led to the reproduction of racism within the Western feminist movement given that unacknowledged differences automatically favour the epistemology and ontology of the dominant group. In fact, hooks (1981) emphasized that racist socialization encourages "bourgeois white women to think they are more capable of leading masses of women than other groups of women" (p. 54). Highlighting another pressing dimension, hooks (1981) argued that "not all women are equally oppressed because some women are able to use their class, race, and educational privilege to effectively resist sexist oppression" (p. 145). Rezai-Rashti (2005b) also highlighted how unacknowledged differences resulted in the feminist



movement focusing on issues that were important for White middle-class women and not WOC:

White feminists are ethnocentric when establishing priorities for the feminist movement, such as abortion rights and the notion of “family.” In a Eurocentric framework, the complexities of race engendered in the lives of black and Third-World women in relation to such priorities were not taken into account.... (p. 84-85)

Here, Rezai-Rashti (2005b) revealed that some White feminists can be ethnocentric as their imagined universalistic understandings of women’s needs do not reflect the needs of racial and ethnic minority women.

Another key criticism of second-wave feminism is that it has a tendency to homogenize. Collins (1990), another influential anti-racist feminist, elaborated on the dangers of the essentializing tendencies of second-wave feminism. Collins (1990) drew on Haraway’s conceptualization of standpoints, which “...are cognitive-emotional-political achievements crafted out of located social-historical-bodily experience” (p. 304).

Standpoint theory describes how women and other oppressed groups in society understand the world. As mentioned, the problem with second-wave feminism is that it assumes all women share similar social experiences, which automatically privileges the standpoint of White middle-class women over the standpoint of WOC which are dismissed as nonexistent. This is not to say that all WOC share similar experiences.

While they may share experiences based on their identities, for example, being Black and a woman, their standpoints may be very different based on other aspects of their identity and social positions, such as their nationality, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality. As Collins (1990) asserted, “despite the common challenges confronting African-American women as a group, individual Black women neither have identical experiences nor interpret experiences in a similar fashion” (p. 27).

Correspondingly, another aspect of second-wave feminism which is often overlooked, and which anti-racist feminists challenge, is the issue of epistemology. As described by hooks (1986), second-wave feminism tends to “focus primarily on cathartic, individual

psychological acknowledgement” (p. 133). Such an epistemology can exclude the subjective experiences of WOC in the effort to uphold *objectivity* and, instead, may pathologize their experiences. Indeed, feminist scholars began to question the founding philosophies, categories, concepts, and disciplines of second-wave feminism. As McCall (2005) contended, “...the philosophical critique of modernity included a disciplinary critique of modern science and a methodological critique of the scientific method, its claims to objectivity and truth belied by the actual practice of science” (p. 1776). Thus, WOC developed their own epistemology which differs from the methodologies associated with positivism as a means in which to respond to the societal challenges they faced and continue to face (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

While similar, the anti-racist feminist movement within the Canadian context is unique relative to the movement in the U.S. given the social and historical context of both nation-states. The main difference is that Canada is imagined as a mosaic where differences are apparent and respected. Whereas, in the U.S, assimilationist goals are public, and while there are people from a vast array of ethnicities, cultures, races, and nations, it is expected that they enter the melting pot and adopt American values (Maeder & McManus, 2020). While differences are thought to be celebrated within the Canadian context, which is a key descriptor of the multicultural agenda (see Rezai-Rashti, 2005b), some scholars argue that the term *visible minority* that is ascribed to those who are non-White within the Canadian political realm reproduce inequality through homogeneity, especially concerning WOC (see Bannerji, 2020b). Furthermore, within the academy of feminism in the Canadian context, Bannerji (2020a) revealed how some scholars essentialize WOC. As Bannerji (2020a) argued:

The great bulk of Canadian literature on women and what passes for Women’s Studies curricula leave the reader with the impression that women from the Third World and southern Europe are a very negligible part of the living and laboring population in Canada. Furthermore, the silences in this literature would seem to imply that nothing much is to be learned about the nature of economic, social and political organization of Canada by studying the lives or concerns of women of colour. (p. 196)

In line with this, Canadian feminist scholar Ng (1993) wrote:

There has been insufficient re-conceptualization of how race matters in the structuring of social experiences inside and outside the academy. More insidious and stifling, when racism is treated as an individualistic and attitudinal property, as Mohanty has pointed out, is that members of minority groups (both faculty and students) are tokenized. (p. 193)

Here, Ng (1993) drew on Mohanty, an anti-racist feminist scholar, to elaborate on how minority faculty members and students are tokenized. Mohanty (1989) suggested:

...specific “differences” (of personality, posture, behavior, etc.) of one woman of color stand in for the difference of the whole collective, and a collective voice is assumed in place of an individual voice...[T]his results in the reduction or averaging of Third World peoples [for example] in terms of individual personality characteristics... (p. 194)

Moreover, Mohanty (2003) critiqued Western feminism for essentializing and ahistorizing the experiences of WOC. Specifically, she argued that White feminism constructed Third-World women as subjugated individuals in need of rescue, ignoring their historical, geographical, social, and political differences, as well as disregarding their agency. As Mohanty (2003) argued:

While radical and liberal feminist assumptions of women as a sex class might elucidate (however inadequately) the autonomy of particular women’s struggles in the West, the application of the notion of women as a homogeneous category to women in the Third World colonizes and appropriates the pluralities of the simultaneous location of different groups of women in social class and ethnic frameworks; in doing so it ultimately robs them of their historical and political agency. (p. 39)

Marking the importance of relationality and acknowledging the politics of location,<sup>4</sup> Mohanty (2003) illuminated that every woman inhabits a specific location that is based on race, class, nation state, and religion, among other markers of social difference. Thus,

---

<sup>4</sup> Mohanty (2003) explained: “By the term ‘politics of location’ I refer to the historical, geographical, cultural, psychic, and imaginative boundaries that provide the ground for political definition and self-definition for contemporary U.S. feminists” (p. 106).

it is through the politics of location that Mohanty (2003) cautioned against essentialist discourses which construct all Third-World women as uniformly oppressed.

Mohanty's (2003) outlook, rooted in the politics of location, is in line with the major tenets of intersectionality theory which emerged within the field of anti-racist feminism (Nash, 2008). As Hancock (2007) asserted, "From the normative point of view, intersectionality has emerged as a compelling critique of this group unity equals group uniformity logic" (p. 65). Instead of understanding human experience through a cumulative approach, intersectionality instead aims to understand human experience through analyzing the multiplicity of identities which highlight the uniqueness and complexity of lived experience. Nash (2008) explained how cumulative understandings of social processes of categorization are illogical by drawing on Crenshaw's (1998) example of U.S. law. Nash (2008) stated that "because law recognizes only race- or gender-based injuries, black women's injuries as *black women* cannot be wholly addressed by the existing doctrinal structure" (p. 89). Specifically, Crenshaw (1998) asserted that "because intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (p. 140).

It is important to note that while intersectionality is a relatively recent theory which was introduced in academia by Crenshaw in the 1980s, the concept was leveraged to mobilize and advocate for women's rights globally prior to its use in the U.S. (Christoffersen, 2017; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Davis, 2008; Nash, 2008). Thus, intersectionality has provided a label for an already existing political and theoretical commitment (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Nash, 2008). Regarding the development of the theory in academia, intersectionality's focus was primarily on Black women at the intersection of gender and race (Crenshaw, 1998; Davis, 2008). According to Davis (2008), "intersectionality was intended to address the fact that the experiences and struggles of women of colour fell between the cracks of both feminist and anti-racist discourse" (p. 68). Furthermore, the evolution of intersectionality also began from questioning conventional understandings of

the experiences of WOC as they were considered *more* marginalized based on the addition of a new social inequality (gender, class, race). However, Davis (2014) explained that, with intersectionality, “the focus shifted to how race, class and gender interact in the social and material realities of women’s lives to produce and transform relations of power” (p. 18).

Although there are several definitions of intersectionality, Crenshaw (1998) highlighted that intersectionality is based on the premise that multiple oppressions are simultaneously experienced rather than experienced individually. In agreement, Collins (2000) emphasized that a key feature in conceptualizing intersectionality is understanding how different forms of oppression work with one another to produce injustice. Similarly, Davis (2008) denoted intersectionality as “the interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination” (p. 67) and “the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in the individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (p. 68). This is reminiscent of Collins’ (1990) notion of *the matrix of domination*.

The matrix of domination represents how intersecting oppressions are typically organized by power (Collins, 1990). Specifically, Collins (1990) asserted that the matrix of domination is organized by four different domains which intersect with one another. She argued that we must understand these different domains to fully understand how power functions, writing:

Each domain serves a particular purpose. The structural domain organizes the oppression, whereas the disciplinary domain manages it. The hegemonic domain justifies oppression, and the interpersonal domain influences everyday lived experience and the individual consciousness that ensues. (p. 276)

Likewise, Bowleg (2012) defined intersectionality as:

...a theoretical framework for understanding how multiple social identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, SES, and disability intersect at the micro level of

individual experience to reflect interlocking systems of privilege and oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism) at the macro social-structural level. (p. 1267)

Below is a list of what Bowleg (2012) considered to be some of the core tenets of intersectionality:

(1) social identities are not independent and unidimensional but multiple and intersecting, (2) people from multiple historically oppressed groups are the focal or starting point, and (3) multiple social identities at the micro level (i.e., intersections of race, gender, and SES) intersect with macrolevel structural factors (i.e., poverty, racism, and sexism) to illustrate or produce disparate health outcomes. (p. 1268)

Most scholars would agree with Bowleg's (2012) understandings of intersectionality's core tenets. She highlighted that it is not just social identities that intersect, but different levels of analysis that also intersect with each other (i.e., micro, meso, macro, global). According Cuadraz and Uttal (1999), such complexities foster more of an accurate representation of power and inequality in society without losing sight of individual experiences which construct and shape social structures of inequality.

Nonetheless, Bowleg (2012), like Mohanty (2003), cautioned against applying a universal understanding of the macro level of analysis when contextualizing the micro level of analysis. She instead acknowledged that individuals from historically underrepresented groups have unique histories based on group affiliation, and thus, contexts which in turn shape policy decisions and outcomes. Bowleg (2012) highlighted the importance of this acknowledgement when attempting to develop interventions aimed at remedying social issues, arguing that an avoidance of an analysis of the macro will increase structural inequalities various minority groups face. In addition to this, Bowleg (2012), from a public health perspective, explained how intersectionality is emancipatory:

Because people from multiple historically oppressed and marginalized populations are its starting point, intersectionality examines the health of these populations in their own context and from their vantage point rather than their deviation from the norms of White middle-class people. (p. 1268-1269)

Most scholars agree that intersectionality provides profound insight into lived experiences by understanding how social categories such as race, gender, and SES intersect with each other.

Considering the history and specificities of anti-racist feminism, this framework allows for the possibility to understand the complexities of Muslim girls' experiences. Namely, it allows us to conceptualize and see how Muslim girls may hold both *oppressed* and *privileged* social identities simultaneously, and how some of the identities that they occupy may be more salient than others in certain contexts and situations. Thus, anti-racist feminism allows for a comprehensive understanding of how the experiences of people are shaped in certain contexts, which can enable the effective development of strategies aimed at improving some of the social issues a particular group may experience (Christoffersen, 2017).

While there have been improvements within the education system, existing scholarship demonstrates that many racialized youth still experience marginalization within the school system. According to Davis (2014), anti-racist feminism allows for blind spots<sup>5</sup> to emerge within research so that misdiagnosis of a problem is less likely to occur. Indeed, anti-racist feminism is a way of analyzing and understanding the complexity of human experiences through emphasizing that social divisions such as gender, religion, race, class, sexuality, age, and dis/ability work together and build on each other (Collins & Bilge, 2016). As such, I am unable to comprehensively study Muslim girls' experiences of Islamophobia without understanding other forms of oppression and privileges each participant experiences. Therefore, when anti-racist feminism is paired with postcolonial feminism, participants' experiences are more effectively contextualized.

---

<sup>5</sup> Recognizing blind spots can be described as uncovering hidden exclusions in research. Davis (2008) explained: "The infinite regress built into the concept – which categories to use and when to stop – makes it vague, yet also allows endless constellations of intersecting lines of difference to be explored. With each new intersection, new connections emerge and previously hidden exclusions come to light" (p. 77).

### ***Postcolonial Feminism***

Postcolonial feminism focuses on the experiences of women from formally colonized territories and provides unique contextual factors specific to Muslim women. Thus, the purpose of including postcolonial feminism in this study is two-fold. First, postcolonial feminism situates the experiences of Muslim girls in the diaspora. Specifically, it identifies how colonialism and sexism interlock with each other. Second, postcolonial feminism has the potential to address the limitations of both second-wave feminism and postcolonial theory (Mohanty, 2003). Specifically, postcolonial feminism emerged in the 1980s as a response to Western feminism—which is predominately concerned with the plight of Western feminists as discussed above—and postcolonial theory—which inadequately addresses issues of gender in relation to colonialism. Thus, this section begins with a description of postcolonial theory and its limitation before delving into the significance of postcolonial feminism to this study.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1994) demonstrated the impact of European colonization of large, diverse geographical locations, demonstrating that although direct colonization has ended, imperialism exists within a cultural sphere. Said (1994) posited that colonialism and imperialism embrace a type of cultural formation which is marked by the idea that specific people and territories require domination and control. Although there were general trends of Western global colonization, there were also differences in the way lands were colonized contingent on who colonized peoples were. In *Orientalism*, Said (2003) explained how the image of the Orient<sup>6</sup> is a consequence of the discourses produced by the Occident,<sup>7</sup> highlighting a number of reasons for why such an image was fashioned by the West. People from the Orient were described as backwards, violent, and

---

<sup>6</sup> Geographical locations comprised of North Africa, the Middle East and India.



barbaric relative to those from the West who were self-defined as morally superior and civilized. Thus, the Orient was and remains an integral part of Western material civilization and culture because images and descriptions of the Orient defined the West in contrast to itself, built upon a relationship of domination, power, and hegemony (Said, 2003). Indeed, such ideas did not suddenly diminish postcolonialism, but rather they still linger within both the West and previously colonized nations.

As has been noted, postcolonial theory defines aspects of the social and political landscape of the globe today. A vast increase of individuals from territories that were once colonized now reside in the metropolitan West, which is largely a consequence of decolonization and imperialism (Omi & Winant, 2005; Said, 2003). Among these groups are Muslims, who have been subject to Orientalist media depictions in the West (Said, 1997).

As argued by Said (1997), the media sustains and intensifies Orientalist depictions of Muslims. Although Said (1997) recognized the turbulence and unattractiveness of the Islamic world, he wrote that this is no accident as social upheavals<sup>8</sup> across the Middle East and North Africa expose simple-minded clichés of Orientalism. Accordingly, Said (1997) remarked that Islam “defines a relatively small proportion of what actually goes on in the Islamic world” (p. xvi) and that “...covering Islam is a one-sided activity that obscures what ‘we’ do, and highlights instead what Muslims and Arabs by their very flawed nature are” (p. xxii). In other words, the conflicts and political issues occurring in the Middle East are not a direct result of Islamic teachings; rather, they are a result of colonization, capitalism, and war which have negative impacts on the economy, society, and people.

One of the criticisms associated with Said's theory of Orientalism, however, is that it neglects to highlight the significant role gender plays within this project of racialization. As Mohanty (2003) pointed out, women from previously colonized nations are essentialized as subjugated victims in need of rescue. The significance of this not only reveals the unique taken-for-granted assumptions associated with Muslim women, but also reveals how Muslim men were further racialized as violent and barbaric. Such rhetoric is also evident within the Western feminist movement.

Ahmed (1992) revealed how Muslim feminist scholars questioned the concept of *universality*, and uncovered the ethnocentrism as well as the limitations within Western feminism:

As the history of Western women makes it clear, there is no validity to the notion that the progress of women can be achieved only by abandoning the ways of androcentric culture in favour of those of another culture. It was never argued, for instance, even by the most ardent nineteenth century feminists, that the European women could liberate themselves from the oppressiveness of Victorian dress by only adopting the dress of another culture. Nor has it even been argued, whether in Mary Wollstonecraft's day, when European women had no rights, or in our own day and even by the most radical feminists, that because male domination and injustice to women have existed throughout the West's recorded history, the only resource to Western women is to abandon Western culture and find themselves some other culture. The idea seems absurd, and yet this is routinely how the matter of improving the status of women is posed with respect to women in Arab and other non-Western societies. (Ahmed, 1992, p. 244)

By drawing on Ahmed's (1992) quote, Rezai-Rashti (2005b) emphasized the double standards riddled within Western feminism which speaks to how it is rooted in colonialism. This is a significant reason why some women reject the title of *feminism*.

Specifically, Mohanty et al. (1991) explained how Third-World women question the term *feminism* as several feminist movements have been criticized for upholding cultural imperialism and ignoring the diverse experiences of non-White and Third World women in favour of universalizing narratives of women. Mohanty et al. (1991) suggested:

Western feminists appropriate and “colonise” the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of difference classes, religions, cultures, races and castes in these countries. It is in the process of homogenization and systemization of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse and this power needs to be defined and named. (p. 39)

Furthermore, Mohanty et al. (1991) asserted that “third world women have always engaged with feminism, even if the label has been rejected in a number of instances” (p. 7). This is in stark contrast to how some Western feminists homogenize the experiences of women in postcolonial nations based on the assumption that such regions are not evolved as the West is (Mohanty, 1991). Thus, Third-World women have a general distrust of popular conceptualizations of feminism which erases their identities while privileging Eurocentric ways of knowing.

For these reasons, postcolonial feminism highlights the intricately woven relationship between sexism and colonialism and unveils the way colonial goals were met under the guise of *feminism*. Specifically, postcolonial feminism underlines the impact Western colonization has on colonized women. This is done through emphasizing how women from former colonial territories are *doubly-colonized*. Double-colonization was the “catch-phrase of post-colonial and feminist discourses in the 1980s” (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 233). According to Ashcroft et al. (1995), “women in formerly colonized societies were doubly-colonized by both imperial and patriarchal ideologies” (p. 233).

Regarding imperial ideologies, postcolonial feminists explained how the image of Muslim women was developed by Western imperial powers. Abu-Lughod (2013) illustrated the multiple ways this image was created:

In the nineteenth century, the depictions took two forms: women of the Orient were either portrayed as downtrodden victims who were imprisoned, secluded, shrouded and treated as beasts of burden or they appeared in a sensual world of excessive sexuality—as slaves in harems and the subjects of the gaze of lascivious and violent men, not to mention those looking in. (p. 88)

The former discourse was used by colonizers as moral justification to save Muslim women from Islam and Muslim men. Shohat and Stam (1994) contended that such discourses continue to allow Western imperial powers to “sanitize Western history” (p. 3) as a history of morality rather than of conquest, power, and violence. Zine (2002) elaborated on this further by arguing that White men who supposedly wanted to civilize and save *backwards* people actually wanted to gain political, economic, and cultural domination of people through knowledge production, which described the Orient as a primitive region in need of rescue and modernization.

In the process of this rescue, it was expected of Muslim women to abandon their native cultures and to adopt Western ways of living. As Ahmed (1992) asserted, “It was in this discourse of colonial ‘feminism’ that the notion that an intrinsic connection existed between issues of culture and the status of women, and in particular that progress for women could be achieved only through abandoning the native culture...” (p. 244). Therefore, issues of class and gender were central to colonialism. As Mohanty et al. (1991) contended, “...colonial states created racially and sexually differentiated classes conducive to a ruling process fundamentally grounded in economic surplus extraction. And they did this by institutionalizing ideologies and knowledges which legitimated these practices of ruling” (p. 18).

In addition to being portrayed as victims needing to be saved from their native culture, Muslim women were also marked as inferior in comparison to Victorian women. As Ahmed (1992) indicated, the British contrasted Egyptian women in an inferior way relative to Victorian women who “were regarded as the ideal measure of civilization” (p. 151). Likewise, Mohanty (2003) argued that Third-World women are often *othered* as ignorant and tradition bound in contrast to Western women who are perceived as educated and modern. In this way, parallels between postcolonial feminism and anti-racist feminism are evident as both recognize how cultural formations of Black women and Third-World women were created in contrast to White women for a hegemonic, imperialistic order to be developed. As Mohanty et al. (1991) contended:

... constructions of white womanhood as chaste, domesticated, and morally pure had everything to do with corresponding constructions of black slave women as promiscuous, available plantation workers. It is the intersections of the various systemic networks of class, race, (hetero)sexuality, and nation, then, that position us as “women.” (p. 13)

Therefore, Muslim and Black women were constructed by the West in similar yet distinct ways.

Indeed, through this construction, Muslim women’s bodies became symbols of oppression as the apparent violence and subjugation often associated with Muslim men and Islam served as justification for colonization and a reference for success of cultural imperialism. Ahmed (1992) highlighted the hypocrisy of this discourse by arguing that although colonizers seemed so concerned with the emancipation of Muslim women, they were opposed to the emancipation of *their own* women in Europe. Such complex issues regarding Muslim women are still present today, highlighting how we are not yet in a postcolonial era. As Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2008) pointed out, “Knowledge about such historical perspectives, particularly as they relate to illuminating the cultural norms governing the practices of veiling, are instrumental in exposing the fiction of the end of colonialism in the ‘West’” (p. 423).

Regarding patriarchal oppression, postcolonial feminists highlighted how imperialism and patriarchal oppression converge and shape the experiences of Muslim women. As Rezai-Rashti (2005b) reminded us, “...it is also significant to look at the internal power dynamics within these communities and challenge certain cultural and religious gender-based practices that are prevalent within these groups” (p. 85).

Indeed, challenging the *Muslim women need to be* rescued stereotype is important, but it is crucial to not ignore the presence of sexism in Islamic societies. However, one must tread carefully when being critical of such sexism as it is easy to engage in essentialist colonial discourses of Muslim women (Rezai-Rashti, 1998). For example, domestic violence is often perceived as a cultural issue for Muslims and an individual issue for Westerners. When a Muslim man murders his wife, it considered an honour killing;

however, when a White man kills his wife, it is usually rationalized as an individual issue: either he was under the influence, is mentally unstable, or committed a crime of passion (Shier & Shor, 2016). However, domestic violence and sexism are in fact cultural issues in Western societies as well, as they are in the majority of countries around the globe (Katz, 2006). Yet, violence and sexism towards women and girls is often racialized when non-White peoples are involved, and imagined to be a cultural issue. Rezai-Rashti (2005a) marked the prevalence of this within the education system where an educator automatically assumed that a Muslim student's problem with her family was rooted in her culture and religion, where in fact it was an intergenerational conflict that was not specific to culture and religion.

In line with this, Abu-Lughod (2013) emphasized the importance of how issues of colonialism, war, and class propelled sexism in *Islamic* countries. After all, a fundamentalist form of Islam emerged as a response to Western imperialism in *Islamic* countries. Those in power interpreted Islam in a manner that best suited their political goals, thus, Islam was used and adapted according to political pursuits. As Rezai-Rashti (1998) maintained, "women are oppressed in Muslim countries not because of Islam as a religion but because of the way that Islam is interpreted by those in positions of power" (p. 81). She also cautioned against only associating fundamentalism with Islam given that fundamentalists exist in all religions.

Overall, postcolonial feminism connects gendered historical events to present-day issues and is crucial for this study and furthermore identifies how Islamophobia and sexism intersect as well as explains why Islamophobia exists today. Thus, it provides a historical context which explains why schools maintain and exacerbate gendered Islamophobia.

## **Overview of Chapters**

In this chapter, I have introduced my research topic, significance, questions, and gaps. Furthermore, I have presented the theories which frame and connect all the various

sections of my proposed research. The theories that frame this research are anti-racist feminism and postcolonial feminism.

Chapter 2 consists of a literature review, which discusses contextual factors that impact Muslims in the West as well as the common themes in the literature concerning Muslim students' experiences in schools within the Western context. Many studies were reviewed and synthesized which further marked the importance of this study given the gaps in the literature and, equally important, contextualized the findings of this study.

Chapter 3 provides critical insight into this dissertation's methodology which is a qualitative case-study that draws on feminist principles. Specifically, I drew on anti-racist feminism when analyzing participants' experiences in efforts to unearth any blind spots within the research. In this chapter, the methods, the research design, as well as the limitations associated with a qualitative case study will be discussed.

Chapter 4 details how the participants in this study experienced Islamophobia in their schools. Furthermore, their gendered experiences were fleshed out and their intersecting identities were uncovered. While the participants experienced similar experiences with gendered Islamophobia, their experiences deviated based on their race, immigration status and SES. Within such a complex dynamic, specific instances of participants' challenges with their teachers and peers were detailed. Furthermore, their experiences with religious accommodations were shared and it was revealed these accommodations varied based on their geographical location. Finally, this chapter reveals that the participants of this study were not passive victims; rather, they engaged in counter-hegemonic strategies aimed at challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions imposed on them.

Chapter 5 centers the participants' voices. Specifically, against the backdrop of the gendered Islamophobia they experienced in schools, participants' views on the veil as well as their families and communities are addressed, revealing that Muslim girls' experiences are unique and multifaceted. Participants held the veil in high regard and

viewed their parents as immensely supportive of their educational pursuits. However, participants experienced familial challenges in the form of sexism in their homes as well as hyper-policing in their communities, where they were met with the disapproving gaze for their choice of attire and for socializing with the opposite gender. While these were common experiences for the participants in this study, applying an anti-racist feminist lens throughout the research process uncovered how their experiences diverged based on their race and ethnicity, highlighting the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism and ethnocentrism.

Chapter 6 is a concluding chapter which provides a summary of the research, revisits the research questions, and highlights the research contributions as well as offers several policy recommendations.



## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### **Introduction**

Muslim students have been the subject of numerous studies that examine their experiences in schools. As the current research aims to explore the experiences of Muslim girls in secondary schools, reviewing and synthesizing the literature on Muslim students in education is pertinent as it contextualizes the findings of this study while identifying the gaps in the literature. Although this literature review is primarily centered on the experiences of Muslim students within the education system, it begins with an overview of the debates around the concept of *Islamophobia* as well as the politics of the veil. This overview is important as it helps us conceptualize Islamophobia. Furthermore, reviewing the politics of veiling fosters an understanding of how Muslim girls continue to be racialized within the Canadian context. Following this, a review of the literature addressing Muslim students' experiences in school will be addressed. Several themes have emerged across these existing studies: (1) experiences with peers; (2) experiences with educators; (3) perceptions of school environment; (4) experiences with families; and (5) anti-Black racism in schools.

#### **Islamophobia: Is It a Form of Racism?**

The term *Islamophobia* is typically used to describe hostile attitudes and behaviours directed towards Muslims and Islam (Bleich, 2012). However, there are several debates regarding the conceptualization of Islamophobia (Bleich, 2012). Namely, a major debate associated with Islamophobia is whether it is solely religious prejudice or a form of racism. Related to this debate is the tendency for some to ahistorize Islamophobia, which strengthens the argument against Islamophobia being a form of racism. Lastly, some argue that labelling occurrences as *Islamophobia* is a smokescreen which prevents individuals from criticizing Islam and Muslims. These three debates will be elaborated on in this section. Understanding these issues is important for two significant reasons. On

the one hand, it helps to distinguish between what types of experiences are considered Islamophobic, while on the other hand, it provides clear insight into how Islamophobia can be addressed within schools.

To begin, the debate over whether Islamophobia is simply religious prejudice or a form of racism has been the subject of much discussion. While some scholars have argued that victims of Islamophobia are Muslim, others argue this perspective is limited as non-Muslims who *look Muslim* (for example, Sikhs and Arab Christians) are also subject to discrimination (Jenkins, 2016). Such scholars who assume Islamophobia is merely a form of religious prejudice that only targets Muslims (see Bleich, 2012), however, ignore that Islamophobia is indeed a form of racism given the racialization of Muslim people. As such, Islamophobia today can be explained through the project of racialization, which began during the colonial era (Rattansi, 2020). Therefore, it is important to understand the historical context of how Muslim people were racialized.

To explain the project of racialization, the term *race* was argued to have emerged in the 16th century to identify one's family lineage and was rarely used within the English language (Rattansi, 2020). However, with the advent of European colonial expansion starting in the 17th century, the term *race* was used more frequently as it was redefined to serve colonial agendas (Rattansi, 2020). Through scientific racism (racial typology), the term *race* shifted from signifying one's family lineage to indicating group membership based on geographical location and culture. More specifically, groups of people who shared the same geographical location and culture were *racialized* (racially categorized) based on the colour of their skin, the size of their skull, the shape of their nose, and the texture of their hair, among other factors, instead of their family lineage (Rattansi, 2020).

According to Rattansi (2020), predictions of one's level of intelligence and the presumed ability to be *moral* and *civilized* were made based on one's race. Different races were also compared to one another on a continuum: races closer to being *White* were considered more superior than races who were characterized by skin shades that significantly

contrasted with *Whiteness*. The races on the lower end of the spectrum were considered more *animal-like* rather than *human* and were thought to lack the moral capacity to be civilized. It is here that the essentialized *other* emerged vis-à-vis symbolic representations as a means of justification and was subsequently utilized as a manipulative tool embedded within identity politics to oppress and conquer two-thirds of the world (Said, 1994). Thus, through such binary logic, the notion of the superior “West” emerged as it is contrasted with the inferior *other*. According to Said (1993), racial typology corresponded with the cultural imperialist project where false narratives about the *Orient/other* were developed through science and literature to position Western Europeans as superior.

While Said (1994) primarily focused on the cultural aspect of racialization, Shaheen (2003) identified how Muslims were, and continue to be, racialized as a homogenous group that is characterized by specific physical features. Such physical characteristics that are deeply embedded within our social consciousness materialize in such a way that individuals who are not Muslim but share similar physical characteristics of what is considered to signify *Muslimness* can experience Islamophobia as well. It is for this reason that Islamophobia is not only considered a form of religious oppression but also is conceptualized as racism. While *scientific* racial typology that justified predictions of personality and capabilities based on appearance have long been debunked (Rattansi, 2020), racialized narratives continue to persist, upheld between the bidirectional relationship of various institutions within contemporary society and internalized oppression (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Another way this is maintained is through continued ahistorizing of colonial legacies.

Related to erasing the colonial past, there is a tendency among some academics and journalists to describe Islamophobic events using words such as *unfounded*, *irrational*, or *indiscriminate* (Bleich, 2012; Runnymede Trust, 1997). The issue with using such adjectives is that they ahistoricize Islamophobia and imply that Islamophobia is a result of impulse rather than rational thought. One of the outcomes of using such adjectives is

that some may assume that Islamophobia stems from a defensive reaction to terrorism led by individuals who identify as Muslims. For instance, I was at an Islamic conference in 2016 and one activist stated that the reason why Islamophobia exists is because of a small group of *Islamic extremists* who cause havoc around the globe. Under this premise, Islamophobia becomes irrational, indiscriminate, senseless, and unfounded. Indubitably, Islamophobia has increased because of terrorist attacks led by Islamic fundamentalists, among other events. However, the origins of Islamophobia can be traced back centuries (Allen, 2010). As explained earlier, Orientalism was used to create cultural constructs of Muslims for the West to colonize Islamic lands, and these cultural constructs still exist today (Said, 1994; Shaheen, 2003). Therefore, Islamophobia is not driven by irrational or indiscriminate fears, attitudes, or behaviours. Rather, it has been driven by the colonizers' methodic and manipulative reasoning and logic that aimed to secure domination and control. This speaks to the problem of using adjectives such as *unfounded* and *irrational* when describing Islamophobia. As Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) remarked, the language we use shapes our social consciousness, and thus it influences our actions.

Aside from the above stated debates, some oppose using the term *Islamophobia* altogether and argue that labelling events as Islamophobic discourages people from criticizing Muslims and Islam (see Bleich, 2012). However, through historicizing Islamophobia, one will note that criticisms against Islam and/or Muslims are not Islamophobic; they become Islamophobic only when they are developed from historic colonial discourses marked by homogenization. As a scholar who disseminated the challenges of Muslims in the public education system, Rezai-Rashti (1994) embodied this assertion by recognizing that research on Muslim students needs to be comprehensively analyzed by understanding "their communities and that of society and the education system at large. Both exhibit racism and sexism. Both worlds are not without contradictions and conflicts" (pp. 78-79). Here, Rezai-Rashti (1994) underscored the importance of critically examining various Islamic communities as they too exhibit forms of oppression, revealing how some of those who are invested in dismantling

Islamophobia also mark the significance of problematizing the practices within some Islamic communities, which the current research also addresses.

In this section, debates regarding the conceptualization of Islamophobia were reviewed. The major controversies discussed, namely a) whether Islamophobia is a form of racism, b) the problem associated with ahistorizing Islamophobia, and c) the idea that the concept is used as a smokescreen to prevent individuals from criticizing Islam or Muslims, are significant to understanding Muslim students' educational experiences. This section also addressed some of the major misconceptions of Islamophobia which further allows it to persist within society and educational spaces. While this section was primarily concerned with how racialization is at the core of Islamophobia, it is also pertinent to consider the role gender plays within this project of racialization. In the next section, the veil, a significant aspect that uniquely racializes Muslim women and girls, will be discussed through the lens of national and global politics.

### **The Politics of the Veil**

Reviewing literature that delves into the politics of the veil provides us with a glimpse into how gendered colonial narratives exist today and how the veil is a significant factor that contributes to the racialization of Muslim women and girls. Examining this literature further facilitates our understanding of why *the oppressed Muslim girl* narrative is embedded in our social consciousness and reveals how gender and religion converge and shape the everyday experiences of Muslim women and girls in society. This section begins with a brief history of the veil prior to colonialism, touches on how the politics of the veil was used to justify the war on Afghanistan, and reviews the politics associated with the banning of the veil, primarily within the Canadian context. The main goals of this section are to reveal how the politics of the veil contribute to the unique racialization

of veiled Muslim girls and women and to provide insight into how this shapes their school experiences with gendered Islamophobia.<sup>9</sup>

The history of the veil predates the emergence of Islam. According to Ahmed (1992), there was a time when the veil was worn only by prestigious upper-class women who were a part of pre-Islamic empires. Even after Islam was introduced, the veil continued to be symbolic of upper-class women in particular societies, and was, and still is, a part of Christian, Jewish, and Sikh religious traditions. However, the significance of the veil drastically shifted during colonial era when it began to be imagined as a symbol of oppression associated with Islam specifically. Although the veil was initially used as a class signifier and continues to be worn by women of various faith traditions, it is commonly associated solely with Islam.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, gendered Islamophobia is a specific type of oppression that is targeted towards Muslim women and girls. Zine (2006b) defined gendered Islamophobia as “specific forms of discrimination leveled at Muslim women that proceed from historically contextualized negative stereotypes that inform and sustain the structural conditions of domination” (pp. 9-10). She argued that:

Discourses of race, gender and religion have scripted the terms of engagement in the war on terror. As a result, Muslim feminists and activists must engage with the dual oppressions of ‘gendered Islamophobia’...that has re-vitalized Orientalist tropes and representations of backward, oppressed and politically immature women in need of liberation and rescue through imperialist interventions as well as the challenge of religious extremism and puritan discourses that authorize equally limiting narrative of Islamic womanhood and compromise their human rights and liberty. (p. 1)

Here, Zine (2006b) brought attention to how colonial discourses of the past continue to shape modern politics. She focused on the War on Terror as an example by

---

<sup>9</sup> The experiences of Muslim students with gendered Islamophobia will be addressed in the second major section of the literature review that focuses on the schooling experiences of Muslim students.

drawing attention to how the veil was used as a political strategy for the U.S. to invade Afghanistan. Specifically, soon after 9/11, the U.S. declared war against the Taliban and invaded Afghanistan alongside their allies. A key narrative used to obtain public support to invade Afghanistan was to emancipate Afghan women. In the same vein, Macdonald (2006) highlighted the significance of this by arguing that the media:

...used women's bowed and veiled bodies to confirm the urgency of rescuing them from their fate. Without historical enquiry into the reasons for women's poverty and misery, or the role of Western powers in enabling these conditions to prevail, the popular press graphically depicted the plight of female and child victims. (p. 9)

Further marking the parallels between historic colonial discourses and the discourse of the Muslim Afghan women, Zine (2006b) asserted that:

The static and essentialized construction of the Muslim woman as the abject, 'oppressed other' became an important tool in the arsenal of ideological warfare designed to gain public consent for the war on terror. This discursive positioning cast all Muslim women within this limiting narrative. (p. 8)

Therefore, reflective of the colonial era, the way in which Muslim women are positioned as the *oppressed other* played a significant role during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan (Fahmy, 2004; Macdonald, 2006; Zine, 2006b).

While there are many other examples of how the colonial *rescue narrative* persists in society, the war on Afghanistan was of specific focus of many scholars (see Abu-Lughod, 2003; Fahmy, 2004; Macdonald, 2006; Zine, 2006b). Relevant to the politics of the veil, Macdonald (2006) brought attention to how the Western media celebrated the U.S.'s military success through the symbol of the veil. Specifically, the Western media portrayed Afghans celebrating the *liberation* of Kabul by women discarding their veils and men shaving their beards (Macdonald, 2006)—a signifier of ridding Afghan culture of Islamic symbols. However, the many Afghan women continued to wear the veil. Likewise, Fahmy (2004) highlighted how Western media sensationalized the images of Afghan women removing their veil. Through her content analysis of Associated Press

photos taken before and after the *liberation* of Kabul, she found that 60 percent of the Afghan women photographed continued to don the veil. Therefore, the veil was irrelevant for Afghan women contrary to how they were portrayed by the West. What was relevant for Afghan women was how poverty, lack of health care, and outcomes of militaristic invasion impacted them and their families (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Macdonald, 2006). In the same vein, Abu-Lughod (2013) revealed how imperialism exists within feminism and how the notion of *rescuing women* from their culture is often riddled with oppressive discourses that do more harm than good. Such rescue narratives underlie the debates regarding the banning of the veil.

The rescue narrative was also used as a premise throughout many of the debates surrounding the veil within Canadian politics. While most of these debates are prevalent within the context of Québec,<sup>10</sup> there has been controversy over the *niqab*<sup>11</sup> at the national level. While a veil ban never occurred in Québec up until recently within the public sector, Muslim girls who wore the veil struggled to exercise their right to wear it in schools even when the ban was not in place. Zine (2008a) argued in this particular case, “the *hijab*<sup>12</sup> was not only a way of constructing the Islamic other as a threat to liberal civic values but it also polarized French nationalism with Anglophone Federalism” (p. 241).

Aside from the attempt to ban the veil in Québec schools, there has been repeated efforts to ban all conspicuous religious symbols within the public sector (see Macdonald, 2013;

---

<sup>10</sup> Other important events related to the veil in Québec include a judge forcibly removing a veiled woman from her court room for refusing to remove her veil (see Hamilton, 2015) and the exclusion of women and girls wearing a veil from the public sphere (e.g., “sporting tournaments, educational institutions and voting booths” Al-Saji, 2010, p. 876).

<sup>11</sup> A form of the veil that typically covers the nose and mouth.

<sup>12</sup> *Hijab* and veil (a scarf that typically covers the hair and neck) are often considered to be the same and are used interchangeably. However, in this study I use the term *veil*. In Islam, *hijab* means partition or barrier, and broadly encompasses the principle of modest behaviour and dress for both men and women (El Guindi et al., 2009). Thus, the veil is considered to be one aspect of *hijab*.



Shingler, 2018; Uprichard, 2019).<sup>13</sup> Since 2013, various bills have been introduced calling for a ban on all prominent religious symbols, which many argued targeted Muslim women in particular (see Shingler, 2018; Uprichard, 2019). Although most attempts have been denied, Bill 21, the Québec Ban on Religious Symbols, was passed in 2020. This Bill not only requires those who wear the *niqab* to remove their face cover to access public services, but also the Bill also bans public sector employees such as judges, police officers, and teachers from wearing any religious symbols, including, but not limited to, the veil, turban, or *kippah* (Uprichard, 2019). The implications of this ban evidently limit the possible career choices of Muslim students while complicating the experiences of veiled Muslim women who already held such public positions prior to the Bill, leaving them grappling with the prospect of removing their veil to ensure their continued livelihood. While such attempts to remove the veil are positioned as “religious neutrality,” there is an evident gendered and racialized dimension that implicitly underlies such debates. This argument is strengthened by some Québec feminists and politicians who call for the banning of the veil based on an assumption that it oppresses women (see Hoodfar, 2003; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008).

Attempting to ban the veil based on the premise of secularism is not a new approach. France aimed to ban the veil from the public sector in two failed attempts in 1989 and 1994 (Al-Saji, 2010). What underscored such attempts were perceptions that the veil was not only *threatening* but also that it opposed gender parity. The main argument for banning the veil was to protect young women “from communal or Islamic forms of gender oppression” (Al-Saji, 2010, p. 880). Thus, the racialization of Muslim women as oppressed, downtrodden victims became symbolized through their donning of the veil, which stood in stark contrast to the supposed image of French superiority, morality, and gender equity. While Islam was perceived as antithetical to gender parity, gender issues

---

<sup>13</sup> For example, the Québec Charter of Values, Québec’s Religious Neutrality Law, and the Québec ban on religious symbols.

in mainstream French society were interestingly left unquestioned and unproblematicized (see Al-Saji, 2010). The case of France is a formidable example of how the veil in the West has played a considerable role in contributing to the racialization of Muslim women and girls.

Unlike the case of France, religious neutrality was not initially used as a premise to ban the veil in Canada at the national level; rather, gender oppression was the impetus. This is evident in the *niqab* controversy which played a significant role in the 2015 Federal Canadian Elections (Macdonald, 2013), when Prime Minister Stephen Harper inquired, “Why would Canadians, contrary to our own values, embrace a practice at that time that is not transparent, that is not open and, frankly, is rooted in a culture that is anti-women?” (The Canadian Press, 2015).

The politics surrounding the veil within the Canadian context provides us with two significant insights: how Islam is homogenized and how Muslim women are racialized. For example, regarding the homogenization of Islam, many argued that the *niqab* is not an Islamic requirement; therefore, removing the *niqab* would not violate religious freedom (Kay, 2015). The problem with this statement is that it assumes all Muslims follow one version of Islam when in reality there are Muslims who religiously justify the *niqab* as a requirement while others respectfully disagree. Pertaining to the racialization of Muslim women, the premise of banning the *niqab* was rooted in essentialized depictions that cast all Muslim women as oppressed victims in need of rescue from their backwards and barbaric culture. It is important to note, however, that Muslim men are also racialized as they are depicted as oppressive and violent through such gendered narratives. With that in mind, the overarching narrative is that Islamic values are not compatible with Canadian ones, and as result, Muslims are further cast as a threat and as *the other*. As Mazurski (2016) asserted, the *niqab* debate in Canada “...recycles tired Orientalist tropes and reinvigorates stereotypes about veiled Muslim women post September 11” (p. 4).

In this section, the politics of the veil in relation to how Muslim women continue to be racialized was examined. Reviewing such literature is important to understand how we imagine Muslim women and girls, and how we are continuously socialized into internalizing racialized stereotypes. This can help facilitate our understanding of Muslim students' school experiences in the literature, which is presented in the following section. Recognizing the significance of such debates will help with developing a comprehensive understanding of the participants' school experiences in this study.

### **Muslim Students' Experiences in Schools**

There is scant research that addresses the experiences of Muslim girls within the Canadian education system. Moreover, there are even fewer studies that consider Muslim girls' school experiences alongside their experiences within their homes and communities. While there is an abundance of literature to draw upon that provides significant insight into the lived realities of Muslim students within the educational context, such research is mostly situated within the post-secondary level and outside of Canada.<sup>14</sup> Reviewing and synthesizing existing literature assists with contextualizing the findings of this current study while also helping to uncover contradictions between studies and gaps in the literature. As I will discuss in this section, there are contradictions in the literature pertaining to how the role of teachers and families influence the lives of Muslim youth, which speaks to the importance of how context shapes the experiences of Muslim students' experiences in the literature. This section will also address the gaps in the literature, namely with regards to existing research which has paid limited attention to how social differences shape Muslim girls' gendered experiences with Islamophobia. Furthermore, the literature reviewed in this section reveals the need for more studies that

---

<sup>14</sup> The research presented in this section will not be categorized based on level of education. Instead, it is organized by common themes across the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. Furthermore, while the current study focuses on Muslim girls' experiences, much of the research reviewed will be organized based on the experiences of Muslim students in the education system irrespective of gender due to the limited number of studies that focus on Muslim girls.

address how Muslim students experience accommodations. With all of this considered, several themes emerged within the literature on the school experiences of Muslim students: (1) experiences with peers, (2) experiences with educators, (3) perceptions of school atmosphere, (4) experiences with families, and (5) experiences of anti-Black racism in schools.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Experiences With Peers***

A primary concern for adolescents is to develop a sense of belonging, and this is commonly achieved by developing relationships with peers in school (see Drolet & Arcand., 2013). However, based on several studies, Muslim students often experienced challenges developing friendships as a consequence of being subjected to homogenizing discourses that cast them as *the other*, rooted in the politics of difference which are subsumed in Western society. This subsection begins with some of the stereotypes Muslim students struggled with before delving into how this influenced their peer relationships at school. Regarding the latter, Muslim students experienced name-calling, which in turn made making friends with non-Muslim students challenging. This subsection concludes with an overview of the literature which has found that Muslim students preferred to socialize with other Muslim students.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, post-9/11 has seen a revival of Orientalist discourses which cast Muslims as backward, barbaric, and violent. Furthermore, gendered Orientalist tropes have been reinvigorated within society as well as within the education system, as numerous studies have found (for example, see Khosrojerdi, 2015; Mir, 2006; Zine, 2006b). In the same vein, Zine (2006b) explored the experiences of young Muslim women enrolled in a Canadian Islamic school and revealed how they contended with perceptions of them being backwards and oppressed. Moreover, Khosrojerdi (2015) found that Muslim university women experienced explicit othering as a consequence of

---

<sup>15</sup> It was pertinent to include a section devoted to anti-Black racism in schools given that the most significant contribution of the study related to how some of the participants' experiences with gendered Islamophobia were compounded with anti-Black racism.

negative stereotypes which misrepresented them as oppressed. Specifically, she reported that nearly all her participants experienced gendered Islamophobia, where the two prevailing stereotypes they encountered were that *Muslim girls are oppressed* and that *Muslim girls are forced to wear the veil*. Other stereotypes participants reported being subjected to are the following:

“forced to get married”, “veiled”, “having no choice”, “needed to be saved”, “not athletic”, “quiet”, “polite”, “not kind”, “not smart”, “having no brain”, “controlled by men”, “not educated”, “barbaric”, “weak”, “not socially active”, “timid”, “told what to do”, “having no freedom”, “submissive”, “staying at home”, and “sitting in the back”. (Khosrojerdi, 2015, p. 147)

Correspondingly, Mir (2006), who explored the experiences of American Muslim women who attended post-secondary education, found that participants were commonly perceived as oppressed, shy, lacking agency, and belonging to a homogenous religion and fanatical community by members of the educational community (also see Basit, 1997; Watt, 2016).

In addition to gendered colonial tropes that manifest into challenges for Muslim girls’ peer relationships, Muslim students of all genders experienced general stereotypes. For example, it was common for Muslim students to be thought of as terrorists, hostile, belligerent, suspicious, and considered to be an *enemy within* (see Alizai, 2017; Mir, 2014; Mir & Sarroub, 2019; Sarroub, 2007). It is unsurprising, then, that Muslim students experienced name-calling given these taken-for-granted assumptions which contribute to the continuous racialization of Muslims within Western societies.

More specifically, it was common for Muslim students to be referred to as a *terrorist*, *sand n\*gga*, *towel head*, and told to go back to their country (for example, see Archer, 2012; Fine & Sirin, 2008; Francis & McKenna, 2018; Javid, 2011), which not only speaks to the widespread conceptualizations of Muslims, but also to the notion that Muslims are not compatible with Western values and are therefore excluded from the dominant culture. Participants in Archer’s (2002) study reported being verbally and physically attacked in their British school because of their Islamic identity. Moreover,

Javed (2011), who explored the experiences of Muslim Indian and Pakistani students in a New York school, found that the participants were subjected to name-calling, such as *terrorist*, and navigated the misconceptions of their peers and educators. Likewise, in their mixed-methods study which included Muslim students from the U.K., Francis and Mckenna (2018) found that 25 percent of their participants reported being physically and verbally bullied. Specifically, these students felt as if their religious identification was the reason why they experienced hostility relative to their race or language. It was also found that practicing Muslim students who engaged in religious attendance were more likely to experience victimization and bullying (Francis & Mckenna, 2018). Jandali (2012) discovered similar results which demonstrated the ubiquity of Islamophobia in U.S. public schools. She explained “While Muslim students in public schools were objects of derision and harassment long before 9/11, the situation in the past decade has become markedly worst” (p. 32). These studies reveal the difficulties that Muslim students face in schools in terms of belonging and developing friendships with their schoolmates.

In line with this, it is evident from the literature that Muslim students had challenges with developing friendships with non-Muslim students. For example, Brown’s (2009) ethnographic study exploring the adjustment experiences of international Muslim postgraduate students at a U.K. university found that Muslim students had a desire to attain friendships with host nationals. The students were generally unsuccessful at forming such friendships and believed this was a result of widespread Islamophobic prejudice. Likewise, Keaton (2005) found that the Muslim girls in her study also had difficulty attaining friendships with peers who were of the dominant race and culture, and she attributed this to educational and social structures that exclude Muslim girls who are depicted as “the antithesis of French national identity” (p. 406). Furthermore, Seggie and Sanford’s (2010) study of the experiences of veiled Muslim women in a U.S. college mirrored the above trends. Participants found it challenging to maintain friendships with their peers and felt excluded from the dominant school culture given that their peers often assumed that they are ignorant and cannot speak English. Moreover, Seggie and Sanford

(2010) explained that participants' experiences with their classmates had more to do with their skin colour and veil rather than their immigration status.

Furthermore, a common theme in the literature was that Muslim students preferred to *stick to their own kind* in order to feel valued. Zine (2001) argued:

...the need to "be with your own kind" is also produced by a lack of inclusion and acceptance toward diversity in the social and cultural environment of schools. The institutional subordination of minoritized groups in schools further leads to the need for stronger group cohesion and insulation. (p. 413)

Correspondingly, Aslam's (2011) participants felt an immediate bond with other Muslim students. Similarly, Seggie and Sanford's (2010) participants preferred to be a part of social groups comprised of Muslims. Likewise, Mir (2006) reported that Muslim university students in her study favoured Muslim-only spaces as a protective mechanism from experiencing social marginality.

In this section, the literature pertaining to Muslim students' experiences with their peers was reviewed and synthesized. Overall, Muslim students commonly experienced challenges with attaining friendships with students of the dominant race and culture as a consequence of racialized stereotypes. This increased the likelihood that Muslim students would *stick to their own kind*. Furthermore, a finding within the literature is that Muslim students felt as if their religious identity was the most significant reason why they experienced hostility in some of their schools. Keeping this in mind, Hindy (2016) remarked that much more still needs to be known about how Muslim public high-school students experience Islamophobia. Considering this, while Muslim students were reported to experience such challenges with their peers, it is particularly alarming that such exclusion rooted in taken-for-granted assumptions of Muslims was prevalent among educational leaders.

### ***Experiences With Educators***

Educators play a significant role in the lives of their students (for example, see Gentrup et al., 2020), especially for racialized youth. While education can indeed help racialized students overcome some of their struggles and serve as a beacon of hope, education is paradoxical as teachers can either help foster emancipation for minority students or contribute to their subjugation (Friere, 2000). Furthermore, since teachers are authority figures, students may be increasingly susceptible to internalizing their teachers' beliefs and engaging in what is referred to as a *self-fulfilling prophecy*,<sup>16</sup> which can contribute positively or negatively to a student's life (Gentrup et al., 2020). Evident from the literature concerning Muslim students, some teachers engaged in the latter as they internalized common stereotypes associated with Muslims. This in turn shaped how teachers interacted with their Muslim students and resulted in increased challenges for Muslim minority youth, revealing how interpersonal relationships maintain structural inequity. In this section, the literature pertaining to Muslim students' experiences with their educators will be reviewed.

To begin, Amjad (2018) explored Muslim elementary students' experiences with their teachers in Alberta and how they perceived their interactions with their teachers. While all the participants in her study shared positive experiences with their teachers, many of them reported negative encounters as well. More specifically, they recounted explicit forms of Islamophobia such as discussions of terrorism and *Sharia* law in their social studies classes, where peers and teachers both criticized Muslims based on the negative assumptions of Islam. Similarly, Jaffe-Walter (2019) found that some of the teachers in her study held deeply prejudicial attitudes towards Islam and Muslim students, which in turn affected how the participants were treated. Likewise, Bagguley and Hussain (2007), who examined the experiences of South Asian women in the U.K., found that

---

<sup>16</sup> Students may behave in a way that is congruent to how they are expected to behave. Low teacher expectations can result in students doing poorer than their actual ability, and vice-versa (Gentrup et al., 2020).



Islamophobic assumptions of Muslims and Islam crept into a professor's teaching material when the relationship between the West and Islam were discussed (also see Aslam, 2011; Speck, 1997; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013). Alizai (2017), who explored the experiences of Muslim students in an Ontario university, highlighted the educational repercussions associated with students who experienced Islamophobia, where some participants noted how their educational experiences were hampered by the Islamophobic comments of their professors. This took on the form of some educators discussing Islam inaccurately and verbalizing rhetoric that positioned Muslim women as oppressed without context (Alizai, 2017). Such sentiments were also reflected in Zine's (2001) study. She found that some of the participants' teachers and guidance counselors held negative attitudes of Muslims, which resulted in differential treatment (also see Abukhattala, 2004; Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Azimi, 2011; Watt, 2016). As Watt (2016) contended, some teachers "narrowly construct Muslims as the embodiment of difference" (p. 21).

Based on such overt displays of Islamophobia, an overall theme in the literature was that Muslim students felt it necessary to challenge their teachers (for example, see Alizai, 2017; Amjad, 2018; Aslam, 2011; Speck, 1997). However, some were fearful of challenging their educators' misconceptions. For example, Amjad (2018) found that some Muslim students reported being afraid to question teachers as they felt their grades would be at risk, and others complained about peers' remarks to their teacher. In addition, some students reported that their teachers presented videos about terrorism and 9/11 which also elicited Islamophobic speech from classmates. In cases where students challenged the videos presented, other students would not listen to the Muslim student and instead agreed with the teacher's views (Amjad, 2018). Aslam (2011) presented similar results where participants were concerned about challenging their professors in fear of risking their grades. Likewise, Speck (1997) found that the participants reported being afraid to correct their professors' misconstrued assumptions of Muslims and Islam out of fear of experiencing repercussions. Such fear and anxiety were magnified for students new to English as they were not only worried about challenging their professors, but they also

felt insecure as they did not have the linguistic capability to defend their positions. Several of the students in this study attributed such hostile attitudes to a general lack of knowledge among their teachers and peers, as well as a lack of critical engagement with how the media frames Islam and Muslims. Thus, while some students were confident to challenge their educators, others were unable to do so.

As noted above, fear of negative repercussions was a significant component as to why students avoided challenging their educators. However, another factor that prevented them from speaking up was implicit racism. Acts of implicit racism can be especially detrimental because students who are on the receiving end of such treatment cannot *prove* that an incident was indeed an act of racism. Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) referred to implicit forms of racism as aversive racism and posited that this form of racism typically occurs when the basis of social judgement is ambiguous, when wrong or right choices are not clearly defined, and when it is expressed in subtle, rationalizable, and indirect manners. Consequently, individuals with dominant identities and unconscious negative attitudes about minoritized groups can engage in harmful behaviours towards racialized individuals while maintaining a fair and equitable self-image. Thus, behaviours of implicit racism can be rationalized as something other than race which signifies just how complex dismantling structural inequality is, especially because these acts are often unintentional. As Aslam (2011) found in her study “...while student service providers are well-meaning, there is a problem of experiencing an Orientalist gaze that racialized students experience...” (p. 84). Therefore, educators may be discriminatory towards their students without even being aware of their racist expressions.

Overall, in the literature, implicit racism primarily took on the form of low expectations, encouragement of assimilation, and nonverbal communication (see Aslam, 2011; Basford, 2008; Brown, 2009; Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013; Zine, 2003, 2004). For example, the participants in Archer’s study (2003) reported that teachers ignored them. Furthermore, Van den Bergh et al. (2010) described how teacher expectations of Muslim students were informed by prejudicial attitudes. A teacher’s level

of prejudice toward their Muslim students was scored using an implicit association task which measured teachers' implicit prejudice scores using a time latency procedure. The results indicated that there was a significant relationship between teachers' expectations and attitudes towards their Muslim students and their grades. Muslim students had an overall lower academic achievement score in comparison to students of the dominant culture in classrooms that were taught by teachers who held prejudicial attitudes.

Rezai-Rashti (1994) noted how stereotypes of Muslim girls in schools were reminiscent of a colonial era, describing how some educators were influenced by such stereotypes. The significance of her findings was that school staff rationalized their racist behaviours towards Muslim girls in their classrooms while believing themselves to be proponents of multicultural education. For example, she observed that some school personnel assumed that Muslim girls' issues are a consequence of their ethnic culture rather than issues commonly associated with all adolescents regardless of ethnic or religious background (also see Basit, 1997). In a later article, Rezai-Rashti (2005a) explained how interactions between administrators, teachers, and students continue to be largely informed by essentialist stereotypes of Muslims. In particular, Muslim girls who wear the veil were perceived to be oppressed and passive, and educators assumed that Muslim girls in their classroom are forced to wear the veil by their *oppressive* parents. Such stereotypes were found to largely inform the way educators treated Muslim students. For instance, in the case of school counsellors, Rezai-Rashti (2005a) observed how Muslim girls were able to use commonly held stereotypes of Muslim women to their advantage by excusing their lack of engagement with math. As Basit (1997) explained:

The image of a Muslim home as an oppressive arena where the girls lead lives of suffering because of their gender appears to be deeply embedded in the minds of some teachers. While these teachers are not racist, a misinterpretation of religio-cultural values is not uncommon. The teachers seem to view the adolescent Muslim girls with the same lens with which they see the adolescent English girls without taking into account the subtle differences in the ways of life of the ethnic minorities and the ethnic majority. Teachers are constantly struggling to make sense of the social world of their ethnic minority pupils and are effective when they understand the dynamics of the ethnic minorities' religions and cultures and

teach within that framework without exerting implicit pressure on the ethnic minority pupils to conform to the majority norm. (p. 436)

Building on Rezai-Rashti (1994), Zine (2000, 2001) uncovered how teachers and guidance counsellors have low expectations of Muslim students, which are heavily informed by negative, inaccurate stereotypes associated with Muslims and Islam. Specifically, Zine (2001) explained how such notions were communicated via the hidden curriculum,<sup>17</sup> where guidance counselors advised and encouraged Muslim girls to stick to non-academic streams and to avoid academic subjects. Some of the participants felt that they were often treated based on “the misconception that education is not valued for Muslim women, and therefore...educational aspirations were not taken very seriously” (p. 414). Zine (2001) asserted that low teacher expectations of racialized youth can result in biased assessments, negative evaluations, under-achievement, as well as poor self-esteem (also see Basford, 2008). As Nieto (2004) reminded us, “students do not simply develop poor self-concepts out of the blue, rather their self-esteem in terms of schooling is the result of policies and practices in schools that respect and affirm some groups while devaluing and rejecting others” (p. 195). Likewise, Siann and Clark (1992) found that school counsellors held stereotypical views of Muslim girls, including the assumption that they were destined for marriage rather than being interested in pursuing higher education.

Furthermore, Bagguley and Hussain (2007) found that several educators held negative assumptions of Muslim South Asian women. The participants felt as if some of the academic staff questioned their abilities and assumed that their education was a waste since they would be “destined for marriage and motherhood rather than for careers” (p. 34) (also see Mansouri & Kamp, 2007). Similarly, the women in El Nour’s (2012) study reported that educational stakeholders were skeptical regarding their level of ability. Specifically, the participants felt as if faculty and staff treated them poorly and reported

---

<sup>17</sup> This is elaborated on in Chapter 4.

that their professors unfairly graded them because of their identity. Furthermore, some of the teachers' lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity compelled them to assume that their students were incapable, withdrawn, and shy (also see Amjad, 2018); ignoring, for example, that in some Eastern cultures, it is frowned upon to make eye contact with elders and students are encouraged to speak less and listen more (Amjad, 2018). Thus, lack of cultural sensitivity and awareness resulted in low expectations of teachers (also see Basit, 1997).

In line with this, Jaffe-Walter (2019) demonstrated how teachers can manifest implicit racism, which is line with the above-mentioned studies. Teachers in their study cloaked their indirect racism by rationalizing their actions as socially just. Irrespective of this, the teachers' contradictions in speech lead to implicit Islamophobia seeping through the cracks. Furthermore, Jaffe-Walter (2019) reported that the teachers in her study approached Muslim students with a deficit lens as they assumed the students were incapable of forming an opinion relative to native-born Danish students. Teachers also recycled a colonialist discourse by assuming that Muslim students "are not brought up to ask questions" (p. 292) and were found to push assimilation agendas on students under the guise of cultivating "liberal democratic values." Jaffe-Walter (2019) proclaimed:

In describing Danish educational values, teachers emphasized the liberal values of fostering individualism, equality, and freedom, conceiving of their classrooms as neutral spaces where all opinions and beliefs have equal value. But alongside teachers' descriptions of their work to cultivate 'individuals', they expressed racialized representation of Muslim students who they understood to be incapable of being 'individuals' who could critically view the worlds in which they lived because of their religion and traditions. (p. 292)

By the same token, while they were well-intentioned and concerned with the success of their Muslim students, educators in Mirza and Meeto's (2018) study were found to impose Western ideals of empowerment on Muslim girls by encouraging them to oppose their ethnic culture in some instances. Furthermore, although Muslim girls at their U.K. school were attaining more post-secondary degrees and higher academic achievement than ever before, they still experienced racist attitudes that prevented them from entering

post-secondary institutions and attaining top-ranked jobs. As Mirza and Meetoo (2018) asserted, “Despite the illusion of meritocratic post-feminist enlightenment, access to educational opportunities and labour market equity for young Muslim women is clearly not an equitable level playing field” (p. 236). As Mirza and Meetoo (2018) argued, the issues experienced by young Muslim women are being ignored under the guise of high academic achievement, which is demonstrated under the false premise of a socially just education.<sup>18</sup>

This section reviewed the literature that highlighted how Muslim students experience Islamophobia with their educators. Overall, some teachers’ preconceived assumptions of Muslims and Islam impacted the way they treated their Muslim students, which took on the form of disseminating limited and essentialized information of Islam and Muslims. While some students were able to challenge their educators, others were not. This was primarily a consequence of fear as well as the inability to justify that their educators treated them differently. Implicit racism speaks to the complex manner of how Islamophobia manifests in schools and relates to the challenges associated with dismantling prejudice within the education system. It also speaks to not only the significance of academic streaming, but how such negative attitudes and expectations of authority figures affect how Muslim students view themselves. The current study builds on such findings by considering recent socio-political developments as well as by observing how other categories of social difference influence the dynamics of such results.

### ***Perceptions of School Environment***

Muslim students’ experiences with their peers and teachers have been reviewed and synthesized in previous sections. In addition to this overview, another significant theme within the literature that is pertinent to address is how Muslim students experienced their school environment. While Muslim students are typically content with their school

---

<sup>18</sup> This will be elaborated on in Chapter 4.

environment, they also expressed some challenges. Namely, some experienced lack of accommodations and felt excluded from the rest of the school population. Thus, this subsection begins with the research that examined Muslim students' experiences with accommodation and is followed by studies that explored Muslim students' encounters with exclusion.

Only a few studies have investigated how Muslim students are accommodated in their schools, and these studies revealed that while there are religious accommodations in place, some Muslim students expressed dissatisfaction with their implementation (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Asmar et al., 2004; Basford, 2008, McDermott-Levy, 2011; Stubs & Sallee, 2013). For example, Ali and Bagheri's (2009) literature review of Muslim students in American universities highlighted how Muslim students reported that they did not have prayer spaces and a separate place to partake in ablution<sup>19</sup> without fear of being harassed. There was also a lack of halal food options across campuses. In light of their findings, Ali and Bagheri (2009) offered a number of suggestions aimed at promoting inclusion across university campuses. Specifically, they suggested that Islamic holidays should be acknowledged, that safe spaces should be created to help Muslim students partake in their daily acts of worship without fear of being misunderstood, and that there be more halal food options. The authors further noted the prevalence of Islamophobia and, as a result, emphasized the need for student affairs to create opportunities where common misconceptions of Muslims are dispelled, especially regarding Muslim women who wear the Islamic veil.

Regarding the experiences of Muslim girls in U.S. high schools, studies by Azimi (2011), Gunel (2007), and Hanson (2009) found that the participants were critical of their school accommodations. For example, a participant fainted in gym class because her teacher

---

<sup>19</sup> Generally, Muslims partake in a ritual cleansing of their hands, mouth, nose, face, arms, head, ears, and feet (in that order) before engaging in the compulsory prayers of the day. Other forms of prayers, such as asking God for guidance, does not require such cleansing.

would not accommodate her religious obligation of fasting<sup>20</sup> (Azimi, 2011). Furthermore, Jaffe-Walter (2018) found that although teachers appeared to be welcoming and inclusive, they failed to acknowledge Islamic holidays despite the school's significant Muslim population. However, contrary to the studies that revealed Muslim students' challenges with accommodations, Niyozov and Pluim (2009) and Sarroub (2001) found that teachers go above and beyond when accommodating their Muslim students within the North American context. Specifically, Niyozov and Pluim (2009) problematized most of the studies conducted on Muslim students by stating that a reverse-stereotyping of teachers is occurring and that teachers of Muslim students are, contrary to popular belief, culturally sensitive, self-reflective, recognize differences, and strive for fairness. Similarly, Sarroub (2001) argued that teachers would go to great lengths to guarantee that Muslim girls were accommodated and had spaces and times allotted for prayer. Both studies implied that the families of Muslim students should be held accountable for their children's negative experiences in schools.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding feelings of exclusion, Alvi (2008) explored how veiled Muslim girls experienced social activities at schools in Ottawa and found that her participants experienced alienation for refusing to compromise their values in order to *fit in*. More specifically, while many of the girls desired to be involved in the school community, they felt extreme exclusion which prevented them from engaging in social activities in their schools. The three main themes that emerged from Alvi's (2008) study were that a) girls reported an *us vs. them* polarity; b) their differences were pathologized as inferior relative to Western standards; and c) they desired to participate in school activities but were unable to due to barriers they experienced. Specifically, the two main social aspects of schooling the girls believed compromised their religious principles were school dances and school uniforms, as they felt that they would be perceived as *weird* if they wore pants

---

<sup>20</sup> Practicing Muslims abstain from consuming food or drinks from sunrise to sunset during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

<sup>21</sup> This will be elaborated on in Chapter 5.



in some social occasions. In Mir's (2014) study, the most salient pathologized differences that her participants reported were that they did not participate in *drinking culture* and wore modest clothing. By the same token, Hoodfar (2003) explained that:

The Muslim girls always wore tracksuits for gym. Though other students wore similar attire, some interviewees said it was only the Muslim girls who were the butt of jokes in this regard. They were made to feel like outsiders, not quite up to the standards of Canadian society. (p. 28)

Furthermore, McDermott-Levy (2011) found that there was lack of environmental and structural support specifically for Muslim women attempting to practice Islam in higher education.

In this section, the literature pertaining to how Muslim students experienced their school environment was reviewed. What was found in these studies was that Muslim students experienced challenges with accommodation and felt excluded. The significance of this section is that there is a contradiction in the literature in terms of how teachers accommodate their Muslim students, as well as a lack of studies within the Canadian context that draws attention to how Muslim post-secondary students are accommodated. The current research contributes to the literature by addressing accommodation of Muslim students and the need for further research on accommodation practices within the Canadian context. In the next subsection, literature on Muslim students' relationships with their families will be reviewed in light of their school experiences.

### ***Experiences With Families***

Much of the literature reviewed thus far specifically focused on Muslim students' experiences within schools with little attention paid to their familial experiences and how this in turn shaped their schooling experiences. Not only is it pertinent to understand how factors outside school shape the experiences of minority students so that they can be better supported, but it is also important to centre Muslim students' voices. Regarding the latter, the Muslim family unit has been demonized in the media as being an oppressive force that limits Muslim girls, and so it is essential to be aware of how Muslim girls

perceive their families (Watt, 2016). For example, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Rezai-Rashti (1994) brought attention to how some school personnel assumed that the challenges Muslim girls experienced with their families were rooted in their culture, when, in fact, they were mundane challenges specific to any typical parent-adolescent relationship. As outlined in Chapter 1, *saving* Muslim women from their men and their barbaric cultures became a common narrative within Western social consciousness that persists today. In light of this, some studies have marked the importance of understanding the unique challenges Muslim girls experience within their families, while being critical of Orientalist discourses which not only essentialize Muslim women as inherent victims but also mark the West as an ideal measure of gender equality (see Basit, 1997; McDonough & Hoodfar, 2009; Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Zine, 2001). Against the backdrop of such gendered Islamophobia within schools, the scant literature that examines how Muslim girls view their families will be synthesized in this section.

To begin, Haw et al. (1998) explored the familial structure of Muslim girls and found that participants experienced sexism in their households when it came to parental expectations of moral behaviour. In particular, Muslim girls' actions were increasingly policed and subjected to stricter standards in comparison to Muslim boys' actions. Likewise, Sarroub (2007) found that the families of the girls in her study were concerned over their daughters being negatively impacted by American culture in their schools. The educational experiences of the participants were significantly impacted by their families' expectations. For instance, the girls were typically expected to maintain a clean house and cook for the family which interfered with their ability to focus on their studies. Furthermore, their future post-secondary educational goals were also impacted by familial expectations of getting married early. These studies are in line with Rezai-Rashti (1994) who highlighted how Muslim girls not only have to experience Orientalist sexism and Islamophobia within their schools, but also face patriarchal attitudes within their homes.

On the other hand, Zine (2000) found that although Muslim families can, at times, put extra pressure on Muslim girls, the students in her study reported that their families served as a significant form of strength in times of difficulty. Like Zine (2000), Siann and Clark (1992) highlighted that in contrast to popular belief, they found no evidence of Muslim parents preventing their daughters from pursuing higher education. Likewise, Watt (2016) found that “...research participants frequently mention family as a strong source of support in their lives.” (p. 29). Furthermore, out of all her participants, only one was forced to wear the veil but ended up removing it. While her parents were unhappy with her decision to remove the veil, they accepted it.

Demonstrating the complexity associated with familial relationships, Basit (1997) conducted one of the most comprehensive studies about how British Muslim girls’ perceptions of their families intersected with their experiences at schools. She not only interviewed Muslim girls, but their parents and teachers as well. Contrary to the common misconceptions that their teachers held, Muslim girls were content overall with their families. However, while she found that parents placed significant value on education and encouraged their daughters to secure highly regarded careers so long as their family reputation was not jeopardized, girls faced additional restrictions and a lack of independence relative to their male siblings. As the *face* of a family’s reputation and the “epitome of family honour” (p. 433), the need to carry the weight of familial reputation was one of the challenges that Muslim girls faced in Basit’s (1997) study. However, Basit (1997) also described the girls as generally optimistic about their futures, and “the parents appeared to have faith in their daughters’ ability and subsequent bright future. This, undoubtedly, was an indication of the strong and confident relationships within the families” (p. 428). She found that parents perceived their restrictions not as oppressive but rather protective as they did not want their daughters to lose their heritage as well as harm their family’s reputation. Basit (1997) shed light on the complex nature of the dynamics between Muslim girls and their parents by revealing how her participants were able to guarantee themselves more autonomy by negotiating with their parents who were open to compromise.

Similarly, Hoodfar (2003) described how the Muslim girls in her study were able to challenge their parents' cultural traditions that were contradictory to the teachings of Islam, which in turn guaranteed them more freedoms. Like Basit (1997), Hoodfar (2003) explained how parents subjected their daughters to increased restrictions relative to their brothers who "by contrast enjoyed great freedom" (p. 18). Hoodfar (2003) described that many of the participants' restrictions that were imposed on them were a consequence of parental fear of assimilating with Western culture. Conversely, contrary to popular belief which assumes that all Muslim parents force their daughters to wear the veil, some of Hoodfar's (2003) participants chose to wear the veil even though their parents did not want them to. Furthermore, parents were found to be an important source of support for their daughters in reaching their educational pursuits. Nevertheless, Hoodfar (2003) acknowledged that parental restrictions on Muslim girls (for example, limiting their experiences during gym class and swimming activities) led to social exclusion and "strained relations between female Muslim students and their schoolmates" (p. 28) (see Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Sarroub, 2001).

In this section, the literature pertaining to Muslim girls' experiences with their families was reviewed. Overall, Muslim girls seem to view their families as a source of support to achieve their academic and career goals. However, a common theme in the literature was that the families of Muslim girls engaged in sexist parenting by placing more restrictions on their daughters relative to their sons in fear of tarnishing the family's reputation and in apprehension of their daughters assimilating with Western culture. While understanding Muslim girls' family dynamics is important to gain comprehensive insight into their experiences, it is also important for teachers to connect with the families of their students to better understand them. For instance, Haw et al. (1998) highlighted the importance of schools consulting with Muslim girls' families so that teachers can effectively meet the educational needs of their students and provide more supportive spaces. Keddie (2011) reminded us that "attention to context enables a problematising of the ways in which schools themselves, as institutions of social regulation and inequity, can mitigate against

educators' efforts to empower students..." (p. 6). Attention to context includes becoming more familiar with the concerns of Muslim students' families. Like the ambiguity associated with research concerning the impact teachers have on Muslim students, there are ambiguities regarding the impact familial structures have on Muslim girls. As such, I considered this complexity when interviewing participants.

### ***Anti-Black Racism in Schools***

As previously noted, little is known about how gendered Islamophobia converges with various categories of social difference—a gap that this study aims to fill. Given that the experience of anti-Black racism was prevalent among some of the participants in the current study, it is important to review other studies that address how this form of social oppression manifests within schools. There is limited research dedicated to understanding how anti-Black racism and gendered Islamophobia intersect to shape the schooling experiences of Black Muslim youth. Thus, this section solely focuses on how anti-Black racism manifests within the school system in the Canadian and American context so that insight can be gained into the experiences of the participants in the current study.

While the historical oppression of Black people is different within the Canadian context than the American context, there were common challenges Black people experienced in both nations. One similarity included the demand for racially segregated schools, where Black students were forbidden to enter schools that White children were enrolled in (see Anderson, 1988; McBean, 2018). Such segregation was rationalized based on the false notion that Black children were inferior and would morally corrupt White children. However, as time passed, organized efforts challenged this segregation, and emerging ideologies fostered increased freedoms for Black people within the educational system (Lopez, 2020; McBean, 2018). Regardless, the cultural ideologies which deemed Black children as morally corrupt, intellectually inferior, and violent still have a significant effect on the schooling experiences of Black students today (McBean, 2018). As Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) noted, the effects of historical oppression are longstanding and

remain deeply embedded in North American culture. To add to this, the societal impact of these practices has resulted in disruptive generational cycles for Black communities that are difficult to break and are furthermore magnified as a consequence of the dire challenges Black youth experience in the education system (Dei, 2008; Lopez, 2020; McBean, 2018).

Although debunked, the ideologies of the racial categorization system which emerged in the 17th century (Rattansi, 2020) persist within the education system and society today (see Dei, 2008; James, 2012). For example, within both the Canadian and American context, some educators have described Black students as at risk, intellectually inferior, drop-outs, disruptive, and low achievers (James, 2012). Likewise, Dei (2008) highlighted how negative stereotypes of Black students within the Canadian education system are reinforced through constantly referring to them as “at risk, dropout, disadvantaged, and special needs” (p. 350) without considering the historical and broader societal contexts that are direct consequences of anti-Black racism. Overall, Black youth have been found to experience many challenges within the education system, including low teacher expectations, academic streaming practices, heightened disciplinary practices, and exclusion from the curriculum.

Dei (2008) argued that the school system often blames the communities and families of Black youth for the educational challenges they face without taking responsibility for how they may perpetuate anti-Black racism. Moreover, some schools fail to take into account larger systemic practices that contribute to anti-Black racism. Dei (2008) asserted that this deferral of responsibility is what prevents meaningful change from occurring within schools. As Lopez and Jean-Marie (2021) asserted:

Education and schooling continues to be site of antiblackness and anti-Black racism. Black students and families are often constructed as the problem, pathologized, students bear the brunt of harsh school discipline, and families are not perceived as resourceful and knowledgeable [sic]. (p. 54)

Lopez (2020) also shed light on how the anti-Black racism prevalent within Canadian schools is “often buried within a multiculturalism discourse” (p. 1935). In line with this,

according to Dei (2008), many of the challenges Black youth experience in schools is a consequence of subtle messages that “deliver differential (negative) treatment by race and misrecognize or unrecognize students’ racial identities” (p. 351). One form of differential treatment Black students experience relates to low teacher expectations which significantly increases the likelihood of academic streaming practices (Dei, 2008).

Regarding teacher expectations, James and Turner (2017) found that out of the students that had the same scores on their grade 6 standardized tests, White students were more likely to be perceived as excellent learners relative to Black students. Findings such as this reveal the detrimental effects of how low expectations undermine the perceptions of some teachers. James and Turner (2017) explained that:

Contrary to the stereotypes, participants argued that Black children begin kindergarten with ambition, confidence, excitement to learn, and high self-esteem, but are “gradually worn down” by teachers’ attitudes toward them and the education system in general. They noted that without a firm grounding in elementary and middle school in academics, study skills, and confidence in their ability to learn, Black students are likely to fail in high school. In fact, given the current schooling context, it was assumed that by the time Black students enter high school, many have internalized the negative messages that the education system has been sending them, and therefore resigned themselves to those low expectations. Hence, there was concern that by high school some Black students are so far behind their peers that they are unable to successfully compete academically. (p. 50)

Furthermore, James and Turner (2017) found that Black students were more likely to be streamed into applied courses rather than into academic courses, which limited their post-secondary options and career aspirations. Similarly, Lopez (2020) discovered that guidance counselors were steering Black high school students away from future university programs in law and medicine and were instead directing them towards college programs. Horvat and O’Connor (2006) found that Black students were overrepresented in special education (also see Dei, 2008) and placed in lower academic streams. As Lopez (2020) reminded us, Black students’ “over-representation in special education and under-representation in gifted education cannot be ignored” (p. 1935). Likewise, Codjoe (2001)

revealed the negative impact low teacher expectations had on the academic success and psychological well-being of Black participants in his study.

Another significant theme within the literature concerning the challenges Black students faced is related to punitive disciplinary measures which arguably stem from the common discourse that associates Blackness with criminality (Dei, 2008). Dei (2008) critically engaged with the “zero-tolerance measures” that were introduced in the 1990s to promote safe schools in Canada. Instead of promoting safe schools, Dei (2008) asserted that these measures “work with a racist and racialized ideology of safety, and the policies in particular perpetuate racial hierarchies” (p. 351) and primarily target Black youth. As indicated in Dei’s (1997) study, “black students reported being frustrated by the fact they were admonished for behaviours otherwise accepted from white students...” (p. 229). In the same vein, James and Turner (2017) found that Black students were suspended at a higher rate compared to any other groups within the Toronto educational context. Furthermore, Ruck and Wortley (2002) found that Black students were more likely to “perceive discrimination with respect to teacher treatment, school suspension, use of police by school authorities, and police treatment in schools” (p. 190). Gregory et al. (2010) also highlighted the pervasiveness of punitive measures towards Black students by revealing that school discipline incidents involving Black students exceeded any other group. Likewise, according to Hirschfield (2008), Black students face more punitive disciplinary actions and are criminalized at higher rates than any other racial group.

Furthermore, it has been found that Black students are not represented in the school curriculum. Kline (2017) explained that the history of anti-Black racism has been erased prior to slavery and that this is confirmed through curriculum and pedagogy. Lopez and Jean-Marie (2021) asserted that “The legacy of anti-Black racism and the ongoing denial of Black people of their basic humanity reflects the ‘afterlife of slavery’ that continually situates Black peoples as objects of fetish and force” (p. 54). Codjoe (2001) also found that there was a “lack of representation of Black/African perspectives, histories and experiences” which spoke to the “structural and institutional dimensions of Canadian



racism” (p. 349). Dei (1997) additionally argued that the curriculum in Ontario schools have robbed students of “a part of their historical experiences and legitimacy” (p. 138).

As a result of some Black students feeling systematically excluded in the education system, students begin to lose trust in their schools and become academically disengaged (Dei, 2008). Thus, it is important to note the roles schools play in compelling some Black youth to drop out, which is a pressing social and educational problem (See Dei, 1997; McBean, 2018; Morris, 2007; Ricks, 2014). Keeping this in mind, however, it is pertinent to consider that statistics on Black youth are typically lumped together, disregarding other categories of social difference such as gender, ethnicity, and SES. In fact, some researchers problematize the lack of a gendered analysis in the schooling experiences of Black youth. As Ricks (2014) asserted:

Although well-intentioned, oftentimes these initiatives ignore the complexity of systemic and interlocking forces at work in education, which can sometimes lead to a band-aid approach. Band-aid approaches neglect the individual and combined impact of variables such as race, racism, sexism, and gendered racism on educational experiences and outcomes of underrepresented groups. (p. 10)

For example, regarding the academic statistics of Black students, the academic performance of Black girls is often ignored compared to Black boys (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Ricks, 2014; Morris, 2007). Related to Black girls’ educational challenges, Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) explained that some Black girls have learned to adapt in school by assuming a “race-less” identity, which refers to the absence of race-related attitudinal and behavioural characteristics. In other words, it is thought that if Black girls assimilate to the majority culture and deny who they are, “they can be successful as Black girls in education” (p. 15). The authors problematized this, arguing that it reinforces the notion that Black girls cannot be themselves and be successful and instead must conform to Whiteness. One way that Black girls have been found to adopt a “race-less” identity was by becoming invisible and speaking less (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Morris, 2007). This is a consequence of the general stereotype that Black

girls are “angry, aggressive, promiscuous, and/or loud” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 15).

Similarly, according to Morris (2007), some teachers encouraged such invisibility so Black girls can:

exemplify an ideal, docile form of femininity, emblemized in the prescription to act like “ladies.” At the same time, however, most teachers viewed the existing femininity of these girls as coarse and overly assertive, leading one teacher to describe them as “loudies.” (pp. 490-491)

Morris (2007) explained that encouraging Black girls to adopt White, middle-class femininity is not something new and highlighted how there is a tendency for teachers to focus on Black girls to *improve* their social skills rather than their academic ones. Morris (2007) also drew on Collins’ (1990) notion of the stereotypical *controlling image*<sup>22</sup> of the Black matriarch in describing how some educators *adultify* young Black girls. According to Morris (2007), “this adultification may pertain to Black girls...whom many view as overly sexual and controlling at a young age” (pp. 502-503). Marking parallels between this common view and Collins’ (1990) notion of *controlling images* of the Black female matriarch, Morris (2007) asserted that this image marks Black femininity as dominant and overly aggressive which “can justify restriction of their inquisitiveness and assertiveness in classrooms” (p. 503). In line with this, Black girls were commonly described as too *loud*. Unsurprisingly, Black girls’ genuine efforts to dialogue in the classroom were sometimes perceived as a transgression against the teacher, revealing how some teachers are unequipped with the skills necessary to cater to diverse personalities and learning styles. Bringing it all together, Morris (2007) suggested that while Black boys and girls are more prone to be disciplined in schools, they are

---

<sup>22</sup> Collins (1990) argued that controlling images are stereotypical representations of Black women used to depict their oppression as normal and natural in order to uphold oppression and perpetuate their inferiority. Some of the common controlling images include the jezebel, welfare mother, and mammy (also see Collins 2000).

disciplined in distinct ways. Namely, boys “appear threatening or potentially threatening, and [this] serves to justify their harsh and persistent discipline in schools” (p. 494), whereas “[t]he discipline directed at Black girls was aimed to make them more ‘ladylike,’ yet this same process appeared to discourage behaviors that could lead to educational success” (p. 494).

In this subsection, the literature pertaining to the experiences of Black youth in schools was reviewed and synthesized to contextualize the experiences of the Black Muslim participants in the current study. There were several overarching challenges that Black youth experienced in the literature, including low teacher expectations, academic streaming, heightened disciplinary practices, and a lack of representation in the curriculum, all of which contribute to academic disengagement as well as disproportionate student dropout rates. Furthermore, Black girls faced unique challenges in schools where some teachers were more interested in *improving* their social skills rather than their academic skills via pressures to assimilate to White middle-class femininity. They were also subjected to stereotypes of being overly aggressive, loud, and hypersexual. Keeping this in mind, the literature reviewed on the experiences of Black girls within the education system is important for understanding the common challenges they experience based on their race and gender. However, it is also important to consider how SES, ethnic identities, and immigration status interlock with gender and race as well, which the current study explores.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter was divided into two major sections. The first section reviewed literature pertaining to the conceptualizations associated with the term *Islamophobia* as well as the politics of the veil. More specifically, the first section facilitates our understanding of what constitutes Islamophobia and makes a strong argument as to why Islamophobia is indeed a form of racism. The section addressing the politics of the veil situates the experiences of the participants within the Canadian context and furthers our understanding of why stereotypical images of Muslim women are taken for granted and

embedded within our social consciousness. This discussion also speaks to how the veil racializes Muslim girls and women.

The second major section primarily focused on the educational experiences of Muslim youth. The overarching themes in the literature included: experiences with peers, experiences with educators, perceptions of school environment, and experiences with families. The review of literature also included research on experiences of Black students in order to provide further insights into the experiences of Black Muslim girls who participated in this study. As noted within the various subsections, the current study contributes to the literature in several ways; however, the most significant contribution of this study is that it considers how anti-Black racism converges with gendered Islamophobia and shapes the educational experiences of post-secondary students in the Ontario context. The methodology used for this study will be described in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### **Introduction**

This qualitative case study explored 20 Muslim girls' experiences of gendered Islamophobia in the Ontario public education system in light of their experiences within their homes and communities. This study also aimed to uncover gaps as well as the heterogeneity of Muslim girls by exploring how their intersectional differences shaped their lived realities. To address this, I drew upon anti-racist feminism in an effort to centre and legitimize Muslim girls' voices as well as to provide relevant policy recommendations that will inform organized efforts to ensure that schools are equitable and inclusive.

In this chapter, I first discuss the distinctive features of qualitative case-study and feminist research. I then explain this study's research design and describe the strategies I used to ensure that participants are protected and accurately represented. I then describe how I ensured trustworthiness within my research design. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by describing the limitations of qualitative case-study research and providing a summary of the chapter.

#### **Qualitative Case Study**

According to Creswell (2007), exploratory research is best approached with qualitative research tools. Thus, I employed qualitative methods to holistically explore the experiences of the participants in my study. Qualitative methods are preferred by those who strive towards centering the voices of marginalized groups by encouraging them to "share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationship that often exists between a researcher and the participants in a study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). According to Yin (2009), "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 16). I adopted a

qualitative case study as my methodology because of its ability to comprehensively examine a case within real-life contexts (Yin, 2009).

Yin (2014) argued that a case study is to be considered when: (a) *how* or *why* questions are posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. I explored *how* Muslim girls experienced their schools, had *little control*<sup>23</sup> in the research process, and I also focused on a *contemporary issue within a real-life setting*. Hence, employing a qualitative case-study approach is congruent with my research which explored and centered participants' voices in a natural, uncontrolled setting.

With that explained, there are three major steps that must be considered before designing a case study. First, one must define the case. According to Patton (2002), a case can be any phenomena that is specific, unique, and within a constrained system. As such, a case can broadly consist of the experiences associated with a nation-state, organization, culture, group, or even narrowly be the experiences of an individual. The primary case for this research is Muslim adolescent girls enrolled in Ontario public high schools.

Second, there are many different types of case studies, and consequently it is necessary for researchers to explicitly state the type of case study they adopted. According to Yin (2014), case studies can be descriptive, exploratory, or explanatory, multiple or single, embedded or holistic. My research is exploratory as it aims to explore the participants' experiences, and it is holistic because it is void of any logical subunits.<sup>24</sup> As Yin (2014) contended, "the holistic design is advantageous when no logical subunits can be identified" (p. 55). Furthermore, rather than adopt a single case study, I implemented multiple case studies. As Yin (2009) argued, in a multiple case-study design, research

---

<sup>23</sup> Unlike experiments on human subjects which typically depend on a controlled environment, little control is advantageous for the purposes of my study as it is exploratory and does not seek to manipulate variables to confirm a hypothesis (Yin, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Based on my theoretical framework and literature review it is unnecessary to define any other units of analysis other than Muslim adolescent girls attending public Ontario high school.

outcomes should produce similar findings or may produce “contrasting results but for anticipatable reasons (a theoretical replication)” (p. 57). Moreover, my research is instrumental because my main objective was to provide insight into a social justice and equity issue within the education system. It is also instrumental because my goal was to offer insight into a particular phenomenon (Stake, 1995). Third, according to Patton (2002), effective qualitative researchers use their theoretical frameworks to guide their research. As previously explained, I adopted both anti-racist and postcolonial feminist theories to guide this study.

Other important characteristics of the case-study method are the use of interviews as well as the ability to use multiple sources of data which increases the likelihood of the data being credible and reliable (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2009, 2014). Thus, while interviews were the primary source of my data collection,<sup>25</sup> I also used secondary sources such as policy documents to further contextualize the data. Furthermore, Stake (2005) contended that “for a qualitative research community, case study concentrates on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political, and other contexts” (p. 444). Thus, a qualitative researcher who embarks on a case study must consider the social, political, historical, cultural, and physical contexts. This will be further elaborated on in the *Data Analysis* section.

Based on Stake’s and Yin’s conceptualizations of qualitative case-study research, it is appropriate for me to draw on feminist principles while designing my study. While feminist researchers hail from a variety of epistemological perspectives, I ascribed to a “feminist alternative to the positivist paradigm” (Brooks & Hesse-Bieber, 2007, p. 12) and engaged in an “alternative way of thinking” (Smith, 1999, p. 20) by questioning neutral and value-free methods associated with the positivist concept of *objectivity* (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). Past psychological and sociological research which

---

<sup>25</sup> I further elaborate on this in the *Data Collection Methods* section.

claimed to be objective and value-free has been used as a tool to legitimize oppressive knowledge (see Rattansi, 2020). Focusing on the experiences of Black women, Collins (2002) argued that research which claims to be objective and value-laden has further marginalized vulnerable communities. As mentioned earlier in my theoretical framework, Black feminists described how the feminist movement omitted their experiences and noted how traditional epistemologies in academia contributed to their disenfranchisement. Consequently, Black feminists developed methodological techniques and research models to account for people's lived realities (Brooks & Hesse-Bieber, 2007). Thus, I framed my research methodology using anti-racist feminism, which is especially fitting because it complements the goals of a case-study design (Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005).

Hancock (2007) reminded us that qualitative case studies in feminist research allow for research contributions due to their innovative epistemology. As for McCall (2005), she contended that the case-study method can identify "...new or invisible group[s]—at the intersection of multiple categories—and proceed to uncover the differences and complexities of experience in that location" (p. 1782). Thus, paired with a qualitative case-study method, anti-racist feminism fostered a comprehensive understanding of how individual experiences are shaped in certain contexts. Attention to this opens up possibilities for one to contribute to research as well as to effectively develop strategies aimed at improving social issues (Christoffersen, 2017; Hancock, 2007).). McCall (2005) explained that:

Case studies and qualitative research more generally have always been distinguished by their ability to delve into the complexities of social life—to reveal diversity, variation, and heterogeneity where quantitative researchers see singularity, sameness, and homogeneity. (p. 1782)

Drawing on McCall (2005), the current study does not dismiss the use of social categorization pertaining to race and ethnicity. Instead, it acknowledges how social categorizations were initially created to oppress while also recognizing the harms of dismissing social categorization. Therefore, this research strategically uses categories of



social difference in order to analyze differences among Muslim girls. McCall (2005) highlighted how this approach reveals the complexity of the experiences of marginalized people. Davis (2014) referred to such complexity as *blind spots* and marked the importance of asking the *other question* in relation to this. Davis (2014) explained what the *other question* is:

The way I try to understand the interconnection of all forms of subordination is through a method I call ‘ask the other question.’ When I see something that looks racist, I ask, ‘Where is the patriarchy in this?’ When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, ‘Where is the heterosexism in this?’ When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, ‘Where are the class interests in this?’ (p. 1189)

As such, asking *the other question* fosters the ability for researchers to discover blind spots. Referring to blind spots as neglected points of intersection, McCall (2005) contended that with the *intracategorical approach*, “authors working in this vein tend to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection...in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups” (p. 1774).

Overall, McCall (2005) argued that feminists of colour tend to adopt a similar approach to categorization because, instead of generally being critical of categorization per se, they are critical of broad sweeping methods of categorization. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will describe the research design of the current study.

## **Research Design**

### ***Recruitment Strategies***

To encourage diversity, I engaged in purposeful sampling<sup>26</sup> and snowball sampling<sup>27</sup> (Creswell, 2007). To appropriately reflect the diversity of my participants, I employed what Patton (2002) refers to as *maximum variation strategy* which is described as “any

---

<sup>26</sup> Patton (2002) explained, “Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 230).

<sup>27</sup> This is when participants refer/recruit potential participants to take part in the study.

common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or a phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p. 235). Therefore, participants were recruited from various Islamic community centres as well as online community-based Facebook pages via advertisements. Given the importance of a diverse sample, I wanted to ensure that students from a variety of schools and regions were included. I preferred to gather such a sample from community centres rather than school boards given the limited time and resources associated with PhD dissertations. Thus, in order to achieve my desired goal of geographical diversity, and, given time and resource limitations, I decided it would be an efficient and effective strategy to attain my sample from community centres so long as participants were enrolled in a public Ontario secondary school.

### ***Research Participants***

This study is based on the experiences of 20 Muslim girls. Participants of this study are characterized by a variety of ethnic, socio-economic, and racial backgrounds.<sup>28</sup> While some observed the veil, others did not. The participants in this study attended several public secondary schools within three regions in Ontario that have unique demographics. Specifically, participants resided in three regions—the Niagara, London, and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)—and were enrolled in 10 different public secondary schools (three schools within the Niagara region; five schools within London; and two schools within the GTA). The eligibility to participate in this study included:

- (1) Identify as Muslim
- (2) Be between the ages of 14-19 years old
- (3) Identify as a girl/woman
- (4) Be a student in a public school located in Ontario, Canada in one of the following three regions: Niagara region, London, or the GTA

While I hoped to include participants who identified as non-religious, the majority of my sample held positive views towards Islam, even though some did not consider themselves

---

<sup>28</sup> See Table 1 for details.

to be *too religious*. Reflecting on this, participants' positive views towards Islam may be due to having recruited participants from Islamic-based communities. As such, while there is great diversity within the sample, this research is limited to exploring the experiences of practicing/faith-based Muslim girls. Furthermore, considering the nature of qualitative research and the limitations of a doctoral dissertation, it would have been too time-consuming to capture the complexity of Muslim identity. Nonetheless, this study serves as an important and much-needed starting point to engage with the intersectional differences of Muslim girls given the gaps in the literature.

**Table 1**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Place of Birth</b>	<b>Ethnic Affiliation</b>
Alia	14	10	Niagara Region	Canada	Egyptian and Indian
Ranya	15	10	London	Sudan; came to Canada when she was a child (unspecified age)	Sudanese and Turkish
Hafsah	17	12	Niagara Region	Jordan; came to Canada when she was 9 years old	Jordanian
Yasmeen	17	12	London	Canada	Syrian
Khadija	16	11	Niagara Region	Dubai, UAE; came to Canada in 2009	Palestinian
Janeen	15	10	GTA	Dubai, UAE; came to Canada as a child (unspecified age)	Sudanese
Halima	15	10	GTA	Canada	Pakistani
Sabah	15	10	GTA	Saudi Arabia; came to Canada when she was 2 years old	Palestinian
Leila	18	12	London	Saudi Arabia; came to Canada 3 years ago	Syrian
Soumia	15	10	London	Canada	Syrian

Fatima	17	12	London	Canada	Sudanese
Basimah	15	9	London	Canada	Sudanese
Amina	19	12	London	Canada	Sudanese
Kowther	17	11	Niagara Region	Canada; travelled to Saudi Arabia as a child with family for 3-4 years and then returned to Canada	Sudanese
Faduma	16	11	London, Ontario	Canada	Somalian and Kenyan
Bahira	15	10	London, Ontario	Syria; fled to Turkey then to Canada because of civil war in Syria	Syrian
Shada	15	11	Niagara Region	Canada	Sudanese
Nafisa	17	11	Niagara Region	Canada	Sudanese
Samar	17	12	Niagara Region	Canada	Sudanese
Gulsan	18	12	Niagara Region	Iraq; came to Canada when she was 11 years old	Kurdish

### ***Data Collection Methods***

As Yin (2009) contended, interviews are “one of the most important sources of case study information” (p. 106) and are typically comprised of open-ended questions which aim to provide an in-depth understanding of people’s experiences. According to Patton (2002), there are three interview approaches: “(1) the informal conversational interview, (2) the general guide approach (semi-structured interview), and (3) the standardized open-ended interview” (p. 349). I adopted the “general guide approach” (semi-structured interviews) in order to have some structure when interviewing the participants, but also allowing for the interview to take unplanned directions (Yin, 2009).

Christoffersen (2017) marked the importance of framing research questions to capture the complexity of participants’ experiences. For example, she argued that one should avoid

asking questions such as: “do female academic staff experience barriers to career progression, compared with men? If so, what are they?” (4) and instead ask questions that are open-ended: “do groups of female academic staff experience barriers to career progression, compared with groups of men and with other women?...If so what are they?” (p. 4). Christoffersen (2017) explained that:

Without specifically opening research design and research questions up to distinct experiences, in this case for different groups of women, you risk your research primarily uncovering only those barriers experienced by women who do not experience inequality due to the interaction of other aspects of their identity with their gender. (p. 4)

When developing interview questions, I ensured that they were open-ended and that my approach to each interview was conversational rather than rigid. Furthermore, framing questions in an informal and open-ended manner allowed for intersectional differences among the participants to be uncovered. Moreover, participants were given the freedom to choose where they wanted to conduct their interviews. Interviews primarily took place in a private area within their homes or in reserved library meeting rooms. Due to social distancing protocols with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, a few of the interviews were conducted virtually.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative research is typically characterized by a blurry line between the data collection and analysis phase, as both occur simultaneously (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Thus, I adopted several necessary steps when analyzing my case study. Patton (2002) contended that the initial step is for researchers to carefully understand each case. Subsequently, Patton (2002) advised that researchers implement a cross-case analysis so that patterns and themes emerge across cases. Likewise, Creswell (2003) recommended the following steps for data analysis:

- (1) “organizing and preparing the data for analysis,” (2) “reading through all the data,” (3) “beginning detailed analysis with a coding process,” (4) “using the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis,” (5) “advancing how the description and themes will be presented in the qualitative narrative,” and, finally, (6) “making an interpretation or meaning of the data.” (p. 190)

Following Patton's (2002) and Creswell's (2003) guidance, I organized and prepared the data so that it could be effectively and efficiently analyzed. After transcribing the data, interviews were read and revisited multiple times to foster a holistic understanding of the participants' experiences. Consequently, codes emerged and were determined based on relevance to the research questions. As more interviews were read, quotes were either placed in preexisting codes or new codes were created accordingly. Themes of the study were determined based on how many references each code had.

### **Ethical Considerations**

As Stake (2005) contended, "If case study research is more humane or in some way transcendent, it is because the researchers are so, not because of the methods" (p. 443). Therefore, it is essential to be cognizant of the implications associated with how we conduct research. Effective qualitative researchers avoid approaching research with the intention of disproving or proving phenomena; rather, they approach research with the intention to learn and discover knowledge in an effort to better society, no matter how small their contribution is.

According to Creswell (2007), the goal of qualitative research is to minimize and be reflexive of the power imbalances between the interviewer and interviewee. Awareness of the power I hold as a researcher is integral to remedying this ethical issue (Creswell, 2007). As Madison (2005) advised, "it is important to be aware of power differences and status. If you are oblivious to or refuse to accept the power and privilege you carry with you as a researcher you will be blind to the ways your privilege can be a disadvantage to others" (p. 32). For a case study to be ethical, researchers must acknowledge that their work can become emancipatory through collaboration between the researched and researcher, where both of their contributions help develop new forms of knowledge and both work towards the humanization of one another.

This ethical issue is partly addressed by Fine's (1994) concept of *working the hyphen*, which also encompasses the ethical issue of how involved a researcher should be in the

research process. Fine (1994) cautioned against researchers approaching the participants of their study with an *us* vs. “them” mentality, and instead advised researchers to enter a marginal place of *we*. The ethical concern associated with how involved a researcher should be is two-fold: (1) if a researcher is too distant and attempts to be objective in fear of *tainting* the researcher, then this places a heavy burden on the participants and may make them feel more vulnerable as researchers expect participants’ revelations without revealing anything about themselves; (2) in stark contrast, if a researcher is too close then they may excessively identify with the participants and lose clarity as they may learn to only view the situation from the standpoint of the participant. With this ethical concern in mind, I provided details about myself to the participants to help reduce potential vulnerabilities they may experience when sharing their stories while ensuring that I did not influence their responses.

This leads me to a key ethical consideration that has a direct relationship to my epistemological assumption that social research is value-laden and can never truly be unbiased, given that biases always exist within research. As such, researchers must include themselves in the research process and constantly be reflective about their role and their interpretation of the data. Thus, in qualitative research, it is essential that researchers explicate their positionality and engage in reflexivity. As Creswell (2007) contended, “in this clarification, the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study” (p. 208). The implication of this is that my data will demonstrate strong objectivity.<sup>29</sup>

As for Hammersley and Atkinson’s (2007) view of reflexivity, they suggested that “the concept of *reflexivity* acknowledges that the orientations of researchers will be shaped by

---

<sup>29</sup> According to Harding (1992), an effective way to achieve objectivity is not by attempting to control an environment by excluding oneself from the process of research, as positivist researchers typically do. Rather, researchers need to be self-reflexive throughout the research process and acknowledge how subjectivities influence the course of their research. Harding (1992) refers to this as “strong objectivity.”

their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them.” Thomas (1993) highlighted the importance of self-reflexivity in research and contended that:

...we must always be aware not only for how we might influence and shape the slice of culture we study, but how we ourselves are changed by the research process. Reflexive understanding is a form of self-dialogue which we demythologize (i.e., strip away comfortable meanings from) what we have done. (p. 67)

Furthermore, as expected, reflexivity is also considered an essential component for anti-racist feminist research (Christoffersen, 2017; Davis, 2014). Particularly, Davis (2014) argued that one of the initial steps we should take as researchers is to situate ourselves by “...developing a narrative about how your specific location shapes or influences you (your thinking, theoretical preferences, intellectual biography) in specific ways – ways which will be relevant with respect to the research you are doing...” (p. 25). Here, Davis (2014) questioned the way researchers typically situate themselves by listing the various social categories they identify with. Instead, she suggested that a narrative would be more useful to ensure increased *hard objectivity*. Specifically, she explained that developing a narrative encourages reflexive engagement regarding how our identities shape the way we perceive the world, and, in turn, how this would affect what questions we ask and do not ask.<sup>30</sup> In light of this, I will discuss my own positionality in regards to this study below.

I was partly drawn to studying the experiences of Muslim girls with Islamophobia in high schools given not only my own experiences with Islamophobia, but also the numerous accounts of Islamophobia my family and friends have experienced both within and beyond the Canadian public education system. I was raised in St. Catharines, Ontario by working-class immigrant parents who were exiles from Palestine. We were one of the

---

<sup>30</sup> A statement about my positionality is included in the Introduction, but here I provide further context and self-reflection.



few Muslim families in St. Catharines in the early 1990s. My elementary school was primarily composed of White, Christian, middle-class students and teachers. Growing up in the diaspora<sup>31</sup> resulted in experiences of constantly being *othered*, which in turn complicated my identity as a Canadian, a Muslim, and a woman. Aside from this, however, I was most compelled to study the experiences young Muslim girls have with Islamophobia given the politics impacting the globe and the evident societal impacts this is having on Muslims living in Western countries. Being a Muslim woman and sharing a common language (Arabic) other than English with some of the participants afforded me some insight into the possible experiences of Muslim girls and may have fostered a more relaxed environment for participants. However, being reflexive of my positionality ensured that I did not allow my insights to affect the responses of the participants. Furthermore, while I could be considered an *insider*, I am also considered an outsider in some instances given my light skin, my veil, my education status, and my ethnic difference relative to some of this study's participants. As an ethical researcher, I navigated these challenges within the research and ensured I did not impose my voice on the participants. One of the strategies I adopted to ensure that I did not affect the responses of the participants was basing my interview and research questions on theory and a literature review rather than my own personal experiences. However, it is important to note that while I avoided having my own experiences inform my research and interview questions, my positionality is a significant factor as to why I was interested in exploring the experiences of Muslim girls. Furthermore, I ensured that I did not assume all the participants had the same experiences by asking them exploratory, open-ended questions rather than questions that had hidden assumptions. Nonetheless, even though I

---

<sup>31</sup>Moghissi et al. (2009) contended that *diaspora* is a term "widely used today to refer to populations of refugees, migrants, guest workers, expatriates, and the exiled and self-exiled without much concern for the existence of common features or the contextual applicability. In these accounts, it is assumed that globalization has 'de-territorialized,' fluid, and 'transnational' identities, and the concept allows an understanding of ethnicity, culture, and identity free from problems of essentialism." The authors also indicated, however, that "others have expressed concern that 'diaspora' deploys a notion of ethnicity that privileges the point of origin in constructing identity and thus tends to homogenize the population referred to at the transnational level" (pp. 3-4).

employed strategies which allowed for openness,<sup>32</sup> my veil may have affected the participants' responses regarding their own views on the veil.

Aside from my positionality as a researcher, another ethical issue that I must consider is the issue of communication when interviewing participants as well as how I represent the participants' voices. In contrast to the communication associated with most quantitative research, qualitative researchers adopt an informal, engaging style, where they use personal voices when interviewing their participants (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, regarding the representation of participants, historically research has been used to oppress marginalized groups. This is exemplified in Said's *Orientalism* where he noted that the image of the Orient was in part developed by the observations of researchers. Teo (2010), who drew on Bourdieu, referred to this occurrence, whether intentional or unintentional, as epistemological violence. Teo (2010) contended that "epistemological violence refers to the interpretation of social-scientific data on the *other* and is produced when empirical data are *interpreted* as showing the inferiority of or problematizes the *Other*, even when the data allow for equally viable alternative interpretations" (p. 295). Thus, problematizations and interpretations of inferiority are considered as acts that negatively impact the other. Given this, when interpretations are developed within academia and conveyed as knowledge, they are "defined as epistemological violent actions" (Teo, 2010, p. 295). When a study has a high level of trustworthiness,<sup>33</sup> however, epistemological violence is less likely to occur.

Furthermore, a protective and disclosing covenant and a moral obligation exists between the researcher and the researched. Risks to well-being must be thoroughly explained rather than just listed, and researchers must exercise great caution to minimize such risks (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) noted, "even with good

---

<sup>32</sup> I did this by stating how I never thought I would wear the veil when I was younger, and I also shared that some of my extended family members disagreed with donning the veil.

<sup>33</sup> This will be explained later in this chapter.

advance information from the researcher about the study, the researched cannot be expected to protect themselves against the risks inherent in participation” (p. 140). Specifically, Yin (2009) advised that the following steps be employed to protect participants from unethical treatment: (1) obtain informed consent from the participants; (2) protect the participants from any harm, which includes avoiding the use of deception; (3) protect the confidentiality and privacy of the participants to avoid placing them in an undesirable situation; and (4) employ precautions that may be necessary to protect vulnerable groups. Yin (2009) also advised that researchers must frame their ethical protocol with an Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB that informs the specific steps I must take is Western University’s Office of Research Ethics. In addition to what Yin (2009) advised, they required that I provide the participants an opportunity to ask questions and inform them that they can withdraw from the study at any stage of the research, for any reason. Furthermore, according to Western University’s Office of Research Ethics, the consent form must include the possible benefits and risks associated with participation, how I will use the research, and how I will ensure participant confidentiality.

In this study, I provided participants and their parents with the letter of information (LOI) and consent form prior to the study, so they had a chance to read it over and sign it. Also, before I began the interviews, I went over the LOI and reminded them that they can refuse to answer any interview question and withdraw from the study at any time. I also explained how I would protect their identity and ensure their anonymity.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Unlike statistical and quantitative research which utilizes established metrics to determine a study’s validity and reliability, qualitative researchers instead aim to make their research trustworthy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Trustworthiness is about ensuring that the findings are credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable. To establish credibility, researchers use triangulation, which is a process that verifies the repeatability of an interpretation or observation by using a number of participants’ perceptions, and

most importantly, ensures that the findings are true (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). I ensured my work is trustworthy by engaging in member-checking<sup>34</sup> and by collecting interview data from various participants. Moreover, researchers establish transferability by using *thick description* to demonstrate that the findings can apply to other contexts—which can mean similar populations, situations, and phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). I engaged in thick description by detailing the research design. Moreover, researchers achieve confirmability by creating an audit trail which specifies each step of data analysis so that each decision made throughout the research process is rationalized (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). I did this by keeping a researcher diary, where I wrote down each major decision I made and why it was relevant and important to my research goals. This ensures that the findings reflect the participants' voices rather than reflect the researcher's potential personal motivations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Furthermore, dependability is established when the research is thoroughly described to the extent where if another researcher read it, they can replicate it based on the explanation provided. Researchers can secure dependability by having a colleague examine and review their research so that they can ensure consistency and replicability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2009, 2014). For this study, my supervisor and committee members reviewed my work.

## **Limitations**

Qualitative research is often criticized for its inability to generalize. While qualitative case-study research avoids statistical generalization, it adopts analytic generalization (Yin, 2009, 2014). Unlike statistical generalization which attempts to make an inference on a population based on the randomized sample of a study, analytic generalizations compare previously developed theories with empirical findings (Yin, 2009, 2014). It

---

<sup>34</sup> I did this by asking the participants to review segments of this dissertation which included their voices to ensure that I accurately represented them.

would be considered a *fatal flaw* if statistical generalization was used for qualitative case studies as cases are uncharacteristic of sampling units.

Also, the effectiveness of a case study is often downplayed relative to *true experiments* or *randomized field trials*, which are emphasized in education and social research. Such studies seek to establish causal relationships, where, for example, a *particular intervention* has been effective in producing better *learning outcomes* (Yin, 2009). As Yin (2009) contended, "...experiments, through establishing the efficacy of a treatment (or intervention), are limited in their ability to explain 'how' or 'why' the treatment necessarily worked, whereas case studies could investigate such issues" (p. 16).

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed the methodology I adopted for my research. I opened the chapter by defining qualitative research and justified how my research is congruent with a qualitative case study. I also described my research methods and design against the backdrop of feminist research, with a specific focus on anti-racist feminism. I then described my research design, including: (1) how I collected the data; (2) how I analyzed the data; (3) who the research participants were; and (4) what recruitment strategies were adopted. Subsequently, I explained how I ensured trustworthiness, met ethical standards, and have, and will continue to, protect the participants. I concluded the chapter with the limitations of adopting a case-study design.

## Chapter 4

### Muslim Girls' Experiences in Schools

#### Introduction

Research conducted on Muslim students reveals that they often experience Islamophobia throughout their education (see Alizai, 2017; Jaffe-Walter, 2019; Shah, 2012; Van den Bergh et al., 2010; Zine, 2001). A small body of research has also found that Muslim girls in the public education system experience a combination of Islamophobia and sexism, commonly referred to as *gendered Islamophobia*<sup>35</sup> (see Ali, 2012; Diab, 2008; Kassam, 2007; Mirza & Meetoo, 2018; Rezai-Rashti, 1994, 1998, 2005a; Zine, 2008b). Gendered Islamophobia brings to light how sexism and Islamophobia converge, and it contextualizes the unique experiences that Muslim girls encounter within both Western society as well as their ethnic communities. Drawing on anti-racist feminism as a theoretical framework revealed the unique forms of oppression participants faced. What is absent from the literature is how other types of oppression are further compounded with gendered Islamophobia and how this convergence shapes the experiences of Muslim youth in schools. Thus, the findings presented in this section illustrate the participants' interwoven experiences of gendered Islamophobia based on their race, SES, and immigration status. While the participants in this study demonstrated resolve through engaging in reflection and adopting coping strategies, they still navigated barriers and challenges that complicated their sense of belonging. Participants were determined to *be themselves* in the face of low expectations, unfair interactions with educators, and unpleasant exchanges with their peers. However, *being themselves*—or in other words, not *losing themselves*—is a constant battle between being the substandard *other* and being devoted to their values.

---

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 2 for a literature review on gendered Islamophobia.

This chapter begins by addressing participants' experiences with Islamophobia in their schools by revealing how some of their teachers and peers essentialized them against the backdrop of historical as well as contemporary power dynamics that uphold structural inequities. Following this, participants' common experiences with gendered Islamophobia will be addressed. While the participants shared similar experiences as Muslim girls, their experiences diverged based on other aspects of their social identities, namely their race, SES, and their immigration status. Subsequently, participants described how they contended with challenges they faced within their schools. Finally, this chapter shares how participants are accommodated in their school based on the accommodation policies in place and their geographical location.

### **Experiences of Islamophobia**

This section highlights participants' experiences with Islamophobia from both their teachers and peers at school. Specifically, some of their teachers would verbalize rhetoric rooted in Islamophobic stereotypes, whereas their peers would primarily engage in name-calling that reflected routinized media depictions of Muslims. Thus, this section begins with reviewing participants' experiences of Islamophobia with their teachers followed by their experiences with their peers.

Regarding Islamophobic encounters with their teachers, several participants described incidents where their teachers discussed topics that were derived from Western stereotypes of Muslims and Islam. Sharing an experience that occurred in her Civics class, Khadija (Palestinian) explained that her teacher asked: "If you could stop a certain group from coming to Canada, who would you stop?" A classmate raised his hand and remarked that he would stop Middle Easterners from coming into Canada:

...he was like, "Middle Easterners," and I was like, "Is he joking?" Like, I wanted to see what he was going to say. He said, "Because they have the highest crime rate," and I am like, "That is not possible," and then he was like, "They cause too many problems here."

Khadija, surprised that her teacher agreed with the student, fearlessly spoke out against

such blatant Islamophobic rhetoric as she felt that her identity was being labelled as violent. Khadija took it upon herself to research statistics on her cellphone to challenge what the student was saying:

I think he [the teacher] knew I was Middle Eastern...so yeah...I raised my hand and I said, "I am Middle Eastern, and what you're saying is not possible." And the teacher is like, "You guys are not allowed to use your phone," and I was like, "I need to use it for a second," and I Googled the highest [incarceration] rate, it was America, and then Mexico, and I said, "See it is you guys<sup>36</sup> who have the highest rate," and he [the student] was acting dumb after, and he was like, "Can I just see the list because I didn't research last time?" And I'm like, "You didn't research it at all." And he was like trying to be friendly because he knew he was wrong...a week later...I was writing my exam, and he [the teacher] was like, "Do you remember that time that student said something. Are you okay about that?" And I'm like, "That passed weeks ago, so you should have asked me then." He was like, "I am really sorry. I didn't know how you would feel."

It is evident that Khadija's teacher realized that the conversation deteriorated, but he was unequipped with the tools necessary to make the best of the situation by turning it into a teachable moment to critically engage with racism and to support his minority student. More importantly, the teacher was unaware of how problematic and inappropriate his question was as it prompted racist dialogue.

While Khadija's challenging of her peer's racist rhetoric elicited by her teacher's question exemplified courage, research studies have found that Muslim students are generally fearful of defying their teachers (see Alizai, 2017; Aslam, 2011; Amjad, 2018; Speck, 1997). However, the participants in this study who recalled overt acts of racism expressed they were unafraid to assert themselves.

Nonetheless, other participants shared Khadija's frustration regarding how some teachers are insensitive and unequipped when dealing with a diverse student population. For instance, Soumia (Syrian) advised that teachers should be more reflective: "They should

---

<sup>36</sup> Khadija was referring to people living in the West as a whole, which is why she was using American statistics to support her claim.



stop talking about topics that are sensitive; they should not stereotype.” She further expressed her annoyance by stating:

Something that really pisses me off is that the lady [her teacher] used to say things that are not true and state them as facts and they use them against [us]. They say things about Islam that they think are true, but they are not, and they say it to me. It’s like, I know that it’s not true because I am a Muslim. They get this stuff off of social media.

As Soumia demonstrated, some of her teachers have internalized Islamophobic discourses and present this knowledge to students as if it is common sense and indisputable.

A similar pattern of results that echoed the above interactions between educators and Muslim students is evident within the literature (see Alizai, 2017; Bagguley & Hussain, 2007; Gotschalk & Greenberg, 2018; Jackson, 2011; Zaal, 2012; Zine, 2003). For example, Zaal (2012) shared how a teacher’s classroom activity largely sparked student discomfort. While the teacher’s intention was to commemorate the 10th anniversary of 9/11, his classroom activity was profoundly problematic and inappropriate. Some of his students were confused as to why he would ask them to reflect on the idea of a new Mosque being built in the vicinity of the World Trade Centre site in New York as well as to construct a paragraph using the following vocabulary: “AI Qaeda, terrorist, Islam, Muslim, hijacker; and Islamist” (p. 555). According to Zaal (2012), “The teacher did not provide any context (historical, political, or social) for the assignment, and several students were uncomfortable with it” (p. 555).

Watt (2016) explained that many teacher candidates, like the teacher Zaal (2012) described, are unaware of how socialization influences their thoughts and behaviours. She drew upon Stanley’s (2009) notion of *grand narratives*, which described how the socialization process widely circulates colonial depictions of Muslims that have become mistaken as *common sense* knowledge. Stanley (2009) explained that colonialism “continues as processes of cultural production through which power legitimizes itself by

silencing the memory of its own unilateral construction at the same time that it seeks to fix and re-fix meaning” (p. 144). Through grand narratives, colonialism persists to exist through the cultural binary logic and the sanitization of colonial history. As Watt (2016) contended, grand narratives are primarily legitimized through the media, which creates sites “where the goals of socialization through educational curricula are realized...where images insidiously promote dominate discourses” (p. 22). In line with this, many scholars suggested that the mass media significantly influences our social consciousness (see Collins, 2002; Said, 1993; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017), and, thus, it is unsurprising that Orientalist representations of Muslims in the media influence educators’ interactions with their Muslim students.

Ranya (Sudanese and Turkish; identifies as Black), a participant in this study, showed she was profoundly aware of how media representations elicit essentializing tendencies by stating, “When the media says that a Muslim did something, people register it in a way that all Muslims are like that.” Likewise, Yasmeen (Syrian) asserted, “They obviously think from what is being portrayed in the media that we are all terrorists.” These results are similar to those of McDermott-Levy (2011) who found that the participants of her study, “blamed American media for not providing an accurate representation of Muslims, Muslim practices, and the Arab world by only reporting negative things about Muslims” (p. 271). Watt’s (2011) participants shared similar sentiments.

Participants in this current study explained why the public is prone to internalize popular media depictions of Muslims. As Ranya stated, this is a consequence of “[A] lack of exposure, face-to-face interaction. They don’t know a lot of Muslim people, or don’t have a lot of Muslim friends, so they believe what the general public believes.” Similarly, Yasmine explained that if people were critical of the static representations of Muslims, learned about Islam, and had more contact with Muslims, then such misconceptions would be dispelled, saying that “those who are actually educated and try to learn about it [Islam], know that we are not that [terrorists]; they know that we are nice, peaceful people.” Yasmine’s thoughts corresponded with Saeed (2007) who argued that such

essentialized depictions compel people with limited exposure to Muslims to internalize such monolithic frames:

When these frameworks are applied to audiences who have little social contact with minority groups, the role of the media as sole provider...becomes crucial. (p. 2)

In *Covering Islam*, Said (1998) explained the complex processes of how Muslims are covered in the media. He provided an example of how unqualified reporters are asked to cover a story based on their proximity to a particular location. Such reporters, with limited knowledge of Muslims or Islam, rely on frames which automatically pair terrorism with Muslims. As Kearns et al. (2019) found, terrorist attacks carried out by Muslims receive 357 percent more coverage in the news compared to terrorist attacks committed by other groups. Moreover, they found that of the 136 terrorist attacks in the U.S. over the span of ten years, Muslims were responsible for approximately 12.5 percent of them. Yet, terrorist attacks committed by Muslims received over half of the media coverage. Furthermore, the authors explained that the consequence of such coverage is that half of the American public is concerned that either they or their family members will be a victim of a terrorist attack even though the risk, statistically speaking, is miniscule.

Thus, it is unsurprising that some of the participants' peers engaged in name-calling, drawing on vocabulary that is commonly used to describe Muslims in the media. Specifically, participants recalled many instances of peers accusing them of carrying bombs, referring to them as terrorists, associating them with violence, and remarking that they should "Go back to their country." For example, Kowther (Sudanese) described her interactions with some of her peers at school:

I definitely got some comments...they [other students] would yell "AllahuAkbar"<sup>37</sup> any time I would walk outside. Some kids in the older grades,

---

<sup>37</sup> Transliteration of Arabic phrase "God is the Greatest."

they would try to get my attention by saying “*AllahuAkbar*” and stuff like that. One day, I asked them, “What do you think *AllahuAkbar* means?” And he didn’t really know any better... and he said, “Doesn’t it mean an explosion?” Then I was like, “This is why you should do your research before,” and I explained what it meant, and he stopped saying that after.

Participants’ experiences revealed the high degree of Islamophobia embedded within our social consciousness that results in these kinds of comments. Instead of being defensive, Kowther decided to openly educate her classmate on what *AllahuAkbar* means, shifting her classmate’s understanding of the term, and consequently convincing him to stop using the phrase in such a derogatory way. According to Collins (2002), taking conscious actions to change everyday relations demonstrates resistance strategies within the interpersonal domain.<sup>38</sup> Like Kowther, Shada (Sudanese) engaged in conscious actions by adopting effective dialogue with a peer who was known to be Islamophobic at her school, resulting in a new friendship:

I had a class with him [Islamophobic peer] the next semester, and ironically enough, we sat beside each other. I just remember the whole semester we debated every single thing. The whole class heard us just back and forth about Black people and police brutality, and we talked about Islam and his vision of it. It’s funny because even the students and teacher in the class saw the progress that was made just by talking to each other every day and debating, and we ended up becoming friends. I thought it was really cool.

Thus, some of the participants demonstrated resolve through actively challenging the interpersonal domain of power via dialoguing. While the outcome is sometimes positive, the participants feel that dialoguing with others by challenging their preconceived assumptions about Muslims and Islam is daunting and emotionally draining.

In summary, overall, the findings regarding participants’ experiences with Islamophobia support the general findings in the literature concerning Muslim students in schools (see Archer, 2002; Jaffe-Walter, 2019; Shah, 2012; Van den Bergh et al., 2010; Zine, 2001).

---

<sup>38</sup> As mentioned earlier, the interpersonal domain of power “functions through routinized, day-to-day practices of how people treat one another” (Collins, 2002, p. 287).

The findings highlight how participants' experiences with Islamophobia mirror the Islamophobic discourses recycled by the media. The participants were keenly aware of the media's influence on their teachers' and peers' conceptualizations of Muslims and demonstrated their ability to foster change through facilitating open dialogue with their peers. Furthermore, these results highlighted the prevalence of overt forms of Islamophobia that arise within schools even though there are policies in place which aim to create equitable school environments. Thus, not only do these findings suggest that policies need to be reworked, but also they reveal the way Islamophobia manifests within schools (Amjad, 2018; Francis & Mckenna, 2018; Jaffe-Walter, 2019; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Mir & Sarroub, 2019; Mirza & Meetoo, 2018). Additionally, while participants contended with common media depictions of Muslims on the one hand, they also experienced gendered Islamophobia on the other, which reveals the complexities that equity policies and educational leaders need to consider. The next subsection will discuss such gendered experiences.

### **Experiences of Gendered Islamophobia**

This section first details how some of the participants' peers and educators assumed that Muslim families oppress their daughters and subsequently illustrates instances of how peers and educators encouraged them to remove the veil. Moreover, while participants have shared experiences based on their gender and religion, their experiences deviated based on their unique social identities. Thus, this section concludes with how participants' intersectional differences shape their schooling experiences, revealing how race, citizenship status, and SES converge with gendered Islamophobia.

As Rezai-Rashti (2005a) indicated, "women's mistreatment within Islamic culture is one of the main signifiers of Muslim inferiority in Western culture" (p. 180). As already noted, the discourse of *oppressed* Muslim women in need of rescue is an image that has persisted in the Western imaginary since the colonial era. Specifically, the image of the *uncivilized* and *misogynistic* Muslim man who mistreats women was used as a significant component for the development of a new imaginary of the Orient, "which has been intrinsically linked to the hegemony of western imperialism" (Hoodfar, 2001, p. 426).

Furthermore, Hoodfar (2001) noted how the imagery associated with Muslim men as abusive and controlling coincided with the development of the ideology of femininity which came to be known in Britain as Victorian Morality.<sup>39</sup> Variations of this ideology were also consequently developed throughout the West, primarily by Western writers who were also obsessively interested in the oppression of Muslim women without mentioning that much of these condemnations equally applied to women in their own societies. As Hoodfar (2001) indicated, “European women in the nineteenth century were hardly freer than their oriental counterparts in terms of mobility and travelling, a situation of which many European female expatriates repeatedly complained” (p. 427). Hoodfar (2001) also revealed that societies in both the Christian Occident and Muslim Orient engaged in sexual hypocrisy:

Both systems of patriarchy were developed to cater to men’s whims and to perpetuate their privileges. But the social institutions and ethos of the orient and occident that have developed in order to ensure male prerogatives were and are different. (p. 427)

Thus, while imperialists used Muslim women’s mistreatment as a significant factor to confirm the inferiority of the Orient, they were unconcerned with the well-being and emancipation of their own women. Such narratives persist and continue to signify the *otherness* of Muslims.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, there is no denying that Muslim girls and women experience sexism. However, it is how their stories are sensationalized and repeatedly attributed to Islam that leads to hypocritical media coverage in the West.

Many participants were keenly aware of the media’s influence in juxtaposing them to Western gendered ideals, further contributing to the Western social imaginary of oppressed Muslim women in society. In line with this, Bullock and Jafri (2000) explained

---

<sup>39</sup> This is when women’s roles in the West became more distinct relative to men’s roles; women in general “were thought to be in need of male protection and intellectually and biologically destined for the domestic domain” (Hoodfar, 2001, p. 427).

<sup>40</sup> This will be addressed further in Chapter 5.

how the Canadian mainstream media essentialized Muslim women as *Eastern others* and often associated Muslim women and girls with gender oppression. Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2008) indicated that such polarizing tendencies are caused “by an Orientalist and neoliberal dogma which dictates the terms of ‘a well-organized sense’ that the Muslim subject is not like ‘us’ and, hence, does not subscribe to our democratic and supposedly enlightened values” (p. 418). Similarly, Jiwani (2018) highlighted how the media hijacked the image of Muslim women to further reify the binary between the West and Islam. Specifically, Jiwani (2018) analyzed Muslim women’s gendered representations within the Canadian media and shared a critical analysis of how the media represented Muslim girls and women by using the concept of *doubling discourses*, where racialized women are typically subjected to two media representations. On the one hand, the mass media depicts Muslim women as oppressed and ignorant individuals who blindly follow their religion and cultural traditions. On the other hand, the media depicts Muslim women as rebellious individuals who want little to do with their religion and culture. According to Jiwani (2018), while both discourses represent Muslim women in an inferior light, the audience perceives the latter discourse more positively as it is within the latter image that the Muslim girl rejects her *barbaric* faith and attempts to assimilate to Western *superior ideals*.

While some literature has discussed the historical representations of Muslim women in books and paintings, little research has addressed how Muslim women are depicted in television and film in contemporary times.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the former informs the latter. MacDonald (2006) is one of the few scholars who has reviewed Muslim women’s depictions in contemporary popular culture (also see Hirji, 2011).<sup>42</sup> She explained that such media representations of Muslim women ensure an effective marketing strategy: “in

---

<sup>41</sup> Comparably, there is more research on media representations of Muslim women in the news.

the search for marketability, the voice of the ‘other’ is frequently appropriated for dramatic effect” (p. 16). Here, she revealed how audiences are more likely to be drawn to media that confirm their stereotypes. As MacDonald (2006) noted, media representations silence Muslim females and subject them to essentialized colonial tropes.

In relation to such discourses that are deeply embedded with society’s consciousness, some of the participants contended with stereotypes that construct Muslim women as victims of their families, cultures, and religion, where it is assumed that their families force them to marry early and discourage them from continuing their education. Amina demonstrated the pervasiveness of such stereotypes by reporting how a classmate asked her, “[Do] you guys have to get married at a young age?” Amina educated her classmate by pointing out that people should not “put culture and religion together.” Such sentiments were common. For example, Hafsah expressed that people “think that they [Muslim women] are stuck in the house and their husbands don’t let them leave the house, and they are not allowed to study.” She also recalled a time when her teacher featured a documentary depicting Muslim women as hopeless victims where their husbands oppress and prevent them from leaving their homes. Hafsah challenged such assertions by pointing out the inaccuracies of the film to her teacher and classmates, and by questioning the essentialized portrayals depicted in the documentary. Thus, we can observe that Muslim girls not only resist Islamophobia that associates Muslims with violence, barbarism, and extremism, but also must contend with stereotypes of their families oppressing them, forcing them to wear the veil, and discouraging them from furthering their education.

These findings are consistent with the scant literature concerning the experiences of Muslim girls in North American and Western European schools (see Mirza & Meeto, 2018; Rezai-Rashti, 1994, 2005; Zine 2006). For example, Zine (2006b) found that educators thought that Muslim girls “...were oppressed at home and that Islam did not value education for women” (p. 244). Likewise, Mirza and Meeto (2018) noted that educators often perceived Muslim women as *at risk* for forced marriage and related them



to issues pertaining to patriarchal gender control. Equally important, Rezai-Rashti (1994) described that while educators are often quick to attribute the problems that Muslim girls complain about to their *home culture*, they rarely see that these problems “...in fact have little to do with specific cultural practices. They could well be the types of problems encountered by any typical adolescent” (p. 78). Thus, even though educators are typically aware of the intergenerational conflict between parents and their teenaged children, it has been found that, “...when the youth involved happens to be a young woman from a Muslim background; more often than not, educators view the problem as a cultural one. It is immediately communicated to the student that her culture is backward” (Rezai-Rashti, 2005a, p. 181).

Such essentialized assumptions of Muslim girls are arguably consequences of media frames which portray Muslim families as inherently oppressive towards their daughters. One particular frame in the media that attributes cultural familial oppression specifically to Muslims is the trope of *honour killing*. Zine (2009) referred to such media coverage of femicide in Muslim households as *death by culture*:

Any attempt to insert a more normative frame of reference through which to understand Aqsa’s death was overshadowed by the barrage of media sensationalism that framed the issue as a ‘death by culture’. The hegemonic construction of the debate purveyed in the media was rooted in the trope of ‘honour-killing’ rather than as a case of tragic domestic violence. (p. 147)

Furthermore, Allen (2017) asserted:

These discourses mobilize binaries between the global East and West by utilizing words like Middle Eastern, Pakistani, Islam, restrictive, traditional, and old-world, with no attempt to define or differentiate between them. In doing so, they use gendered and racialized discourses that have long collapsed differences among members of Muslim-majority communities...while also othering them by neatly connecting words like Western, freedom, and liberal, to being Canadian in ways that effectively place Parvez, the Shafia sisters, and their families outside the imagined national community. (p. 35)

Thus, securing the concept of *honour* only in cases of violence against women in Muslim families further reifies Muslims’ imagined barbarity and backwardness. Taking a deeper

look at such double standards within the media, Shier and Shor (2016) conducted a content analysis of 486 news stories in Canadian mainstream newspapers regarding honour killings and family murders<sup>43</sup> to explore how reporters frame *culture* depending on the perpetrator's race. One of their findings was that the Canadian news media typically placed a greater emphasis on a perpetrator's culture when he was a Muslim, while a non-Muslim, Western perpetrator was deemed as cultureless. The West regards itself as having no culture which naturally results in misnaming violence against women in the West as an individual issue. This is in stark contrast to how violence against women in racialized communities is portrayed as an inherent cultural flaw, further reifying the dichotomy of the superior West vs the inferior East (Mirza & Meeto, 2018; Razack, 2008; Shier & Shor, 2016). Thus, familiar media frames are mapped onto news stories based on the identity of the perpetrator rather than the context of the situation. Namely, femicide committed by a Muslim perpetrator automatically elicits the frame of *honour*.

Despite some scholars and reporters' shared preoccupation with attempting to distinguish between *honour* crimes and *traditional/family* domestic abuse, violence against women committed by a Muslim perpetrator is still commonly referred to as an *honour* crime even though such violence, at times, constitutes *traditional/family* domestic abuse (Shier & Shor, 2016). Also, Shier and Shor (2016), alongside other scholars (Baker et al., 1999), interrogated the descriptor of *honour* within the media as being solely reflective of Islamic and Eastern cultures by emphasizing that *honour* is also a property of Western and Christian cultures which contributes to femicide as well as other forms of violence against women. Specifically, Shier and Shor (2016) shared stories of *family murders* committed by Western, non-Muslim men that are rooted in shame and *honour*. Despite this, most non-Muslim, Western perpetrators who engaged in femicides propelled by

---

<sup>43</sup> This is often synonymous with "traditional domestic violence" and is typically used to describe murders that are void of the concept of *honour*.

*honour* were suggested as having deep-rooted psychological issues and/or were described in a humanizing manner.<sup>44</sup> Regarding mental illness, Shier and Shor (2016) made a robust argument that those who commit *honour* crimes can also suffer from mental illness; however, there is no mention of this in news reports when the perpetrator happens to be Muslim. Therefore, even though some reporters and researchers attempt to distinguish between *honour* crimes and *traditional/familial* forms of domestic violence, the line that separates both is blurred when the perpetrator is Muslim (Shier & Shor, 2016). On the other hand, some scholars and reporters have argued that using *honour* to describe some femicides is a misnomer as there is a tendency to focus on the rationale for the murder (namely, the culture and religion of the perpetrator) rather than the murder itself when it is used (see Shier & Shor, 2016; Zine, 2009). Thus, the remnants of colonial discourses which deem Muslim girls as oppressed by their families are apparent within the media and indeed influenced some of the participants' experiences in their schools.

In addition to such colonial discourses which mark Muslim women as subdued victims of patriarchy, there seems to be an obsession with young Muslim women unveiling within the media. According to Macdonald (2006), "the media attribute generic qualities to the veil that belong primarily to specific misogynistic patriarchal structures responsible for the contours of daily life" (p. 13). She further explained that the media constructs Muslim women to also lead double lives, as both subdued victims of patriarchy within their homes and as liberated subjects once they are out in public and unveiled. MacDonald (2006) highlighted how even when Muslim women remove the veil in some scenes, they are still placed under scrutiny and excluded "from post-feminist forms of sexual liberation" (p. 15) because of othering and Western assumptions of the Muslim female body.

---

<sup>44</sup> The following description in a news article demonstrates the latter, "[Rawlings] liked to play his guitar around the camp fire, never had a violent incident in his marriage, had no history of mental illness and was known as a 'nice guy' by his neighbours and close friends" (as quoted in Shier & Shor, 2016, p. 1179).

Such constructions can be traced back to the colonial era when colonizers were fixated with unveiling Muslim women (Ahmed, 1994; Fanon, 2004). As Mahmood (2005) contended, colonizers constructed the veil as a banner of oppression in order to invoke reductive binaries aimed at justifying colonization. Such rhetoric was rooted in a colonial strategy which viewed unveiling as an impetus towards colonial success. Furthermore, for the colonizer, the more women unveiled, the more apparent the success of assimilation was (Fanon, 2004). As Fanon (2004) asserted:

Every rejected veil disclosed to the eyes of the colonialists horizons until then forbidden, and revealed to them piece by piece, the flesh of Algeria laid bare. The occupier's aggressiveness, and hence his hopes, multiplied tenfold each time a new face was uncovered. (p. 47)

Here, Fanon (2004) revealed how the colonialists' hopes increased as women rejected the veil as this was metaphorical for the colonizers' success of assimilating the occupied. As such, colonialists' symbolization of the veil as a banner of oppression was a smokescreen. Specifically, they wanted women to remove the veil not because they were concerned with Muslim women's oppression; rather, they were concerned with ensuring colonial success. For the colonizers, unveiling served two purposes: it decreased the likelihood of the ability for Muslim women to see without being seen and it served as a litmus test of colonial success (Fanon, 2004).

Furthermore, the link between formal education and veiling existed in colonial times as well, where colonizers constructed the veil as an impediment towards pursuing education (MacDonald, 2006). Correspondingly, within the larger Western modern society, the veil has been fashioned as a symbol of oppression where it has been thought of to be a threat to Western values. The preoccupation with having Muslims unveil reduces that threat as assimilation breeds compliance.

Yet, drawing from McRobbie's (2007) notion of the *sexual contract*, even if Muslim girls were to unveil and assimilate, they would still not be entirely accepted within society. The *sexual contract* is rooted in the assumption that the West has achieved gender parity and sexual liberation has been achieved. Central to the *sexual contract* are increased

displays of sexuality, which reinforces new norms of femininity. Compliance with the *sexual contract* is equated with liberation, whereas deviance from it is read as backwards (James, 2017). However, what is hidden within the *sexual contract* is that even if Muslim girls attempted to assimilate by unveiling, they would still not be fully accepted as their sexuality is regulated via Western social ideals that ascertain the female Muslim body as sexually repressed irrespective of how she dresses or behaves (MacDonald, 2006; Mirza & Meeto, 2018). As Zine (2009) noted, “these contradictory tensions produce ambivalent desires to rescue and liberate Muslim women from their debilitating cultures and at the same time keep them outside the physical and discursive boundaries of the nation” (p. 158). Considering this, it is unsurprising that some of the participants’ peers and teachers encouraged them to remove the veil in the effort to perhaps rescue them from their *backwards* culture and guide them towards liberation via the *sexual contract*, which simultaneously encourages assimilation and perpetually regulates and excludes the Muslim female body.

According to Mirza and Meeto (2018), acceptable forms of assimilation for Muslim girls are primarily associated with them achieving credentials and receiving high grades. The authors noted that some educators who actively attempt to *include* Muslim girls view them as the *model student* and the *good Muslim girl* who simultaneously need to be rescued. This underscores how Muslim girls are kept outside the discursive and physical national boundaries even if they assimilate (Zine, 2009). Ranya highlighted this by explaining how Muslim girls are not only perceived as oppressed, but “...are known to be shy, quiet, and get really high marks.” Such perceptions of Muslim girls benefit the liberal state that defines itself as progressive, enlightened, and open to gender equality under the premise of being in a post-racial and post-feminist society; however, these perceptions are reflective of racism (Mirza & Meeto, 2018).

Furthermore, Mirza and Meeto (2018) found that “in the schools, the young women’s faith constantly had to be tested. In many cases the headscarf was not taken seriously, seen as merely an outward display of imposed necessary religiosity...” (p. 232). Likewise,

Sirin and Fine (2006) reported that their participants were faced with a similar line of rhetoric. These findings are reflected in Hafsa's experience with one of her teachers in her school. She recalled a time when the teacher inconsiderately suggested that a classmate remove her veil, saying, "Take off your *hijab*; you look better without it." She continued:

He is like, "Take it off; it is way better; your hair is very good" ... and I am like, "What are you saying? That is so offensive!" He didn't even say sorry. He just looked at me like this [facial expression] and turned around.

Likewise, many of the veiled participants in this current study were questioned by both their teachers and peers who implied that they should remove their veils. However, they also noted how some of their peers and teachers supported their choice to wear the veil. While there is important theoretical work on how Muslim women and girls are pressured into removing the veil (see for example Bullock, 2002; Hoodfar, 2003; Rezai-Rashti, 2005; Zine, 2006a), scant research has examined if Muslim girls are encouraged to remove their veils in schools. Mirza and Meeto's (2018) study is among the few which addressed the pressures of conformity via the removal of the veil in schools. For example, they found that:

Secretly "taking it off" or using it "to clean" were forms of derision used to minimise or undermine the headscarves seemingly imposing and threatening physical presence. For example, one teacher told the girls they could remove it on a hot day as their parents were not looking. It was as if, given the opportunity, the girls would relinquish the burden and "take it off".... (p. 232)

Thus, the current study provides important contributions to the literature regarding how teachers and peers sometimes assumed that Muslim girls are forced to wear the veil, further *othering* them by imposing gendered Islamophobic discourses on them.

In addition to the media recycling colonial discourses which generate gendered Islamophobia within school walls, Canada's political landscape may also contribute to such occurrences. The question of the veil has been a contentious topic within Canadian politics, especially in Québec. For instance, the national *niqab* debate singled out

Muslims and strengthened the Islamophobic association of Muslims with “backwardness.” As Barber (2015) noted, this debate played a significant role during the 2015 election campaign and was consequently referred to in Stephen Harper’s re-election campaign commercial. Surprisingly, shortly after the introduction of the *niqab* debate, politicians added fuel to the fire by introducing the Barbaric Cultural Practices Act, an act that encouraged Canadians to report any *barbaric* incidents to the police. Although it did not specifically mention Muslims, many argued that it targeted Muslims (Barber, 2015). To add to this, some Conservative politicians engaged in divisive rhetoric, further reinscribing Islamophobia within Canadian society’s social consciousness (Barber, 2015). Also, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the Québec education system has a history of attempting to outlaw the veil. However, this was prevented by a student who resisted the veil ban within Québec schools by citing that it contradicted the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Zine, 2006). As Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2008) wrote, “many feminists and Québec nationalists in Canada have advocated the banning of the veil in public schools on the basis that it will free young women from oppression imposed on them by their families” (pp. 420-421). Correspondingly, the alarming recent passing and implementation of Bill 21, which makes it illegal for women to wear the veil when working as a public servant in Québec, has intensified the struggles of an already vulnerable minority and has serious implications for young Muslim girls’ educational experiences.

Overall, participants’ common experiences with gendered Islamophobia mirrored colonial tropes recycled within the Canadian political landscape. These colonial narratives characterized Muslim girls and women as victims in need of saving. Coincidentally, Western hegemony constructed the veil as symbolic of Muslim men’s mistreatment of women. Thus, it is not surprising that some of the participants’ peers and teachers assumed that they are oppressed within their homes and suggested that they remove the veil. As established above, participants in this study challenged these inaccurate, generalized assumptions that have been placed on them. Nonetheless, confronting the neocolonial gaze of some educators and peers should not be confounded

with denying the sexism that does exist within some Islamic families. Undeniably, as Chapter 5 highlights, one of the findings in this study is that Muslim girls experience challenges within their homes; however, these challenges are not associated with forced marriage or discouragement from education. Indeed, especially concerning the latter, the opposite is quite true. While these are the common experiences of the participants with gendered Islamophobia, their experiences diverged based on other aspects of their social identities as is discussed in the following sub-section.

### ***Intersectional Differences Among Muslim Girls***

While the findings of this study regarding participants' experiences with gendered Islamophobia are consistent with the literature on Muslim girls in Canadian schools, the current research contributes to this body of work by including diverse voices of young Muslim women from various cultural and racial backgrounds and revealing how other forms of oppression converge with gendered Islamophobia within the school context. Specifically, as a result of asking the "other question" (Davis, 2014), themes emerged in this study which uncovered complexities and differences between Muslim girls which are often overlooked. Some of the participants who experienced the interwoven effects of Islamophobia and sexism also experienced anti-Black racism within their schools. Anti-Black racism primarily took on the form of peers in their school using the *N-word* and of educational personnel engaging in differential treatment. However, not all of their challenges with anti-Black racism were overt. Many times, participants faced subtle forms of racism which made it difficult for them to report the incidents to their schools. Furthermore, in addition to anti-Black racism, participants' experiences diverged based on their class background and immigration status. This sub-section begins with participants' experiences of anti-Black racism, followed by the complexities of subtle racism which include microaggressions. The sub-section ends with how participants' experiences diverged based on their SES and immigration status.

In terms of experiencing anti-Black racism, Kowther, who is Sudanese and identifies as Black, described an incident where her Sudanese male peer questioned a White male



student who was voicing Islamophobic rhetoric at school. Following this, the student who was engaging in Islamophobia approached the school police officer and lied to him by stating that Kowther's peer had a knife on him. Instead of the police officer or school officials reprimanding the boy who was engaging in Islamophobia, Kowther's peer was reprimanded even though he did not have a knife on him. However, because several people witnessed the event, Kowther's peer was released:

I feel like our Islamic community, our Sudanese community in general, because we backed him up; we were defensive because a lot of us watched it, they let him go even though he didn't do anything wrong. He shouldn't have been talked to the way he was. Because we pulled together, they just let off, then they actually chose not to punish him.

When asked if she thinks her peer's race or religion had anything to do with the way the police officer and school reacted, Kowther answered, "For sure, 100 percent. Our principal, I don't know what her problem is, but they get very intimidated and anxious." Kowther described how her peer was rudely spoken to and highlighted how, if it were not for all the students who witnessed the situation coming together, her peer would have had to deal with severe consequences.

Police interactions with Black youth in schools are common. According to Na and Gottredson (2013), over the past twelve years, the presence of police officers has dramatically increased in Ontario schools and has negatively affected Black students in particular. The incident that Kowther described is similar to how Black students are subjected to increased disciplinary measures relative to other groups of students (see Dei, 2008; Hirschfield, 2008; James & Turner, 2017; Ruck & Wortley, 2002).

Media depictions of Black men as violent criminals entrenches the association of Blackness and criminality within our social consciousness.<sup>45</sup> Chaney and Robertson (2015) asserted the characterizations of violent criminals as Black individuals in the media has been “deeply etched in the psyche of viewers” (p. 52). They also explained that, “Unfortunately, Black as a metaphor for criminality is so deeply embedded in the minds of societal members that Whites have reported seeing an African American criminal suspect at the scene of a crime when none was actually present” (p. 52). Correspondingly, statistics and research into the judicial system have found that Black people are more likely to be found guilty of a crime, given longer sentences, and thought of as more likely to reoffend compared to White people (see Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Welch, 2007). Thus, Black people have historically been constructed as inherent criminals (Welch, 2007), and the media, justice system, and schools mutually reinforce such stereotypes. It is unsurprising, then, that Kowther’s peer, a Black Muslim young man, was automatically suspected of being the criminal and aggressor in the situation, when in actuality he was defending himself from Islamophobia. The findings of the current research reveal that Black Muslim students’ experiences are shaped by the compounding effects of the Western social imaginary of Blackness and the symbolic representations of Muslims.

Uncovering the complexities associated with the converged experiences of anti-Black racism, sexism, and gendered Islamophobia, Kowther shared another situation in her school concerning herself and two friends who are also Black Muslim girls that was reflective of the “angry Black girl” stereotype. According to Ashley (2014):

The “angry Black woman” mythology presumes all Black women to be irate, irrational, hostile, and negative despite the circumstances . . . Black women

---

<sup>45</sup> Such an association became increasingly common after the introduction of the 13th amendment in 1865 which abolished slavery; Black people in the U.S. were incarcerated on a mass scale. Many argue that this mass incarceration is a consequence of the government attempting to rationalize slavery based on criminality rather than race (Chaney & Robertson, 2015; Welch, 2007).

described as tart tongued, neck rolling, and loud mouthed are archetypes perpetuated in the media...The angry Black woman stereotype is pervasive and parasitic; it affects Black women's self-esteem and how they are viewed by others. (p. 28)

Here, Ashley (2014) described how such stereotypes, transmitted through the media, affect Black women's identity constructions of themselves and others. Such findings were also reflected in the literature where educators perceived Black girls as angry and loud and attempted to assimilate these students to adopt White middle-class femininity (see Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Morris, 2007).

Regarding the incident, Kowther explained how her friends were demonstrating typical high school behaviour and arguing with one another. While Kowther was de-escalating the situation by acting as a mediator, teachers became involved and made them feel as if they were angry outsiders:

The whole school came and chased us down; they said, "This is not welcome in this community blah blah blah" . . . they made it seem it was like an "us" thing. Like no one else gets mad except us . . . I was more of, like a mediator . . . they were very expressive. I was trying to calm them down, and it was working. She [her friends] just got a little bit upset, and literally all the teachers came: "You can't be doing that in this community; we don't welcome anger," and I was like, "You can't act like no one gets upset; as if no one has ever gotten upset."

As a consequence of how her teachers responded, Kowther was made to feel as if she and her friends were different from the rest of the school community. In her view, the teachers blew what was a mundane situation way out of proportion, revealing how racialization plays a role in the everyday lives of the participants. When asked if she thought the teachers' remarks had anything to do with race, Kowther commented:

I think it is a good mixture of race and religion. It's the fact we are kind of different and we stand out, and race has an influence with that and the same with our religion, like one of them was *hijabi*.<sup>46</sup> Like the one who raised her voice a little was a *hijabi*.

---

<sup>46</sup> One who wears the veil.

Moreover, Kowther shared another incident at her school, this time concerning her principal who said the *N-word*:

Our principal...has said the *N-word* a few times and it was very controversial. ... One of the girls was upset, like this other White girl wanted to start a fight. It was like the little stupid high school drama, and they went to the office. The White girl said the *N-word*, and the principal, I don't know if we should put the blame on her ... she kept saying the *N-word* herself, and she kept repeating it. She said it the first time, and the Sudanese girl asked her if she could not say it again out of respect. She kept repeating it in front of the girl's dad...That is a really offensive example because if you are going to get a student in trouble because they're saying the *N-word* how are you, yourself, going to say it in front of someone's father?...About 10 or 11 people went to go talk to her after that and said, "If you're going to set an example for the school you have to take back what you said and apologize for that because all these kids are looking at you...You're the principal of the school, so if you can say that word easily, what makes you think other kids are not going to say it?" She refused to apologize, and we ended up emailing the Board, and they didn't respond to us, but yeah, it was a really weird situation. It wasn't a good place.

As Kowther demonstrated, school board equity and diversity policies are especially ineffective when school boards ignore student reports of principal misconduct. In line with this, Collins (2002) explained how the structural domain of power upholds injustices via the way in which policies are put in place and implemented. It is evident that the school board in this case upheld injustice by silencing Kowther and her peers' concerns, revealing the necessity to hold school boards accountable. While Kowther described how her principal is usually very nice in most cases, she highlighted the importance of the principal taking responsibility for her mistakes. Coincidentally, Samar (Sudanese), a participant who goes to the same school as Kowther, witnessed the same event. Like Kowther, Samar also marked the importance of her principal taking responsibility for her actions, especially because, according to her, students using the *N-Word* in her school is prevalent:

That also turned into a huge deal 'cause you can respect us enough to skip over the word. She is an authority figure so she should know that it is not okay to say it. So, the fact she already did and she is a principal is like she has no respect for

us. ... There are probably like a thousand cases of using the *N-Word* at my school. Especially the White people thinking like, “Oh, it is just a word; we can say it...it’s not that deep.” It angers me a lot because it is, like, you obviously don’t know the root of the word; you don’t know the history of the word; you don’t know what goes into the word. They just think it is this meaning of like, “I’m calling you a buddy; I’m calling you a friend,” but it is like, no. There is a double meaning behind that word. Obviously, they don’t want to be educated enough to actually know what that meaning is, so they just use it for fun.

Both Kowther and Samar explained how such occurrences make them feel as if their school devalues them and highlighted how important it is for educational leaders to display diplomacy and sensitivity when dealing with such issues. Their experiences also uncovered how their challenges within their school are compounded based on their religion, race, and gender.

After searching multiple databases and journals and using a variety of search terms, I was unable to find research addressing the complexity of the converged experiences of anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, and sexism within the school context. The closest I came to finding something similar was by Alimahomed-Wilson (2020) who argued that the matrix of gendered Islamophobia “locates Islamophobia within shifting aspects of oppression that are simultaneously structured along the lines of gender, race, class, sexuality and citizenship” (p. 648). Within her study of Muslim women social justice activists in the U.K. and the U.S., some of her participants discussed how gendered Islamophobia and anti-Black racism converge within society. For example, one participant remarked how her hypervisibility of being veiled and Black increased the likelihood of experiencing violence in society. Relevant to this research is Codjoe’s (2001) work on the experiences of Black Canadian youth in schools. He found that peers would refer to their Black classmates using the *N-word*. Speaking of school peers using the racist expletive, Codjoe (2001) highlighted how racist experiences have a significant impact on the identity constructions of Black youth and pose significant challenges to whether they complete their education. Thus, the findings of this study contributed to research by revealing how Black Muslim girls’ experiences are compounded based on the intersection of their religious, racial, and gendered identities.

Considering such experiences, not all forms of anti-Black racism and gendered Islamophobia are as overt as the examples shared above. Shahd, Amina, and Samar, who all identify as Sudanese, Black, and African, reported experiencing subtle forms of racism by their teachers in school which is line with the literature on Black students' experiences in the education system (for example, Codjoe, 2001; Dei, 2008; Lopez, 2020; James & Turner, 2017). However, unlike the literature reviewed, they were unsure whether the mistreatment was a result of their religious affiliation or race, revealing how Black Muslim girls not only expect Islamophobia in their schools, but also anti-Black racism. For example, Shahd explained how her teacher would favour one of her classmates over her and a friend who is also Black and Muslim:

I came across a teacher who was kind of like disrespectful in [a] way—not by what he said but by his actions. I know I wear *hijab* and my other Muslim friend who wears *hijab*, we take the same class together, and we were asking for help. ... We have this other girl, like this Canadian White girl beside us, and anytime she would ask a question he would answer her. He would help her anytime she asked. And then we would come to ask him, and he would say, “She can help you.” He’s like, “She can help us,” but when we need his help...I don’t know if it is because we are Muslim or Black, he was very unkind towards us during that whole semester, and ever since then I have hated him.

Shahd shared another experience with her teacher which revealed how social structures, symbolic representations, and identity constructions converge:

I had a teacher, this female teacher, and she was kind of like a horrible person. It was very obvious<sup>47</sup> she hated Muslims. It was something I felt and knew because she made it very obvious there were things she would allow other kids to do that she wouldn’t let us do. We ended up going to the principal. My parents went, and they talked to them because she wasn’t treating me right, and I was very uncomfortable every day in that class as a Muslim girl, [and] as a *hijabi* girl as well. It was just a horrible experience; that whole year was just horrible. It was like her mission was to degrade me and hurt me.

---

<sup>47</sup> The teacher’s subtle differential racism was obvious to Shahd. It is important to note that although the racism was obvious, does not mean it was overt.

Amina recounted similar experiences of a teacher subtly treating her differently than her other classmates, which resulted in her feeling dread when entering her class. Likewise, Samar, who is Black, also shared how some of her teachers engaged in subtle acts of unfairness:

It just affects my schooling life. There are some teachers who—I don't know how to word this—all teachers have to be fair. You can kind of see. I don't know if it is in my head or not... it's basically, like, if I were to ask something, or I was to do something and a White person would, then it is, like, their tone would be different with me, and the way they answer would be different with me. I don't know if it is, like, 'cause I'm Black or it's 'cause I'm Muslim.... There's also those times where I shoot up my hand really fast, and the teacher would go to every other person but me and then would choose me after, and it's like is that a race thing? Or should I just leave it? Or should I speak up? I don't want to call anyone out if they're actually not doing anything wrong. The only thing I can do is stay quiet.

Samar underscored the intricacies associated with subtle instances of inequality that Amina and Shahd have also expressed. For example, as Samar implied, if she was to complain about her experiences, she would need the burden of proof to corroborate her claims, otherwise she might face the institutional repercussions associated with falsely accusing a teacher. Subtle racism is especially difficult to name as nonverbal communication is ambiguous. Addressing this ambiguity within inter-racial contexts, Dovidio et al. (2002) found that Black participants in their study viewed White participants who were highly implicitly prejudiced against Blacks to be less friendly compared to White participants who scored low on the implicit prejudice scale,<sup>48</sup> even though those who scored high on the implicit prejudice scale perceived themselves as friendly towards Black participants. Dovidio et al. (2002) reasoned that people who are implicitly prejudiced reveal their prejudice through uncontrollable behaviours, such as

---

<sup>48</sup> This is a scale used in psychological research to measure implicit prejudice. This is measured through a time-latency procedure. For example, in this particular study, participants were tested to see how quickly they associated “positive” terms and “negative” terms with Black and White faces. If negative terms were quickly associated with Black faces, and positive terms were quickly associated with White faces, then the participant would have a high implicit prejudice score given that they think of themselves as non-prejudicial.

their body language and other nonverbal behaviours. According to Gaertner and Dovidio (2005), “their actions can have effects sometimes even more detrimental than those of overt racists” (p. 626). It is important to then consider that non-verbal communication plays a significant role in interracial interactions. Thus, in the face of differential treatment, Samar chose to be silent about her experience because of the difficulties associated with reporting.

The participants’ remarks revealed how hegemonic discourses that uphold structural inequality inform interpersonal interactions between students and teachers. The disciplinary domain of power is clearly evident through the mistreatment participants experienced as they felt like outsiders which they believed to be a consequence of their racial and religious affiliation. The challenges associated with reporting and the lack of educational support these students received demonstrates how structural inequality is upheld. Aside from the challenges associated with reporting, many of the teachers who behaved unfairly appeared to be unaware of the consequences of their actions, which makes it difficult to eradicate various types of oppression within schools and other societal institutions.

The subtle experiences of racism, however, were not limited to Black participants; all the participants in general shared the experience of subtle inequity. For example, Hafsah, who was born in Jordan and immigrated to Canada as a youth, highlighted how her educators’ nonverbal communication fostered feelings of being devalued. She mentioned that her teachers sometimes, *Beye7ko bedoun nafs*.<sup>49</sup> I look at them and I want to say something back to them, but I hold myself. Yeah, they don’t care about students at all.” Likewise, Halima, a Canadian-born student of Pakistani origin, reported similar experiences in her school because of her educators’ nonverbal communication: “...so

---

<sup>49</sup> Transliteration for the Arabic phrase, “Speak without care or concern.”



there are a couple of people who ask questions; they are just like, ‘Oh, you are Muslim, right?’ I feel like they kind of judge you with your eyes too.” Similarly, Gulsan who is Kurdish and came to Canada as a refugee in elementary school, reported being keenly aware of how some teachers have low expectations of her based on their nonverbal behaviour: “When the teachers ask the students questions, they don’t give me the opportunity to ask questions or pick me to answer because they don’t believe that I have the answer, or I have the knowledge. Low expectations for sure.”

As Sabry and Bruna (2007) noted, “Deeply held prejudices about the Muslim world as inherently villainous...may, albeit unconsciously, limit the amount of time, attention, and feedback teachers give to their Muslim students and promote disequilibrium in terms of students’ self-esteem” (p. 45).

While acts of subtle gendered Islamophobia are difficult to detect, they are noticeable to students. As Gulsan’s comment above demonstrates, she feels as if her teachers have low expectations of her. Other participants noted how such subtle acts of racism caused them to disengage from their classes and resulted in increased anxiety when completing assignments, afraid that their teacher would grade them unfairly.

Subtle acts of racism, which are often referred to as microaggressions (see Minikel-Lacocque, 2013), have serious consequences for students. For example, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968)<sup>50</sup> found that teacher expectations of students had a significant effect on their overall performance. As such, two important implications stem from Rosenthal and Jacobson’s (1968) research that relate to this study: (1) educators’ expectations of their students significantly impact the way they treat their students, and (2) educators’

---

<sup>50</sup> While dated, this is considered one of the most important studies on how expectations shape consciousness and how this materializes into differential treatment.

expectations of students can result in self-fulfilling prophecies.<sup>51</sup> While the participants cannot state for certain the negative outcomes associated with subtle racism, studies like Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) revealed common negative outcomes that are linked with low-teacher expectations.

In line with this, Rezai-Rashti's (1994) and Zine's (2000, 2001) work on the streaming of Muslim girls is relevant here, as it speaks to the subtle ways in which gendered Islamophobia persists in schools. Specifically, they found that some guidance counselors stream Muslim girls into non-academic or college-level classes and attributed such streaming practices to gendered biases they have of Muslim families not valuing their daughters' education. Zine (2001) argued that such streaming practices are a consequence of the hidden curriculum, which she explained is a "...tacit mode of relaying the implicit assumptions of teachers and other school agents that silently structures social discourse and educational praxis. The hidden curriculum serves to reproduce status quo relations of power and authority ..." (p. 409). While this study's findings confirmed that some educators' academically streamed Muslim girls, the findings also contribute to the literature by revealing that the academic streaming experienced by Muslim girls may be influenced by another factor. This study found that participants who came from lower SES backgrounds and who were immigrants or refugees were more likely to be streamed. These findings revealed how socio-economic differences and immigration status shape the experiences Muslim girls have in school.

For example, Leila—who came to Canada as an immigrant—shared her experience when entering high school:

When we [she and her sister] first came to school, they told me I am not going to get used to the system, so they made me repeat a couple of courses, and they were

---

<sup>51</sup> Students may act in a way that is congruent to how they are expected to act. Low teacher expectations can result in students doing poorly than their actual ability (Gentrup et al., 2020).

super easy, and they assumed because I came from an Arab country that I don't know what's going on with the course. So, in the middle of the course, I asked them why I had to do this because it is super easy, and they said, "Oh, no, you didn't have to do that"...but in the beginning they said, "You have to do this; it is good for you"...it delayed me a year.

Leila's experience uncovered how immigration status may cause structural challenges for immigrant youth. To provide some background information, Leila—who was born in Saudi Arabia—is Soumia's older sister. Leila and her parents eventually moved to Canada, where Soumia was born. A couple of years after Soumia's birth, their family moved back to Saudi Arabia, and the siblings attended an English private school until they eventually moved back to Canada. Although Leila had more experience with speaking and learning English than Soumia, Leila was required to take English as a Second Language (ESL) classes while Soumia was not, solely based on their place of birth:

**Soumia:** Oh no, they didn't put me in ESL because I was born here.

**SH:** So, that is the only reason why they put you [referring to Leila] in ESL, even though your English is almost identical [to Soumia's] and you technically have more experience in Canada than she does?

**Leila:** Right.

**SH:** And you were probably taught English in Saudi, right?

**Leila:** Yeah, the whole time...Our schools are way harder [compared to school in Canada]. We take lessons like one year after here, so grade 9 we take grade 10 stuff, and grade 10 we take grade 11 stuff.

It is also important to note that Leila and Soumia come from a low-income household.

Thus, aside from the common experiences Muslim girls face with gendered Islamophobia, it appears as though immigration status and income level may affect the likelihood of students experiencing academic streaming.

Furthermore, Gulsan shared a similar example of how differences among Muslim girls may affect the likelihood of streaming practices. Gulsan demonstrated how her experiences with gendered Islamophobia are interwoven with SES and immigration

status. She felt as if common stereotypes of Muslim refugee girls resulted in her guidance counselors having low expectations of her which resulted in them suggesting she take college-level courses:

I do have guidance counselors in my school that will tell me what the options are, but I just feel like because I wasn't born here, and I look a bit different, they don't think I'm capable of doing university. So, they sometimes introduce college options to me and not university, but my goal is to go to university and become a teacher. So, I was never introduced to options to go to university, and I was not introduced to taking academic courses so far in high school that would prepare me for university.

Gulsan delved deeper into her complex situation by sharing her struggles living in a low-income household with many siblings and with parents who have limited knowledge of the education system in Canada:

Sometimes I do find it difficult, to be honest, and I just wish that my parents were employed and had enough income, so I don't have to work. But I feel like I have no choice, and I have to work. ...It impacts me because I have to stay up and complete my homework, and sometimes when I go to school in the morning, it does make me feel tired because I worked long hours the day before...I think it will [be difficult to go to university] because a lot of parents support their children to go to university, and I feel like I don't have that support from my parents. My parents are really nice, and they did everything for us to bring us here from back home, but I just feel like, here in Canada, because they didn't go to school here, and they didn't have an opportunity to build a career, that kind of impacted them...They had trauma and [that] made them feel depressed, so when they came to Canada, they didn't have no motivation to start a career or anything, and they also didn't have any guidance or anyone to help them...Not being financially supported fully adds challenges, or even signing up for extra-curricular activities outside of school, so like maybe signing up for a soccer team...No one really motivates me to go to university and talks to me about the different options.

In addition to Gulsan facing barriers associated with entering university, her challenges are further compounded based on the systemic barriers associated with her SES and immigration status. For example, Gulsan's need to be employed prevents her from fully focusing on school, which added barriers to reaching her full academic potential. Her parents' inexperience with the educational system has also prevented them from providing constructive educational guidance to help Gulsan and her siblings navigate the school system. Finally, the unresolved trauma her parents experienced as refugees

continues to affect Gulsan and her siblings. She also made note of how she is unable to participate in some extra-curricular activities that would provide her with increased social capital—such as stronger interpersonal skills—due to her family’s financial struggles. Thus, aside from being affected by gendered Islamophobia, Leila, Soumia, and Gulsan’s experiences are compounded by their financial background and immigration status.

This section addressed participants’ experiences with overt and subtle forms of gendered Islamophobia within their schools. Their accounts revealed how their schooling experiences were significantly impacted by the rampant gendered Islamophobia which exists in the larger Canadian society. If it were not for the pervasive tropes embedded within our social consciousness, participants would most likely not have to contend with such experiences with their peers and educators. However, while participants shared common experiences with gendered Islamophobia, their experiences diverged and were compounded based on other aspects of their identity, including their race, SES, and immigration status. While the participants experienced challenges that are rooted in structural inequalities, they are not passive victims. Rather, the participants developed coping strategies in order to effectively navigate their schooling experiences. As will be demonstrated in the following section, some of the participants’ coping strategies worked towards dismantling structural inequalities.

### **Coping Strategies**

As a response to dealing with the challenges of Islamophobia and other forms of oppression in their schools and the larger society, some of the participants developed coping strategies to help them persevere and succeed academically. Such coping strategies took on the form of *being themselves*, *sticking to their own kind*, increasing their religiosity, *not giving up*, and strategically adjusting their behaviour. However, while the participants in this study overall identified with their Islamic identity, it is important to note that minority youth, including Muslim students, can experience identity loss because of the societal push to *fit in* (Phinney et al., 1997; Rezai-Rashti, 2005).

Nonetheless, the participants in this study demonstrated the multiple ways they developed their identities in light of the Islamophobia they experienced.

According to Collins (2002), while the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power are mutually constitutive, the structural and disciplinary domains of power are more resistant to change relative to the interpersonal and hegemonic domains of power. For example, interpersonal interactions that contribute to the maintenance of oppression (interpersonal domain of power) in society can be resisted more easily than structural inequalities in society (structural domain of power). This can be done by individuals refusing to internalize the stereotypes of their race (hegemonic domain of power). By extension, participants were eager to *be themselves* as they were keenly aware of how their subordination is upheld via pressures of conformity. As Collins (2002) asserted, individuals can develop counternarratives to discourses that subordinate them in order to resist the interpersonal domain of power which is fundamentally linked with the hegemonic domain. Specifically, for the hegemonic domain of power to be effective, the subjugated must internalize Western dominant ideologies and cultural norms. Empowerment, which challenges both domains of power, includes critical consciousness, where the subjugated questions and is critical of what is being taught and disseminated in society and also constructs new knowledge (Collins, 2002). Below, participants demonstrated empowerment by constructing their own views of themselves and by not allowing the negative views of others to affect them which helped them cope, move forward—and perhaps unknowingly—work towards resisting oppression.

For example, almost all of the participants developed a common understanding of the importance of being themselves to avoid being negatively affected by others. As Alia noted, “Be yourself. ...It’s over said, but be yourself.” Indeed, this statement can sound cliché; however, for the participants, being themselves is an act of resistance in a society that is constantly encouraging them to be something they are not. Coupled with marking the criticality of being themselves, they also highlighted the importance of not concerning

themselves with how others perceive them. Yasmeen reflected what the majority of the participants stated:

I mean, be yourself; don't be afraid what others think of you. ...I didn't really care what others thought because...with all these expectations, I'm going to try my best but not really let what other people think of me get to me. Also, thinking positively, having the right mind set is so important...If you keep thinking about yourself negatively, and calling yourself ugly, or other negative things, you're obviously going to be in a low state of mind, so trying to be more positive, like loving yourself more.

Additionally, other participants were keenly aware of the negative educational repercussions associated with internalizing others' thoughts. For example, Samar stated:

Even though there are stereotypes you get in school, do not let it affect your education at all because at the end of the day, your education is the only thing that matters. So, if you're not going to do it for yourself, at least do it for the people around you.

Some of the participants realized this after contending with the negative effects associated with *fitting in*. As Halima noted, her grades fell as a result of trying to fit in with her peers. She came to recognize the importance for one to "Follow their own path, and not to follow what everyone else is doing." Likewise, Kowther reflected on one of the struggles associated with assimilation by stating:

Sometimes you may say, "Why can't I be like everyone else?" But, honestly, at the end of the day, it's going to have a big influence on the person you are going to become. You're going to be so proud. Like going through that struggle—going through the daily little things of being different—by the end, you are going to see how much a difference it will make in your character and yourself, your growth, your identity.

However, differences were evident in the participants' accounts based on language proficiency. For Bahira,<sup>52</sup> who is a Syrian refugee who came to Canada in 2015, *fitting in* is important. Her statement revealed how proficiency in English and citizenship status converge with gendered Islamophobia. She stated, "Just try to fit in. If you are nice, they

---

<sup>52</sup> Bahira has spent the least amount of time in Canada compared to any of the other participants.

will always be nice to you.” The majority of the participants in this study are fluent in English and lived in Canada for a relatively longer time than Bahira. They did not share the same burden she did, revealing the interwoven vulnerabilities Bahira experienced as a refugee, a Muslim, and a girl.

Aside from her struggles with English, Bahira also felt she lacked the motivation to do well in her classes, which she attributed to moving around from school to school as a consequence of having to flee war in Syria:

When I was in Syria, I was really one of the best students, and I always cry when I remember that when I came here. I don't have motivation anymore to do my work and get it done maybe because I went to many different schools. Maybe that has affected me, which I am really sad about. I don't know how to get it back.

Bahira's story demonstrated the challenges associated with settling in a new country and learning a new system and language. Bahira's main concern seems to be unrelated with how her religious identity and gender is perceived in school and instead is related to her basic needs. Thus, while the majority of the participants marked the importance of *being themselves*, this coping strategy was not relevant to all the participants based on their social circumstances.

Drawing on anti-racist feminism, Collins (2002) made note of the concept of *safe spaces*, which are “social spaces where Black women speak freely” (p. 200). These spaces offer disenfranchised groups the ability to self-define rather than accept the “objectification of the other” and can consist of friendships as well as formal organizations like Muslim Student Associations (MSAs). Safe spaces cater to a wide variety of disenfranchised group and are important as they:

...provide opportunities for self-definition; and self-definition is the first step to empowerment: if a group is not defining itself, then it is being defined by and for the use of others. In order for an oppressed group to continue to exist as a viable social group, the members must have spaces where they can express themselves apart from the hegemonic or ruling ideology. (Collins, 2002, p. 5)



In line with this, participants in this study developed *safe spaces* and made friends with other Muslims as a coping strategy. This is a common theme in the literature where Muslim girls were more likely to develop friendships with other Muslims (see Aslam, 2011; Mir, 2006; Stafiej, 2009; Zine, 2001). Soumia explained one of the benefits associated with having a friend group comprised of other Muslim girls: “You don’t have to change who you are to fit in. You can be yourself and still fit in.” Other participants noted how this coping strategy helped them to see the *bigger picture*, and increased their positivity and motivation. Furthermore, two of the participants developed MSAs in their schools as a way to develop a place of comradery as well as to challenge Islamophobia and exclusion within their schools. Zine (2001) extensively discussed how participants developed Islamic subcultures, which included an MSA within their school, for the following reasons:

to challenge Eurocentrism and racism in school policies, practices and curriculum; to allow for the accommodation of their religious lifestyle; to ensure the inclusion and positive representation of Islam in the school curriculum; and to empower group members through generating modes of social, spiritual and academic support. (p. 299)

However, Zine (2001) noted the challenges associated with such formalized spaces of resistance given the fact that Islam is not monolithic and there were differences with the way her participants conceived Islam. Nonetheless, her participants focused on their common interests and beliefs in order to ensure the productivity of their organization.

Additionally, for many of the participants in my study, becoming closer to their faith helped them cope with the day-to-day challenges associated with being a teenaged girl in addition to the systematic injustices they face, which is a common finding in the literature (see Cristillo, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2007; Zine, 2001, 2008a). As Zine (2008a) wrote, “Clearly, religion provided these young people with a path to personal and spiritual fulfilment” (p. 146). For example, Yasmeen explained how increasing her religiosity helped her overcome her hardships with her school and family. In line with this, Delic (2014) explained that over the past 20 years:

... many Diaspora Muslims have rediscovered a new solidarity with their community, invoking religion as a basis of identification and utilizing faith-based language to address social problems. Arising as it did from the feeling of being negatively stereotyped in various walks of life, this was for Muslims in Western Europe and North America the beginning of a newly constructed religious identity—a new self. (p. 27)

Thus, for some of the participants, increased religiosity helped them contend with the mutually reinforcing effects of their gender, religion, and other aspects of their identity that are often questioned within their schools as well as the larger society. As Yasmeen highlighted, religion reminded her of her greater purpose in life and provided her with comfort.

In relation to this, another coping strategy the participants adopted was the persistence to *not give up*. As Faduma asserted, “Don’t give up. It doesn’t matter if your teachers aren’t encouraging you; your education is very important.” Also, Gulsan suggested:

Another thing too is not to feel discouraged because sometimes people might have different ideas of us that [are] not realistic with how we view ourselves, so it is important that we don’t fall for how others view us because if we do, we will not reach our goals and it will bring us down.

It is clear that for some of the participants, others’ low expectations of them compounded their mundane challenges in life. Participants highlighted how not internalizing such views is a mode of resistance that defies the hegemonic domain of power. However, other participants coped by expecting to be treated unfairly by their teachers and adopted preventative measures as a response. These preventative measures took the form of participants gaining the favour of their teachers by standing out as respectful, polite, and hardworking. For example, Faduma revealed that she holds power over how she is perceived by ensuring that her teachers know she is studious and diligent. She recognized that some teachers will still have biases but are more likely to help if they know students are serious about their studies.

Overall, participants engaged in a number of coping strategies in order to deal with the many challenges they faced in schools. Specifically, some of the participants emphasized the importance of being themselves, created safe spaces with other Muslim girls, increased their religiosity, evaded *giving up*, and engaged in preventative measures by gaining the favour of their teachers. Through these coping strategies, participants were able to resist the effects associated with assimilation by engaging in self-definition as a counternarrative and by creating safe spaces where they felt valued. However, it is important to acknowledge that, at times, the participants' ability to develop safe spaces, such as forming MSAs, was partially cultivated through their school's willingness to accommodate them. While this was the case in some circumstances, the manner in which school accommodations were applied for some of the participants were paradoxical to the main goals that underlie the purposes of accommodation. Thus, the following section delves into participants' experiences with school accommodation.

### **Experiences With Accommodation**

While some of the participants were content with their school accommodations, others noted how they did not participate in religious holidays and practices in fear of their teachers negatively judging them. As such, this section delves into participants' experiences with accommodation in their schools. To contextualize the findings, the Ontario Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119 (PPM; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b), which requires school boards to implement equity policies and religious accommodations, will be discussed. A discussion of the PPM No. 119 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b) is important as it mandates school boards to develop strategies to accommodate for students' religious needs. Following this, the participants' experiences with their school accommodations against the backdrop of their geographical location as well as their local school board policies and guidelines will be considered.

In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education required that school boards across Ontario develop equity policies to ensure that students feel *included* and *represented* within their

schools. A part of the Ministry's requirements included school boards developing and implementing guidelines for religious accommodation. While the main objective of the Ministry of Education is to ensure that students are not subjected to discrimination, some argue that the Ministry's approach is problematic and inhibits equity and inclusion. It is important that criticisms of the PPM No. 119 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b) are addressed given that they may partly reveal why a significant proportion of the participants experienced appalling challenges associated with their school accommodations.

Of those who problematize the PPM No. 119 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b) are Rezai-Rashti et al. (2017). Their main argument is that the PPM No. 119 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b) shifts understandings of equity from a democratic agenda to a neoliberal "strategy to boost student achievement and economic competitiveness" (p. 166). The authors supported their main argument by bringing attention to how the PPM No. 119 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b) and its accompanying documents lack intersectional approaches that erase race and social class. While these are pertinent topics worthy of discussion, expanding on them would go beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, what is of great significance to the current discussion is how the PPM No. 119 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b) attempts to define and measure equity fulfillment (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017). In line with Rezai-Rashti et al. (2017), after I reviewed the PPM No. 119 and its accompanying documents, it is clear that the main goal of the Ministry is to achieve equity by closing achievement gaps and by generally improving academic achievement so that students can become "citizens who can contribute to both a strong economy and a cohesive society" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b, p. 2). Thus, accountability measures of whether schools are equitable, which are closely related to how students are accommodated within their schools, are solely based on grades with the direct purpose of ensuring a strong economy (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017).

While a focus on academic achievement is essential for equity fulfillment, it alone is an invalid measure of equity and inclusion fulfillment. For example, while some educators

academically stream Muslim girls<sup>53</sup> (see Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Zine, 2000, 2001), statistics reveal that Muslims in Canada have more university degrees than the average Canadian. Yet, the unemployment rate for Muslims is significantly higher (Hamdani, 2015<sup>54</sup>; Zine, 2012). Thus, although Muslims in general attain high academic achievement, they still experience unfair treatment and disconfirming messages about their identities from their peers and teachers while facing economic disparities.

Moreover, the PPM No. 119 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b) is vague in terms of how school boards and educators alike should apply accommodations, which leads to large discrepancies in how they make sense of and implement the policies. Equally important, the PPM No.119 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b) requires that students and parents request accommodations which shifts the responsibility for accommodation from the institution to the individual. As Rezai-Rashti et al. (2017) remarked:

We have also alluded to what appears to be emerging as a general trend in terms of policy governance, which is the devolution of responsibility from the institution to the individual. What this means is that individuals become responsible for matters that the state once dealt with, or put another way, individuals rather than institutions become targets and objects of policy texts. (p. 428)

Using similar logic as Rezai-Rahsti et al. (2017), Omercajic and Martino (2020) problematized the requirement for students and parents to request accommodation, “Ironically such a policy stipulation puts the students in the *driving seat* for ensuring their own accommodation with no specific accountability being required for the actual system

---

<sup>53</sup> This was also found in the current research; however, not for the participants as a whole. Instead, participants who came from low-income households and immigrated to Canada were more likely to experience academic streaming, further highlighting the importance of intersectionality to be effectively included within policy documents.

<sup>54</sup> Hamdani (2015) argued, “As with other immigrant populations in Canada, Muslims are on average younger and better educated than Canadian-born citizens. They also experience higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, even in comparison with other visible minority groups (e.g., Hindus, Sikhs)” (p. 13).

to take responsibility for trans inclusive interventions” (p. 6). Although their main focus was to generate critical insights into trans-affirmative policies in Ontario schools, Omercajic and Martino (2020) highlighted pertinent points regarding the problem of requesting accommodation, which can be applied to racialized youth as well as other historically marginalized students. While the negative ramifications associated with requesting accommodation differs based on the specific contextual factors of each marginalized community, the one aspect that remains constant is the underlying shift of responsibility for accommodation from the institution to the individual. Omercajic and Martino (2020) underscored the need for a more systemic education centering diversity rather than a reactive one that relies on marginalized youth to instigate accommodation. Applying such logic to religious accommodation guidelines and policy identifies a starting point for reimagining how they can be developed to ensure that marginalized youth feel accepted, welcomed, and included. Contrary to the intended purpose of the PPM No. 119 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b), the way some of the participants were accommodated further increased their vulnerability.

Regarding the participants’ experiences with religious accommodation requests, the emergent theme is that while most participants were satisfied with their school accommodations overall, they experienced challenges related to religious holidays and prayer which is recurrent within the literature (see Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Asmar et al., 2004; Azimi, 2011; Basford, 2008, Gunel, 2007; Hanson, 2009; McDermott-Levy, 2011; Stubs & Sallee, 2013). As this research includes participants from various geographical locations, I reviewed participants’ experiences with their school accommodations in relation to policies and guidelines pertaining to their regional religious accommodation and equity policies to observe whether there would be any major differences.

To begin the discussion of participants’ experiences with accommodation, the religious accommodation guidelines and policies of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), District School Board of Niagara (DSBN), and the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) stated that students are permitted to be absent from school for religious

holidays as long as accommodation requests are made (DSBN Religious Accommodation Guidelines, 2013; Procedure 2022a). The Niagara region (DSBN) guideline implies that it is the responsibility of parents and students to inform the school of religious holidays at the beginning of the school year. However, there is a stark distinction when compared with the religious accommodation policy in London (TVDSB), which is much more detailed and comprehensive. While it requests that parents and students inform the school of religious holidays, the TVDSB policy also promises that school leaders will take initiative to collaborate with various religious organizations within the community to identify significant holidays, promising to take these into consideration when planning board-wide and school-related events (TVDSB Procedure 2022a). Regarding the TDSB's (GTA) religious guidelines, there is no mention of who is to make the requests for accommodation for religious observances. Nonetheless, all religious accommodation policies and guidelines reviewed required that parents and/or students request days off for religious holidays, which is problematic for the reasons mentioned above. Similar to Omercajic and Martino's (2020) critical insights regarding the problems associated with requiring trans students to request accommodation, the participants in this study also revealed challenges associated with such a policy stipulation.

Specifically, the participants explained how some of their teachers inconsistently accommodated them. A consequence of this is that some of the participants would refrain from requesting accommodations. For instance, students in the Niagara region and London noted that it was up to their teachers' discretion to accommodate them even though there are policies and guidelines in place for students to be accommodated for their religious holidays. Such findings highlighted the lack of accountability measures of religious accommodation guidelines and elucidated that many students may be unaware that requests have to be made at the beginning of the school year. As such, it may be plausible that some teachers rationalized denying a student's request on the basis that their request was not made at the beginning of the school year. Correspondingly, Leila, a student in London, echoed many of the participants' experiences with accommodation requests regarding absences for religious holidays, explaining that "it depends on the

teacher; some say yes, and others say no.” However, for students in the Niagara region, some teachers were unclear with how they imagined religious accommodations and penalized students for missing class on *Eid*.<sup>55</sup> For example, Kowther described a situation where her teacher deducted grades for handing in her assignment after *Eid*, which coincided with her due date:

Throughout the whole school year, I was a good example. I would hand everything in on time...I had the highest mark in his class...There was something due on *Eid*. It was a culminating assignment, and like, obviously, I told him the day before that me and my Muslim friends are not going to be here tomorrow because we have *Eid* tomorrow...and he knew. The day of *Eid*, I was supposed to give it [the assignment] to him. He didn't say anything about, "give it to me the day before" or anything like that. Obviously, I assumed it would be okay that I can give it to him the day after when I came back. So, I came in the next day, and he is like, "You have 5 percent off," and I was like, "Yeah, yesterday I was not here. I let you know I was not going to be here, and you knew it was *Eid* holiday for us. Can you please, like, let it be because we don't usually take it off, and you know I don't usually hand things in late," and he insisted. He was like, "5 percent off; 5 percent off."

While this upset Kowther, she felt that complaining would further complicate the situation, ultimately deciding to remain silent. Other participants in London and the Niagara region also contended with having to choose between studying or celebrating their religious holidays. Basimah echoed the common challenges of the participants by stating, "I found it annoying, am I going to celebrate or am I going to study? I was really disappointed."

Furthermore, some students experienced difficulty practicing prayer during school. While students in all regions are given a room to pray and the opportunity to participate in Friday prayers,<sup>56</sup> students in London and the Niagara region had difficulties engaging in

---

<sup>55</sup> There are two religious holidays for Muslims which are both referred to as *Eid*. *Eid Al-Fitr* marks the end of *Ramadan* (a holy month which requires Muslims to fast from sunrise to sunset) and *Eid Al-Adha*, which takes place in the Islamic month of *Dhu al-Hijjah*.

<sup>56</sup> Congregation Friday prayers for Muslims.



this accommodation as, in some cases, there were no designated prayer rooms. It was only upon request that some students were given a room to pray. Another challenge related to accommodation was that participants felt that some teachers were displeased with them exiting class for prayer. For example, Khadija stated:

For the last two years, Muslims asked the principal if they could have a room. But I feel like our Principal...like I don't know.<sup>57</sup> Anyways they said, "Yeah," and they gave them a prayer room. Like there was a wall and an empty space in the back, so they were like "You guys can pray there," but I feel like you just can't leave class to pray. They [her teachers] will get mad and you will miss something.<sup>58</sup>

Existing literature has also detailed the challenges students have with religious accommodation in schools. For example, Guo (2011) found that while some parents were pleased with the religious accommodation their children received at school, others were not. Regarding the latter, a parent remarked how the principal refused to accommodate prayer<sup>59</sup> because he did not want the school transformed into a Mosque (Guo, 2011). Similar results were found by Zine (2001), where a principal refused to provide students with a prayer room, reasoning that schools are a place for education, not religion. While the principal initially declined, he eventually provided students with a prayer room after students threatened to approach the Board. It is possible, then, that some educators resort to their perception of how religion should be incorporated in a school rather than feel obligated to adhere to school board policies as there is a lack of accountability measures. As noted, as soon as the principal felt that he would be held accountable, he quickly

---

<sup>57</sup> Khadija demonstrated an uneasiness towards her principal through her speech and body language during the interview.

<sup>58</sup> Khadija is referring to missing course material.

<sup>59</sup> Muslims are required to pray five times a day based on the sun's positioning. Thus, during the winter, Muslim students may need to pray at school as there are certain times allotted for prayers. Friday afternoon prayers are congregational prayers for Muslims and are typically preceded by a sermon similar to Sunday sermons for Christians.

provided students with their right to accommodation. Indeed, the request to accommodate is problematic for the reasons mentioned above.

As Zine (2001) mentioned, some students are aware of their rights and the appropriate language they must use in order to secure accommodation. Others, however, are not. Both instances speak to how requesting accommodation is problematic. While those who are willing to voice their demands for accommodation may succeed, they must go out of their way, and perhaps face possible risks for challenging authority. Other students may be unequipped with the social capital needed to challenge their superiors if they decline accommodation as schools are not properly held accountable for accommodation unless they feel threatened.

Unlike participants' experiences in London and the Niagara region, none of the participants who resided in the GTA recalled challenges associated with religious accommodations; in fact, quite the opposite was true. For example, Janeen explained that she not only receives an automatic day off for *Eid* without requesting it, but her teachers also "...don't do anything important that day." She explained, "For *Eid*, or anything like that, they know when it is. If you have any assignments due, they take that into consideration and they give us a day off." Thus, Janeen enjoyed being absent from school for her religious observances given that she was not concerned with missing crucial course material, which was not the case for the participants in the Niagara region and London. Likewise, Halima and Sabah, students in the GTA, explained how their teachers were very understanding and lenient with them during *Ramadan*.<sup>60</sup> Although the religious accommodation guideline requires students and their parents to request absences for religious holidays, the participants from the GTA did not have to make such requests given that their teachers were already aware of their religious observances. Also, as mentioned, to ensure that students avoid expending extra time and energy studying

---

<sup>60</sup> *Ramadan* is considered a holy month in the Islamic calendar. Muslims are required to fast during the month of *Ramadan* from sunrise to sunset.

course material that they missed because of their holiday, the teachers circumvented covering important material on those days. This is in stark contrast to some of the students in London and the Niagara region, where even if they requested accommodation, sometimes teachers would refuse to fulfil their request. Similar to how the participants in the GTA were accommodated, Lindkvist (2008) explained how school liaisons located in a region with a high proportion of Muslims would send reminder e-mails to school administrators informing them about Islamic holidays instead of requiring parents to request their children's absences from school. Thus, aside from religious accommodation policies and guidelines having an influence on how students are accommodated, it is also possible that the participants' geographical location influenced how students are accommodated. Namely, the more Muslims in a given region may increase Muslim students' positive experiences with accommodation.

While estimates of the latest demographics pertaining to religion are inaccurate given that they were compiled 10 years ago (from the date of this study), they still provide us with some context to better understand whether participants in areas with a high population of Muslims experienced accommodation differently. In 2011, the population of Muslims in London, Ontario was approximately 16,000 (Statistics Canada, 2011). In the Niagara region, there were approximately 4,200 Muslims. In Toronto, there were close to 425,000 Muslims, which was nearly the entire population of London (Statistics Canada, 2011). Thus, school boards located in diverse regions may be under increased pressure to learn how to better serve their demographic of students. The findings in this study support this argument as participants residing in the demographic with the least number of Muslims (Niagara region) experienced the most challenges with accommodation relative to the region that had a moderate number of Muslims (London). In stark contrast, the participants who reside in the region with a substantial number of Muslims (GTA) expressed no challenges with their accommodations. However, future research needs to further address this as this relationship is indefinite and requires more context. Furthermore, as Rezai-Rashti et al. (2017) highlighted, other geographical demographics,

such as SES, should also be considered when attempting to understand the differences between how marginalized students are accommodated.

Nonetheless, what is apparent is that when religious accommodations are effective,<sup>61</sup> there is public outcry as accommodating religious minorities is perceived as an encroachment on Christian values (Goldstein, 2000; Lindkvist, 2008; Mahmud, 2012). This is especially relevant as the religious accommodation guideline for Toronto served as a defense, explaining why they were accommodating Muslim students for prayer. For example, a significant proportion of the document was dedicated to defending their decision to allow Friday prayers in some schools. While the participants in this study made no mention of the contention associated with accommodating Muslims, Mahmud's (2012) research addressed this concern specifically as it pertained to Muslim students in the GTA. She explored the attitudes of various educational stakeholders, primarily that of students who attended a GTA school which held Friday congregational prayers. The school's decision to permit Friday prayers on school property was an ongoing topic of contentious debate, resulting in wide-spread media coverage. According to Mahmud (2012):

...a matter of great concern is the fact that much of the news media coverage contained false or misleading information about the prayers, and/or printed (false) statements made by some of the prayers' detractors without any verification or clarification of the accuracy of this information. (p. 136)

Some of these myths included how such school accommodations oppress Muslim girls. Thus, some media reports adopted colonial tropes when reporting; however, the young women participants in Mahmud's (2012) study were happy with the accommodations and "...took exception to the fact that they were spoken for and were perceived as oppressed and discriminated against" (p. 135). Nevertheless, Mahmud's (2012) research revealed

---

<sup>61</sup> Although participants in the GTA were happy with their accommodations, the policy text is not ideal given the requirement to request for accommodation.

that when religious minorities are accommodated, it is at the expense of the public's opinion who are fearful that Christian values will dissipate if other religions are accommodated. Lindkvist (2008) yielded similar results in his study of Somali youth in the U.S. Even though a principal of a school in Maine refused to provide his Muslim students with a room for prayer, rumors spread that he did. Consequently, there was opposition garnered against the school as it was thought that they granted Muslims with "special rights." Based on the literature, it is important to also consider that while the PPM No.119 implied that students of minority faith traditions should not be discriminated against, the school system is rooted in Christian values despite its secular façade and automatically discriminates against other minority religions. For instance, Christian students of majority sects do not have to request absences from school for their religious holidays<sup>62</sup> nor do they have to request for prayer services<sup>63</sup> as schools are closed on these days. However, when Muslims request to be accommodated, not only are some of their requests denied, but also when they are fulfilled, at times, they have to contend with smear campaigns. Therefore, one challenge school boards and schools alike may have to navigate when accommodating Muslim students is the negative ramifications caused by the fear associated with Christians losing their privileges.

Similarly, Goldstein (2000) shared her experience of the backlash she had to contend with when she suggested that Hanukkah decorations be included during the holiday season. Specifically, Goldstein (2000) suggested that "Christmas door decorations" be referred to as "Holiday door decorations." Her colleagues perceived her suggestion as an attack on Christmas and correspondingly engaged in passive aggressive exclusion by giving her the "silent treatment." She defended herself by highlighting that it was not her intention to steal Christmas nor halt Christmas decorations; rather, her aim was to

---

<sup>62</sup> These days are statutory holidays.

<sup>63</sup> Prayer services for Christians of majority sects take place on Sunday.

develop a more inclusive school environment which is important as students from minority religions may feel devalued and excluded.

Likewise, Sabry and Bruna (2007) reflected on the issue of how Christmas was imposed on religious minority students. For instance, one of the authors described how her daughter's teacher requested she bring a Christmas stocking to class. The author explained to her daughter that, as Muslims, they do not celebrate Christmas and, thus, did not provide her with a stocking. The next day, her daughter came home crying, blaming her mother for being the reason why her teacher did not give her candy as she did not participate in the Christian tradition. Similarly, some of the participants in the Niagara region discussed how their schools would decorate for Christmas and other occasions; however, Islamic holidays were not represented in the school, making them feel isolated. As Gulsan, a student in the Niagara region, described:

There's different celebrations and events in my high school for Halloween and Christmas; they hype them up and celebrate them, but when it is *Eid*, it is not talked about, so that makes me feel excluded.

Thus, apart from facing challenges with religious accommodations, participants also did not feel as if they were properly represented within their schools as other holidays were celebrated and their holidays were not.

When attempting to understand how Muslim students experience accommodation, it is also important to understand the pressure some boards and schools are under to not only properly accommodate their students, but also maintain the satisfaction of the school community at large. As is the case with how Muslim students were accommodated in Toronto, Mahmud (2012) highlighted how the vice-principal fiercely defended his decision to accommodate Muslim students, rooting his convictions in the foundations and logic of democracy despite dealing with much negative commentary. Negative comments cause some educational leaders to fold under pressure, which is evident in Lindkvist's (2008) study.

As is the case with the vice-principal in Mahmud's (2012) study, the participants shared several instances where educational stakeholders made a significant difference in their lives. Some described the educators who created a positive learning environment for them using adjectives such as "caring," "sweet," and "understanding." For example, Khadija remembered how one of her favourite math teachers cared about her and would ask if she was okay during times she was feeling down:

Yeah, because he was welcoming. Not dry. And he like tries to encourage you, and some days I feel off, and then he would notice that, and he would ask me more questions that day so then, I don't know. But now I am like, "okay, thank you" because now I know more, and I'm not scared to say the answer. Like, I used to freak out when I didn't know the answer.

She also mentioned how her teacher tried his best to motivate her and the rest of her classmates and provided her with constructive and detailed feedback. Even though she had difficulties understanding mathematical concepts in her previous class with another teacher, she began to enjoy math after having him as a teacher, revealing the crucial role teachers play in the lives of students. Furthermore, participants appreciated when their teachers and administrators demonstrated a genuine interest in learning about their beliefs and culture. For example, Amina, a student in London, explained how her teacher arranged for students to create a video aimed at helping newcomers feel more welcomed in the school and to shatter rampant stereotypes within the school body. Furthermore, Yasmine, a student in London, shared how her guidance counsellor helped her when she was experiencing distress. Although the guidance counsellor was not Muslim, she encouraged Yasmine to be steadfast with her prayers to increase her well-being, given that the guidance counsellor was aware of the centrality of prayer for Yasmine. Moreover, Yasmine recalled a time when the lunch ladies at her school were excited that they would begin serving *halal* food options in the school. Alia, a student in the Niagara region, also explained how she was granted permission to create an MSA at her school upon request. Likewise, Faduma shared her vice principal's continued effort to

implement accommodations for Muslims upon her requests and often consulted with her to ensure that she and her classmates felt accommodated.<sup>64</sup>

*Alhamdulillah* we are given somewhere to pray every single day, and we have an MSA. We have events centered around the Muslim community and the vice principal takes their time to learn about it and talk to me and other members of the MSA about what we need.

Furthermore, she stated, “When people want change, my school is willing to give change. For example, in the beginning of the year, I was very demanding regarding [the fact that] we need[ed] a prayer room.” Faduma highlighted that her school’s willingness to accommodate her made her feel welcomed. Thus, policymakers and educators would benefit greatly from learning about instances of satisfaction with accommodation from Muslim students to help inform future policies and practices.

The literature pertaining to how schools accommodated Muslim students is scant, and primarily addresses Muslim students’ experiences within the post-secondary level of education. However, among the literature that considered Muslim secondary students’ experiences with accommodation, the findings are varied. While most of the studies found that Muslim students experienced challenges with accommodations (see Guo, 2011; Lindkvist, 2008; Sabry & Bruna, 2007; Shah, 2012; Zine, 2001), others did not (Sarroub, 2001; Niyozov & Pluim, 2009). The findings of this research address these contradictions within the literature, as I will discuss below.

In addition to Sarroub (2001) reporting that teachers go above and beyond when accommodating their female Muslim participants, Niyozov and Pluim (2009) asserted that there is a “reverse stereotyping of public schools and teachers [are depicted] as biased or incapable in dealing with Muslim students” (p. 642). To that end, their main argument is that there is an “overemphasis on the negative, one-sided, and often

---

<sup>64</sup> While this is problematic as the student becomes responsible to ensure accommodation within the school, Faduma did not see a problem with this and appreciated her vice-principal’s demeanor.



decontextualized portrayals of teachers' work in public schools" (p. 642). Specifically, Niyozov and Pluim (2009) criticized most researchers for decontextualizing the experiences of Muslim youth by ignoring the challenges that occur within Islamic communities and homes and for excluding teachers from their research. The researchers partly attributed such negative representations of teachers to the subjectivities of faith-centered or anti-racist researchers who engage in "selective appropriation of data...to support the researcher's bias or ideological stance (see promotion of anti-racism or Islamic schools)" (p. 667). They further contended that "...many Western critical leftist scholars have found friends in conservative and radical Islamists" (p. 666). Moreover, while they admitted that there is racism within the school system, Niyozov and Pluim (2009), at the same time, dismissed students and parents' negative accounts of teachers and schools by labelling them as paranoid. They argued that "Muslim students, their parents, and their communities should see themselves as part of the problem as well as the solution, rather than as victims of conspiracies and external forces" (p. 668). To this end, Niyozov and Pluim (2009) used multiple examples of how 'most' research marginalized teachers' voices by stereotyping them as inadequate. After listing their reasons as to why teachers are marginalized by reverse 'stereotyping', they then listed studies that uncover how teachers are caring and inclusive towards Muslim students. They do this in attempt to support their argument that most teachers are, indeed, inclusive and caring. With this approach, they placed the two different themes within the literature—teachers being portrayed as not accommodating and teachers being portrayed as accommodating—against each other and mistakenly engaged in either-or-logic. Indeed, as outlined in this study, it is possible for the same student to simultaneously have caring, thoughtful teachers and insensitive bigoted teachers who do not accommodate them. Indeed, one must caution against either-or-logic. Students can simultaneously have both negative and positive experiences with their teachers. For example, a student may love their mathematics teacher because of her fair treatment but may feel uncomfortable with their English teacher partly because of insensitive comments she has made.

The aim of illustrating the experiences of Muslim youth with school accommodations is not to marginalize teachers. Rather, it is to highlight the oversights that have occurred so that educational professionals can avoid such behaviours in the future. In agreement with Niyozov and Pluim (2009), the author acknowledges there are increasing pressures on teachers; however, this should not excuse any type of acts of marginalization towards students. Indeed, Niyozov and Pluim (2009) were correct that there should be an increased focus on the good work teachers do within their classrooms, as this author contends highlighting the positive work of teachers may assist in building awareness of effective teaching pedagogy. However, it should not be assumed that the lack of teachers' voices in the literature is purposely adopted by researchers. Ironically, Niyozov and Pluim (2009) argued that research access to explore teacher's voices is limited as a result of the challenges with attaining ethics approval from school boards; however, they failed to attribute this to the lack of teachers' voices in the literature and instead ardently blamed most researchers in the field for purposively silencing teachers. All in all, the gap in the literature concerning how Muslim students are accommodated within schools can be explained through recognizing that students can simultaneously experience both positive and negative experiences with educators and this can relate to the participants' context, namely, as noted in this study, their geographical location may play a significant role.

The findings in this section contribute to the literature in several ways. Given that there are virtually no studies which explore how Muslim students are accommodated within London and the Niagara region, my findings broaden our understanding of Muslim students within Ontario. Likewise, I have not found any research that compares how Muslim students are accommodated based on differences in their geographical locations. While more comprehensive work is needed to fully address these differences, these findings serve as a starting point to consider the role of how policy and geographical location influence the lived experiences of Muslim youth within schools. These findings also highlighted the problem with policies requiring students and their parents to request accommodation as boards engage in a devolution of responsibility by placing the burden

of accommodation on individuals. Furthermore, this research addressed a controversy in the literature pertaining to how teachers accommodate Muslim students by marking the importance for researchers to draw upon intersectionality theory as variations with how Muslim students experience their school accommodations are influenced by their converged and multifaceted identities and geographical locations.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter analyzed participants' experiences with Islamophobia in schools, with a particular focus on how they have experienced gendered Islamophobia. The participants' multiple locations and identities were fleshed out, revealing that their experiences of Islamophobia were further imbricated based on their race, SES, and immigration status. While the participants contended with gendered Islamophobia and other forms of oppression within their school and larger society, they demonstrated resolve through developing coping strategies that helped them challenge structural inequalities.

Furthermore, participants' experiences with accommodation within their schools were discussed in light of religious accommodation policies and recommendations as well as their geographical location. The findings of this study implied that the underlying policy that informs their school board's religious accommodation guidelines (PPM No. 119) may contribute to some of the participants' challenges with accommodation.

Furthermore, the findings suggested that regional demographics may influence how participants experience religious accommodations. Overall, this chapter revealed how participants contended with having their educators and peers impose a fixed identity on them. The findings of this chapter contribute to the body of research regarding Muslim

girls' educational experiences by revealing how participants' intersectional differences significantly influence their educational experiences.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Policy recommendations based on the findings in this chapter will be reviewed in Chapter 6.

## Chapter 5

### Muslim Girls' Views on the Veil, Family & Community

#### Introduction

The previous chapter focused on participants' experiences with Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia more specifically. Some of the teachers and peers assumed that the participants' families oppress them, encourage them to marry early, and force them to wear the veil. In this chapter, participants' perceptions of the veil, their families, and their communities will be discussed, which are drastically different than the perceptions of their teachers and peers. Thus, the common thread woven throughout the themes in this chapter is the participants' perceptions of their personal lives,<sup>66</sup> which are commonly misunderstood by others in their schools and in the larger society due to the pervasiveness of gendered Islamophobia. As I adopt anti-racist feminism in approaching this research, participants' voices are centered. Their experiences collectively work towards legitimizing knowledge, which, as this chapter demonstrates, counteracts hegemonic discourses about Muslim women and girls (Collins, 2002) and contributes to existing research by disrupting and problematizing some educators' concerns that essentialize Muslim girls' families as being oppressive. As this chapter will demonstrate, participants challenged such presumptions by shutting down such rhetoric as their experiences reveal different realities. Moreover, while essentialized gendered depictions of Muslim women are prominent in racializing Muslims as a collective (Hoodfar, 2001; Jiwani, 2018; Rezai-Rashti, 2005b; Zine, 2006b), it is still pertinent to highlight how Muslim girls experience sexism within their homes and communities. This will encourage educational staff and policymakers to problematize pervasive essentialized assumptions as well as enable Islamic communities to better support Muslim girls. However, such a discussion does not come without challenges. As will be further

---

<sup>66</sup> Specifically, the veil, their families, and their communities.

elaborated on in this chapter, sexism in racialized communities is often depicted in the media as proof of a culture's inferiority, whereas sexism in the Western world is often framed as an individual issue rather than a cultural one (Katz, 2006). As discussed in Chapter 4, such perceptions are reminiscent of the colonial era; therefore, any discussion of gender relations within an Islamic context risks otherizing (Handa, 2003)—even though sexism within North America is a cultural problem of large significance (Katz, 2006).

This chapter also contributes to the research on Muslim girls' experiences of their communities by uncovering a sociological blind spot with regards to intersectional differences. Although participants shared common gendered experiences in their community, such as being subjected to a form of heightened surveillance (see Alvi, 2008; Aslam, 2011), their experiences deviated based on their race and ethnicity.<sup>67</sup> Specifically, Black participants' experiences were compounded given the anti-Black racism within their communities, and non-Arab participants' experiences were also compounded as a result of ethnocentrism<sup>68</sup> within their communities. These findings reveal how participants' unique social identities converged in complex and unexpected ways. This chapter begins with participants' perceptions of the veil and is then followed by a discussion of how participants experience their families. The chapter concludes with the participants' perceptions of their communities.

---

<sup>67</sup> Ethnicity is defined as a "... social category of people based on perceptions of shared social experience or one's ancestors' experiences. Members of the ethnic group see themselves as sharing cultural traditions and history that distinguish them from other groups. Ethnic group identity has a strong psychological or emotional component that divides the people of the world into opposing categories of 'us' and 'them'" (Peoples & Bailey, 2011, p. 367).

<sup>68</sup> Ethnocentrism is defined as a "nearly universal syndrome of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors"(Hammond & Axelrod, 2006, p. 926). Hammond and Axelrod (2006) explained that these attitudes include "seeing one's own group (the in-group) as virtuous and superior, one's own standards of value as universal, and out-groups as contemptible and inferior" (p. 926).

## Significance of the Veil

This section delves into how participants conceptualize the veil. In contrast to preconceived notions that Muslim girls, as a collective, are forced to observe the veil, participants noted that veiling was their choice and that their parents had little to no authority over their decision. Indeed, several factors have influenced the commonly held belief that the veil is oppressive. The previous chapter highlighted the relationship between colonial discourses of the veil and participants' experiences with their teachers and peers. In this section, the colonial discourses which the participants are subjected to will be contrasted with their sentiments about the veil. This section begins with a discussion of the participants' understandings of the veil and will examine how they view the veil as a form of protection. The section will conclude with a discussion about how participants perceive the veil as a feminist gesture.

For the participants, understanding the meaning of the veil was significant for developing their conviction to wear it. By conceptualizing the veil, participants established strength and confidence. As Soumia indicated, "I personally think that wearing your *hijab* makes your *eman*<sup>69</sup> stronger." Similarly, even though Khadija does not veil, she constructed it as the embodiment of growth, modesty, and respect. She stated, "it [the veil] helps you grow up a little, you can be modest, and more people will respect you." Moreover, Kowther explained how wearing the veil helped her develop values:

Ever since I wore the *hijab*, I learned a lot about myself. I learned what I want to do and how I want people to treat me, and how I want to treat people. Like, it is such a blessing. I feel like it's a part of me now. Like, if I ever felt like taking it off—it wouldn't even feel right—it would feel wrong in my heart.

Comparably, Ranya contended, "I think it builds personal strength. If you are satisfied with the *hijab*, you become more confident in yourself, especially when you accept it more." Here, Ranya spoke to the issue of developing a deep conviction and a solid

---

<sup>69</sup> Transliteration for the Arabic word meaning *faith*.

understanding of what the veil represents for one to feel its power. Touching on these understandings, Halima explained why she does not wear the veil:

It's not that I don't want to wear it. I want to wear it when I find the true meaning behind it. Not that I will never find it, but I just personally don't think about wearing it.

Likewise, Shada stated, "I think the *hijab* is a very beautiful thing. I just think you need to understand it and appreciate it." These sentiments are parallel to Khosrojerdi's (2015) findings that showed veiling contributed to strengthening her participants' confidence. Yasmine, a participant in the current study, also drew attention to the importance for girls to develop their own understanding of the veil before choosing to wear it rather than wear it because of familial pressure.<sup>70</sup> For example, Yasmine began veiling during puberty. Her mother encouraged Yasmine to veil and warned her that she would accrue sins for not doing so.<sup>71</sup> While Yasmine admittedly chose to veil out of fear initially, she explained how she developed her own understanding of it. For Yasmine, the veil:

Means a lot of things. It means modesty [and] being a good Muslim. I'm not saying that Muslim girls who don't wear it aren't good Muslims, but it is like taking steps. Like it helps...*hijab* is a veil. It protects you from other things. It just doesn't just protect your hair. It's so many things. Wearing it helps me not do bad things.

Through developing her understanding of the veil, Yasmine's perception of it as something driven out of fear shifted to something that benefits her. Yasmine challenged her mother's narrative, who attributed veiling to avoiding punishment in the hereafter, as well as counteracted the Western social imaginary of the repressive veil that inhibits Muslim girls' freedom (see Jiwani, 2018; Mirza & Meetoo, 2018). Thus, the participants in this study highlighted the importance of developing the veil's meaning rather than

---

<sup>70</sup> While Yasmine felt pressure from her mother to veil, her mother still gave her the choice to veil or not to veil.

<sup>71</sup> In some Islamic cultures, guardians sometimes advise girls to observe the veil when they reach puberty. In Yasmine's case, while she was advised to wear it, she was not forced to wear the veil.



blindly follow what society or their parents impose on them. They also brought attention to the veil as a form of protection.

Specifically, for some participants, the veil reminded them of their personal values and they viewed it as a deterrence from people and settings which encourage drugs, alcohol, and sexual relations. For instance, Shada stated:

If I go with my friends, and we get into a position or circumstance where something starts happening that is a bad thing, whether it is someone smoking or doing this or that, I'd always kind of think, should I? Even if I'm debating it, I would look back on my *hijab*, and it's always there. It's always on me, and it's like a barrier between good and bad. Whenever I'm on the verge of doing something bad, the *hijab* is on me. It's right there, and it's a barrier.

Also, the veil, as a form of nonverbal communication, dissuaded some of the participants from negative peer pressure. Specifically, the participants believed that the veil communicated a particular lifestyle to their peers and classmates, which is similar to other findings concerning the veil and Muslim women (see Hoodfar, 2003; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Ruby, 2006). For example, Khosrojerdi (2015) found that the veil's visibility prevented some of her participants from certain behaviours that were incongruent with their values and communicated to others that they abstain from alcohol, smoking, and dating. Similar to these findings, Yasmine, a participant in the current study, also spoke to this issue by explaining that the veil conveys a message to her classmates that they should avoid objectifying her and respect her instead. While her classmates did not verbally express views of the veil being a symbol of respect, she derived this conclusion from the way her classmates treated her in comparison to other girls. Hoodfar's (2003) reflection is necessary here:

Veiling also makes it clear to Muslim and non-Muslim men that the veiled women are not available for dating. The veil is a powerful means of communicating these messages without uttering a word, and with this understanding, it is not surprising that women have discovered and adopted it. (p. 22)

Reflecting Hoodfar's (2003) findings, Gulsan noted how her peers' advances to engage in certain behaviours halted after she started wearing the veil. She viewed the veil as a

means of relief from peer-pressure and explained how the veil communicated a particular lifestyle:

...people would always pressure me to go out with them and have drinks with them and dress a certain way. But now that I wear my *hijab*, I don't get those requests from people. It sort of creates a barrier to engage in certain activities.

It is then clear that some of the girls in this study felt wearing the veil provided a sense of control over how they were portrayed. While the participants were cognizant that longstanding representations of the veil as oppressive and backward are common, they also recognized the power of the veil as a form of nonverbal communication. Thus, the participants used the veil as deterrence against assimilation by challenging established norms and stereotypes. Indeed, the pressures of assimilation are daunting. Even if the girls have developed strong convictions in their faith, they still have to painfully negotiate between messages of assimilating and staying true to their values. Rezai-Rashti (1994) commented on such challenges Muslim girls contend with by stating, "I have come to understand the tremendous amount of pressure that is placed upon minority female students to assimilate in the dominant western culture" (p. 78).

It is evident that the participants avoided internalizing the general public's essentializing stereotypes by developing a counternarrative that raises the veil's status and defies the hegemonic domain of power. Specifically, some of the participants explained that they wear the veil to communicate that they are proud Muslims by asserting their identities, especially given the backdrop of increased Islamophobia. That is, despite the numerous simplistic depictions of Muslims in society, participants actively defended their right to wear the veil, knowing very well that others may negatively evaluate them; however, they yearned to challenge the common stereotypes associated with Muslims. For example, Halima demonstrated this by stating, "it [the veil] shows that you are Muslim and there is nothing wrong with that." Also, according to Shada:

I always feel like I am a part of something. Even if I'm walking down the street. and I see another *hijabi*, I feel like I'm part of something. We are all in this together. I'm proud to be a visual representation of Islam.

Likewise, Faduma noted that “I personally love to wear it [the veil], and it gives me a sense of pride and makes me happy, and it is my sense of comfort.”

Furthermore, participants avoided feeling the alienation accompanied by the disciplinary domain of power by developing a strong understanding of their faith and the meaning of the veil. The participants actively chose to distinguish themselves confidently against overarching discourses and firmly believed in their life philosophy without pathologizing any between-group differences. Thus, the participants engaged in what Collins (2002) refers to as “self-definition,” a process that is emancipatory for Black women, among other subjugated people. Specifically, in addition to viewing the veil as a form of protection, another way participants engaged in “self-definition” was by viewing the veil as a feminist gesture. As Kowther stated, instead of being oppressed, Muslim women are empowered by choosing their own lifestyle rather than accepting society’s common depiction of a “liberated woman.” She diplomatically challenged the narrative that solely attributes less clothing with freedom and thoughtfully explained how modesty is her own form of freedom. It is through such dialogue that Kowther built bridges between her and her peers and reworked both the hegemonic domain of power (misrepresentations of Muslim women and girls within Western social consciousness) and the interpersonal domain of power (interpersonal interactions which contribute to the subordination of others) by challenging typical societal depictions of Muslim women and by potentially shifting her peers’ attitudes, respectively:

I think a Muslim woman is the most empowered woman because they [people in society] look at the way we wear *hijab* or the way we stay inside the house, but it’s actually for our own benefit. It’s preserving ourselves—why should we stick to what society thinks a woman should be able to do in order to be considered free? We can do what we want to do. If I want to wear the *hijab*, I wear the *hijab*. Why do I have to take it off or wear shorts instead of being modest? It doesn’t make sense, you know.... I explain to them [her peers] it’s a part of my religion, and I used to like using this example. I used to like explaining to them how modesty is my form of freedom just like you think like wearing shorts or whatever is your choice obviously. I am not going to say you’re not right, but for me, that is my form of freedom. That is my way of gaining respect and my way of self-control. That is my way of acting in public. That is how I like to express it in

public, and they don't really question it, and they're like, "oh that makes sense." It is like a different concept; they are open sometimes.

Within Kowther's dialogue, she challenged the Western social imaginary that equates women's liberation with less clothing by disseminating her own definition of freedom to her peers. Through such dialogue, Kowther embodied the struggles of racialized representation within the feminist movement. As outlined in Chapter 1, third-wave feminism, which includes anti-racist feminism and postcolonial feminism, partly developed in response to the marginalization of women of colour in the feminist movement, which was largely dominated by middle-class, White women, and the anti-racist movement which ignored intersecting social identities beyond race. However, including minorities was not the only issue third-wave feminism aimed to remedy. Differing ideologies about female sexuality divided feminists, with some leaving the movement altogether. For example, some feminists found themselves split over contentious topics such as sex work, heterosexuality, and pornography, "with one side seeing evidence of gender oppression and the other opportunities for sexual pleasure and empowerment" (Snyder-Hall, 2010, p. 255). To address this issue and to ensure group solidarity, third-wave feminism developed the notion of "choice feminism," where women's choices and paths towards liberation, albeit different, should be respected (Snyder-Hall, 2010). However, subcultures within third-wave feminism emerged, one being "raunch culture" (Levy, 2005). Levy (2005) described raunch culture as the hypersexualized American culture where women are objectified and encouraged to objectify one another. She explained how such objectification is often disguised as *feminism*, where fewer clothes and overt displays of sexuality are equated with gender liberation. Overall, she asserted that capitalism has hijacked this subculture of feminism. As Levy (2005) explained:

This is our establishment, these are our role models, this is high fashion and low culture, this is athletics and politics, this is television and publishing and pop music and medicine and—good news!—being a part of it makes you a strong, powerful woman...we have determined that all empowered women must be overtly and publicly sexual. (p. 26)

In relation to this and the *sexual contract*, Groeneveld (2009) touched on how veiled Muslim women are sometimes excluded from feminist spaces by the positioning of the burka as a “tyrannical imposition” (p. 181).

Nonetheless, participants in this study viewed the veil as a means to communicate an identity and lifestyle that challenges established norms and implied that the veil is a feminist gesture to challenge the commodification of the female body in Western society, which is in line with the literature concerning the veil and Muslim women (see Bullock & Jafri, 2010; Hoodfar, 2003; Zine, 2006b). While this reading of the veil may place “the burden of responsibility for avoiding sexual harassment upon women, who are expected to regulate their bodies to avoid eliciting the negative sexual attention of men, rather than placing the onus on men to regulate their behaviour toward women” (Zine, 2006b, p. 243), it still remains an effective strategy for some Muslim women who veil given its alleged benefits.

To support this, similar to Levy (2005), Bullock (2002) drew on a number of Western feminists who critiqued how female bodies are commodified and depicted in Western popular culture as mere objects. She contended that “this kind of objectification... dehumanizes women, turns them into objects and denies their personhood” (p. 19). Drawing on Mustapha’s (1993) and Yusufali’s (1998) personal essays featured in *The Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*, respectively, Bullock (2002) rationalized how the veil is a “way out of the commodification/objectification trap” (p. 19). Through the donning of the veil, Bullock (2002) argued that some veiled women are “opting out of the beauty game” (p. 19) by challenging the ideal measures of beauty imposed on women in the West. To explain this, Hoodfar (2003) reported that some of the participants in her study believed that Canada and other Western countries encourage sexualized femininity entrenched in patriarchal, capitalistic desires where “their half-naked bodies [are] used to sell everything from toothbrushes to sports cars. In the West, a woman’s breasts, waist, hips and clothing are supposed to conform to the ideal standard of beauty” (p. 29). According to Hoodfar (2003), the veil as a feminist gesture, even when considering the

criticisms associated with it, reduces some Muslim girls' preoccupation with imposed standards. Specifically, Hoodfar (2003) asserted that, "it [the veil] relieves the emphasis on their bodies, enabling them to participate in public life as people rather than bodies" (p. 205). This is evident by Ranya who mentioned the following benefit of the veil, "I actually feel better [when wearing the veil] because I don't have to do my hair, so it's a good thing."

While this relief of not having to conform to Western beauty standards is evident among some young Muslim women who veil, it is essential to note that some of the participants in this study were still susceptible to conforming to societal fashion and beauty ideals which are based on White middle-class femininity and leave little room for other expressions of feminine subjectivities for Muslim women as well as other racialized women. This is increasingly challenging for some participants as they would like to represent their identity and adhere to their beliefs while also remaining "relevant" to mainstream culture. Thus, although the participants constituted the veil as a feminist gesture, some described the challenges associated with veiling. Yasmine demonstrated this by explaining how she contended with the immense pressures to socially conform to Western clothing norms when she initially began wearing the veil, but as time passed, she was able to overcome it. The ambivalence towards veiling can be partly explained by the messages transmitted throughout mass media that expect women to adhere to Western femininity in order to *fit in* as well as to develop self-worth. Self-worth, here, is erroneously based on the approval of others heavily rooted in one's appearance (Levy, 2005). To demonstrate this, the majority of the participants in this study who did not veil desired to wear the veil but feared that they would not be accepted within their school's social circles if they did. Aisha embodied this common tension:

I think it [the veil] is beautiful...I want to wear it sometimes, but then I feel like I can't be like so confident like I am now with walking in the hallways because, my hair, I style it, and do everything to it, so covering it feels weird...I thought I was going to wear it in grade 9. I really wanted to, but then all my friends were White, so I was like, I don't know. Would they like me and stuff? Just that, it was just for

other people. Then I'm like it is for me and for *Allah*<sup>72</sup>...I thought it [the veil] was really beautiful, and it would make me more religious; but, I didn't feel like I would be confident when I was walking.

Aisha revealed the tremendous pressure some of the participants contended with regarding imposed beauty standards, making it challenging for them to dress how they would like to out of fear of rejection. Sabah verified this by stating that "most of the people wear short stuff so you don't really feel a part of it; you feel like you cannot fit in." These comments revealed how the disciplinary domain functions. Through surveillance techniques, girls who do not abide by imposed beauty standards are considered inferior and backward, remaining outside the imagined boundaries of the *sexual contract*.

Similarly, Mirza and Meeto (2018) described how Muslim girls are pressured to fit in while simultaneously attempting to hold onto their values. Halima supported Mirza and Meeto's (2018) findings by highlighting the tensions of assimilating and suggested that if one avoids following the crowd, she fears being excluded or unlikable. Considering this, participants, through engaging in critical consciousness and self-definition, underpinned the greater satisfaction associated with being content with oneself rather than striving to be likable or internalizing dominant beauty standards. For example, Halima explained how she was able to develop her insight as she interrogated the negative personal and educational ramifications associated with assimilation. Thus, Halima revealed how society's objectification of women through commodification and the push to satisfy the male gaze may not only inhibit them from being who they aspire to be, but it can also have negative educational implications.

Participants countered the pressure to fit in by remembering that, in their view, the veil was decreed by God. Specifically, all of the participants in this study, veiled and unveiled, believed the veil to be a religious requirement. This belief derives from

---

<sup>72</sup> Transliteration for the Arabic word meaning *God*.

interpretations of the *Qur'an*<sup>73</sup> (Bullock, 2002), more specifically a *Qu'ranic verse* that asks women to “draw their *khumurihinna* (transliterated) over their bosoms...” (24:31) as well as *Hadith*.<sup>74</sup> While most Islamic scholars agreed that the *khumurihinna* means headcover, other scholars, primarily within the social sciences, argued that this verse alludes to women only covering their shoulders and chest—not their heads (Bullock, 2002). Indeed, while a significant theme in the existing literature is that Muslim girls and women believed the veil to be a religious requirement, not all women and girls who identify as Muslim see it as such. Some Muslim women’s decisions and personal beliefs to not veil demonstrates the heterogeneity of how Muslim women practice Islam, which is not always accounted for in the literature or larger society. Thus, variations in interpretations highlight the diversity of Muslims.

All in all, the participants’ perceptions of the veil addressed the problem of representation in the mass media which is obsessed with Muslim women’s bodies. Instead of viewing the veil as oppressive, the participants viewed the veil as emancipatory.<sup>75</sup> For the participants, the veil symbolized resistance against the hegemonic domain of power as they interrogated the negative messages they received about their identity as Muslim girls. Through their strong understanding of the veil and their conviction, some participants were able to problematize and reduce the disciplinary domain’s harmful effects which pressure Muslim girls to fit in. As Halima noted, “there is greater peace when not following the crowd.” In the same way that the mass media represents the veil as a symbol of oppression, it also frames Muslim girls’ families as oppressive. In the next section, the participants’ perceptions of their families will be discussed in light of such media representations.

---

<sup>73</sup> The Islamic Holy Book.

<sup>74</sup> Authenticated sayings of the Prophet Mohammed ﷺ.

<sup>75</sup> While this is true for the participants in this study, it is important to note that this is not necessarily true for other Muslim girls.



## **Perceptions of Family**

As the findings in Chapter 1 indicated, some of the participants' teachers and peers assumed that Muslim families strictly regulate their daughters. These findings are unsurprising given how the media portrays Muslim families as oppressive towards their daughters. Thus, an important question to ask the participants in light of this was if they viewed their families as oppressive. This section addresses this question by centering participants' voices instead of prioritizing discursive media practices which tend to silence Muslim women (MacDonald, 2006; Watt, 2011).

This section begins with a discussion of participants' perceptions of their families and Muslim feminist researchers' challenges associated with discussing the existence of sexism in their communities against the backdrop of gendered Islamophobia. Although the participants remarked that they are content with their families, some admittedly experienced challenges with how their parents treat them differently compared to their brothers. Although addressing the issue of sexism within families is important, as mentioned earlier, navigating such terrain<sup>76</sup> as a researcher comes with risks of otherizing which I elaborate on below. Overall, this section's findings reveal that the challenges participants experience with their families are drastically different from the gendered Islamophobic representations that are rampant in Western society.

As Razak (1998) argued, there is a persistence to racialize minorities based on violence against women even though domestic abuse is global, "in a racist society...violence in immigrant communities is viewed as a cultural attribute rather than a product of male domination" (pp. 57-58). For this reason, postcolonial feminist scholars have examined the challenges associated with discussing sexism within their own communities (see Hoodfar, 2001; Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Zine, 2009). As noted by Zine (2009), "this becomes the challenge for Muslim feminists: when we begin to interrogate issues of sexism within

---

<sup>76</sup> Challenges Muslim girls have with their families.

our communities, our efforts become subject to the sensationalized racism outside of the community that feeds off such revelations” (p. 147). Thus, discussing participants’ common challenges with their families should not be confused as inherent practices related to their culture but should instead be read through contextual factors as well as the global ideology of male dominance, which also negatively impacts Western women.

Nonetheless, while the participants did not experience honour-based violence they did experience challenges with their parents concerning honour. In discussing the participants’ challenges with their families, like Zine (2009) and Shier and Shor (2016), I question the viability of using the term *honour* given how the media sensationalizes it. However, keeping this in mind, I have decided to use the term *honour* critically in describing some of the participants’ challenges while interrogating how the term has been used to fuel Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment (Razack, 1998; Shier & Shor, 2016).

To begin the discussion of participants’ challenges with their families, sexism was apparent among some of their narratives. While most participants did not experience this within their family, Hafsah was one of the few who did. She described the burden associated with her mother’s unfair treatment of her brother and her:

Guys can leave the house and come back at 3 [am]. Girls leave the house. They are coming back at 9 [pm] no matter what... My mom is actually sexist; she likes boys more than girls. It’s not just because my brother is young. Even if my brother is 20, she would just treat him better than us, the girls, and mostly she has girls, and she has one boy, and it is not fair to us. I hate guys just because of my mom and my brother. It’s not fair.

Here, Hafsah, on the one hand, demonstrated critical consciousness of how sexism manifests in society, and on the other hand, highlighted how her mother’s imbalanced treatment negatively impacts how she feels towards her brother and other men. However, most of the participants noted that they did not experience this sexism within their home but have witnessed it occur in other Muslim families. For example, Amina stated:

Mostly, Sudanese people, they focus on their girls. I would see two siblings, a boy and a girl. The girl would be the most amazing daughter and girl, and she is protecting herself with her *hijab* and everything is just amazing, and I would find the brother hangin' out with his friends, staying out late, going to parties, getting drunk or something. I would see that, and what's the difference? They are easy on him and hard on her... she turned out to be a good person, but the boy is lost.

Amina spoke about how sexism perpetuated within some Muslim homes has unfavourable effects on both daughters and sons. Parental *guidance* premised and informed by sexist ideologies results in boys not being disciplined enough by their parents while girls receive too much guidance. The difference here is that girls are pressured by parents to uphold the family reputation, where their regulation is rooted in the angst of potentially tarnishing the familial image. Indeed, the sexism which occurs within some Islamic homes is entrenched in fear of what is believed to be illicit sexual relations. However, as many of the participants in this study noted, boys, more often than not, do not share the same burden and are thus given free rein to do as they please. Consequently, girls' actions weigh heavily on a family's reputation relative to the actions of boys.

Thus, it is clear that some of the participants' parents adopted the notion of *family honour*. While all family members have a role in maintaining family honour, there is increased pressure on girls compared to boys as they are considered to be the safeguards of their families and traditions, especially in response to parental fear of Western assimilation (Basit, 1997; Sarroub, 2001). As a result of this, if a girl breaks the family's honour code, the family can sometimes be shunned by the community. However, it is important to consider that many Islamic leaders have spoken out against such practices (Shier & Shor, 2016). While none of the participants experienced physical violence, some of them noted the burdens associated with ensuring that the family reputation is intact. As Faduma noted:

So, I feel like the boy would be able to do more things, for example, being out late. A Muslim girl would have rules to be home no later than 5 [pm] or something... I feel like it is more so a cultural aspect rather than a religious one. So, the parents wouldn't want their daughter seen... if they are out really late, they

are in a situation that would tarnish the family image. And if a guy is in a situation like that, then it would just be on him, and usually, it doesn't really matter if you're a guy, but if you are a girl, your name would be ruined.

Khadija also echoed Faduma's words. She explained how her father worries about the family's reputation based on her actions and prefers that she limits her inter-gender interactions as a result. While she explained this, she recognized that her parents are trying to improve by stating, "I guess my mom is more understanding and my dad is starting to; my mom and I can talk to her about anything, like, 'oh, I like this guy.'"

Although some of the participants either faced or witnessed sexism in their families, they quickly explained that such actions were incompatible with their views on Islam. For example, Amina stated that such behaviours are not Islamic and are instead reflective of culture. Similarly, Hafsa demonstrated her ability to differentiate between her culture and religion and established her understanding of how Islam preaches fair treatment between males and females. Similar to Amina and Hafsa, Yasmine and Faduma mentioned the following:

In Islam, it is about equality; we are all equal. Our culture, oh my God, that is the thing. Yeah, we have an Arab community here, the culture, that is how they think, right. (Yasmine)

Personally, I don't see a connection with it [sexism] being like an Islamic idea. I feel like that is something that is given to a lot of people in the community like that is something they adopted. In Islam, women and men are equal. (Faduma)

The participants spoke to the issue of how Islam and culture should not be confounded with one another. Indeed, religion is a significant factor that influences culture; however, the participants asserted that there are cultural practices entrenched in male domination that contradict their understanding of Islam. From the participants' point of view, Islam remedies sexist cultural issues. Hoodfar (2003) explained that Canadian Muslim girls' "...education, along with their much broader contacts with Muslims of diverse ethnic backgrounds" (p. 24), provided them with a clearer view of the differences between culture and their perceptions of religion. For this reason, some participants in Hoodfar's (2003) study were able to strategically challenge their parents' unfair treatment through

citing Islamic sources instead of engaging in rebellion, which likely would not have been to their benefit. As such, the participants in this study, like the participants in Hoodfar's (2003) research, were able to distinguish between the cultural practices that were incongruent with their interpretations of Islam, which allowed them to use their faith as resistance against sexism within society at large, and within their homes.

Even though some of the participants experienced challenges with their parents, as noted above, all of them viewed their families as a source of support. The participants described how their parents have high expectations of them becoming professionals such as lawyers, engineers, and doctors. For example:

...They [Samar's parents] support whatever I want to get into. They pay for anything I want involving the school. They don't have a problem. (Samar)

My mom is the only reason I study. I wouldn't care about my marks if my mom didn't care about my marks. (Somaya)

He [Leila's father] wants us [her sister and her] to be either a lawyer or a doctor. (Leila)

Oh, it [education] is the most important thing in life. They [Hafsah's parents] are like, "if you don't finish your education, you are not going to go anywhere in life." (Hafsah)

My mom has her Master's. My dad is smart and stuff, but he is more of... he motivates, and he will support you, and he is like, "All I need from you is your marks," and then if you talk to him and tell him you are not doing good, "I need help," he will tell you what to do, but he won't force you. Like it's your choice, but my mom, I like it when someone pushes me to do something because I won't do it by myself. My mom, she would tell me, "you have to do this; you have to study this." (Khadija)

I think for first-generation Muslims, their families really value education because they came here for a better life, so the most straightforward way of getting that is getting good grades and doing well in school. So they put a lot of pressure on that aspect. (Ranya)

For some of the participants, however, who live in low-SES households and who arrived in Canada as refugees, their parents could not provide them with financial support and advice on how to navigate the school system, respectively. Al-deen (2019) explains this

phenomenon as follows: "... the migration process itself may reduce parents' capacity to be involved in their child's education due to unfamiliarity with the new country's education system" (p. 604). Some of the participants' parents were also unable to provide their children with financial help during their time in school, unlike most participants who were not required to work. Even though some parents were unable to help their children navigate the education system, they still encouraged them to take their studies seriously as they viewed education as a pertinent part of their daughters' lives and futures.

As a refugee to Canada, Faduma's mother wanted to set an example for her daughters as she was well-aware of the social capital that accompanies a parent who completes post-secondary education. Faduma explained:

I feel like I'm more so encouraged to complete my education by my mom because, like I said, she is a public health nurse, and she's been working for her degree, and I was blessed to see most of them because she moved to Canada when she was 18. She had me when she was 27, and she moved to London [ON] to go to school. So, like I was born when she came here, so I was fortunate enough to see how much she worked for that, and I know she did not work for that for herself but to show us as an example of our potential.

Thus, participants commonly explained that their parents encouraged them to complete their education; however, intra-group differences are evident regarding the level of support they received from parents. Similar to Al-deen (2019), for the most part, the findings of the current study confirmed that:

Muslim families have often been treated as a homogeneous group which is regarded as strict and placing patriarchal constraints on women. However, the accounts of the young women who participated in this study illustrated the major role their parents played in encouraging them to obtain academic qualifications and possible future professional careers. The pursuit of higher education was greatly emphasised by all of the participants' parents, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds. From an early age, these young women had been encouraged to value and pursue education by their families, on the provision that their behaviour did not jeopardise familial reputations. As a result, these young women have become adept at negotiating their educational and familial aspirations and responsibilities. The participants received substantial family

support, including financial and emotional support, as well as parental advice and ‘effective’ involvement in their education. (pp. 603-604)

Thus far, the findings in this chapter support some of the literature on Muslim girls’ experiences with sexism within their families (see Haw et al., 1998; Sarroub, 2007; Zine, 2001). For example, Sarroub’s (2007) study of Yemeni girls in a small town in Michigan highlights how differential treatment between boys and girls heavily weighed on the participants’ lives. However, unlike most research on Muslim girls’ experiences with their families, Sarroub’s (2007) findings confirmed the typical stereotypes that some of the participants’ teachers and peers associated with Muslim families. The findings of the current research addressed this contradiction in the literature, as outlined below.

Sarroub (2007) noted that Yemeni girls are pressured to marry early and not continue their education compared to boys who were encouraged to complete their education. Specifically, Sarroub (2007) explained that the participants’ families were mostly uneducated, low income, and were new to the U.S., which is a very narrow demographic. Sarroub’s (2007) findings, thus, may be shared among the demographics of Yemeni Muslim girls in the city where she conducted the study, but based on the existing literature, they are largely uncommon for Muslim girls and women in the North American context. Thus, attention to context can explain the gap in the literature concerning the differences regarding how Muslim girls experience their families. Indeed, Muslim girls’ various social identities significantly impact their lived realities.

Overall, while some of the participants in this current study experienced sexism from their parents, all of them noted that their families were supportive of their educational pursuits regardless of their various social identities. Thus, to answer the question of whether Muslim girls perceive their families to be oppressive, the participants in this study answered *no*. They recognized their unique challenges within their homes, but they did not feel that their parents limited them in any way from achieving their goals. In fact, quite the opposite was true—the participants noted that post-secondary education is

expected and they made no mention of being pressured into marriage.<sup>77</sup> Correspondingly, the next sub-section will focus on the participants' perceptions of their community.

### **Views on Community**

This section explains that while participants held positive views of their community, they also experienced several challenges. Namely, some of the participants explained that their Muslim peers policed them, with a particular focus on how they dress and act.

Furthermore, by asking the *other question* (Davis, 2008), a sociological blind spot was revealed concerning how ethnic and racial minorities experienced their Islamic communities. Specifically, participants who are ethnic minorities and participants who are Black experienced ethnocentrism and anti-Black racism, respectively. As such, this section begins with a brief discussion of what constitutes a *community* and then delves into the participants' commonly shared lived realities concerning their interpersonal relationships with other Muslims in their communities. After this, participants' diverging experiences based on their ethnicity will be discussed. Following this, a sub-section will address Black participants' experiences within their communities.

While the concept of *community* is contested, I drew on Veinot and Williams' (2012) broad conceptualization of the term. Focusing on the idea of *belonging*, Veinot and Williams (2012) defined "community as a locality or place, a social system, a form of social exclusion, a type of relationship, a social network, and an interaction" (p. 848). Engaging with the debates and particularities associated with defining community go beyond the scope of this research. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, I operationalize community as participants' interpersonal and intragroup interactions with other Muslims in their schools, Mosques, community centres, and society at large. Thus, community, in the way it used to contextualize the findings of this research, is not bound

---

<sup>77</sup> Based on my involvement within Islamic communities in both London, Ontario and the Niagara region, early marriage is discouraged. Rather, both girls and boys are typically advised to complete their education and secure employment before marriage.



by a physical space; rather, it is demarcated by a group of people who share a common faith, geographical location, and set of values. Especially concerning the latter, as evident below, if individuals from a community do not adhere with the particular values of that community they can experience social exclusion.

In line with this, the participants in the current study described how their Muslim peers sometimes policed them for how they dressed and for communicating with their peers of the opposite gender (see Alvi, 2008; Aslam, 2011; Sarroub, 2001; Mirza & Meetoo, 2018). Consequently, this impelled the participants to engage in self-monitoring to safeguard their reputations within the community. Participants highlighted that Muslim boys do not have to contend with the same scrutiny as girls do, and are sometimes even praised for certain behaviours that girls would be shunned for. Yasmine explained how she contended with issues related to modesty:

Those kinds of Muslims (the ones that judge), they are not better than me, but they think they are... but then they point out what I do wrong and what I should be doing instead. I shouldn't wear this or stuff. It's like, look after yourself. I am trying really hard here. Like, I don't judge others... Seeing other Muslims judging me, it is like, why? Even about stuff I wear. It is just sad it's from Muslims instead of others.

Similar to Yasmine's experiences, Ranya expressed, "I haven't experienced that within my own friend group, but outside of that, there are senior girls who look down on girls who wear tight clothing and also the *hijab*."<sup>78</sup> Likewise, Halima felt as if another Muslim classmate questioned her Islamic identity because she does not wear the veil. She recalled the following:

I had this one guy in my class. He is very loud and out there, and he talks to everyone. When he found out I was Muslim, he was just like, "Really? Why aren't you wearing the scarf?" And he was Muslim too, so I thought he would

---

<sup>78</sup> For clarification purposes, the participant was referring to how some girls judge veiled girls who also happen to wear tight clothes.

know, and I am like, “I don’t choose to wear it,” and he was just like, “Why?” And he would say this in front of the class.

Halima provided another example of how her Muslim peers have questioned her Islamic identity and devotion to her faith:

I have been told, last year, I had these people I don’t even know, some “good” Muslim girls, and they would talk to me, and when it would actually come up, they would ask me, “So you are Muslim, right?” And they would look at me and snicker at each other like, “She calls herself a Muslim,” and I would just have to walk.

As evident from the participants’ accounts, some of their Muslim peers placed them under surveillance and *disciplined* them if they did not adhere to acceptable cultural norms. For example, Halima, Gulsan, and Sabah noted how they avoided wearing tight clothes in fear of their Muslim peers judging them. Participants may be more likely to adhere to such norms because many of them view the community as their *safe space* where they feel valued and respected. However, what concerned the participants the most was that Muslim boys were not placed under such scrutiny and observation. Instead, they were sometimes praised for the same behaviours that girls would be *disciplined* for. For example, Ranya highlighted a double-standard where boys do not share the same burden associated with bodily regulation: “Boys, on the other hand, it is the opposite. A lot of the boys aren’t the best Muslims, **\*laughter\*** but at the same time that is normalized for them.” Leila echoed sentiments similar to Ranya’s in the following dialogue:

**SH:** Do you sometimes feel that, within the Islamic community, there are double standards between boys and girls?...

**Leila:** Yeah, a lot more. Even at school and stuff. The guys will do something, and then everyone is like, “They’re so hot” or something like that, and then you’ll go and talk to a guy, and then they will say you’re dating. They don’t understand what friends are.

Like most of the participants, Samar shared similar experiences and noted how she used the teachings of Islam to challenge patriarchy within her community:

Muslim guys in general, they kind of been looking at me weird like, “Why are you friends with guys?” But no one is looking at them that way when they are friends with girls... No one says anything, and for me, it’s different. There’s a lot of talking behind each other’s back like, “Did you see what she did? She’s talking to this guy; she is close to this guy”... It’s a little controversial because it’s a double standard there...so it’s a little bit off. The second someone says something about them [boys], it’s not okay because, “I’m a guy so I can do whatever I want,” and they literally play off on that. If anything, Allah said everyone should follow the rules including the guys, not specifically just girls.

Thus, from the participants’ accounts, Muslim boys do not face the same consequences as Muslim girls for certain behaviours; instead, they are sometimes praised for their actions.

Similar to these findings, Mirza and Meetoo (2018) noted the significance of peers regulating Muslim girls. Sarroub (2001) shared similar findings where her participants described that the boys from their community kept a watchful eye on them. Alvi (2008) also reported that Muslim peers excluded the girls in her study when they did not adhere to the norms of their sub-group. Aslam (2011) shared similar results; however, some of the participants in her study reported being policed for not wearing the veil, which is similar to Halima’s experience. However, such experiences, which result in participants engaging in self-policing, were not apparent within the space of the Mosque.

### ***Experiences With Institutionalized Spaces of Community***

As mentioned in Chapter 4, for some of the participants, engaging in religious acts served as a coping mechanism to contend with their daily struggles. A Mosque or a community centre is supposed to serve as a place of refuge, or as Collins (2002) refers to it, *a safe space*,<sup>79</sup> where people feel a sense of comradery, belongingness, and solidarity.

However, this was not always the case for some of the participants in the Niagara region and London.<sup>80</sup> While the participants generally shared positive experiences within

---

<sup>79</sup> Especially in Western contexts where Islamophobia is heightened.

<sup>80</sup> The participants from the GTA did not contend with experiences of ethnocentrism or anti-Black racism.

Mosques and community centres, their experiences deviated based on their ethnicity and race in some cases. Accordingly, this subsection begins with the participants' experiences with ethnocentrism within their community and is followed by a discussion of the participants' experiences with anti-Black racism.

Although there are no official demographical statistics on Islamic communities in London and the Niagara region, based on my previous observations as well as participants' accounts, both communities are primarily composed of Arabic-speaking people. In London, the largest ethnic group within the Islamic community seems to be composed of Arabs from the Levant region, whereas in the Niagara Islamic community, the largest cultural group seems to be composed of Libyans. While some ethnically identify as Berber,<sup>81</sup> Libyans are primarily fluent in Arabic. Moreover, a large proportion of Muslims within the Niagara region are composed of Levant Arabs as well as Sudanese people.<sup>82</sup> Thus, ethnic minority participants from these two regions do not originate from North Africa or the Levant region.

Although Ranya (who is Sudanese and Turkish) did not experience ethnocentrism in her community, she has witnessed its occurrence and attributed its pervasiveness to the demographics of London:

There is a lot of racism against, not just against Black Muslims, but anyone who is not Arab... It is also because of the history of London. Lebanese people built the community; they have been here for a very long time.

Correspondingly, some of the ethnic minority participants shared common experiences of exclusion within their Mosques. Particularly, one significant issue for the participants

---

<sup>81</sup> Libyans are comprised of both Arab and Berber ethnic groups. According to Maddy-Weitzman (2015), Berbers are the North African descendants of the pre-Arab inhabitants.

<sup>82</sup> The majority of the Sudanese population in the Niagara region are not from South Sudan. Moreover, although all of the Sudanese participants spoke Arabic fluently, not all of them identify as Arab.

pertained to the standard language in the Mosque being Arabic. As Gulsan (who is Kurdish and from the Niagara region) shared:

Once, I attended a lecture that was presented by one of the imams in the Mosque, so I think he kind of looked around and sort of knew everyone who attended the lecture. So, he knew how to speak English fully. For some reason, he decided to do it in Arabic, and I was the only one that didn't speak Arabic, and, he asked, "Who doesn't speak Arabic here?" And I put my hand up, so even though I put up my hand up that I don't speak Arabic, he still continued to present in Arabic. So, in the middle of his lecture, I got up and walked out because I don't really understand, so there is not a point of me being there.

Gulsan also recalled other challenges within her Islamic community, where prayers and campaigns were not made for people who were in dire need of help in Kurdistan, but were quick to be made for other Islamic countries and communities:

Most of the time, when I enter the Mosque, most people are welcoming and friendly, but sometimes people, like sometimes when they pray for different countries or raise awareness for different countries and issues happening across the globe, they don't really bring awareness about what is happening to Kurdish people in Northern Iraq or Kurdish people in Turkey or in Iran. So, I feel like that makes me feel excluded and isolated. It makes me feel like I am not a part of the community...

Gulsan noted that this is a common concern for her Kurdish community in the Niagara region. She uncovered that some Kurdish people refuse to attend Mosque altogether as a consequence of such exclusionary practices.

Such findings provide new research contributions regarding how minority ethnic Muslims experience ethnocentrism within their Islamic communities in the Canadian context. As there has been scant research on the geopolitical tensions within Mosque spaces in the European context (see Öcal, 2020) and, more fittingly, limited research on how ethnic minorities experience their Islamic communities in the American and Canadian context (Hill et al., 2015), these research finding are an important addition to the literature. The findings of the current study contribute to research by not only unearthing ethnic minorities' experiences of exclusion within Islamic institutionalized spaces, but also by considering how the experiences of ethnic minority Muslims are

compounded based on their schooling experiences and familial interactions. For example, as noted in Chapter 4, Gulsan not only experienced challenges associated with her gender, religion, SES, and immigration status in school, but also she experienced gendered bodily regulations<sup>83</sup> and ethnocentrism<sup>84</sup> within her larger Islamic community as this chapter outlined.

The study that best supports the findings of the current research was done by Hill et al. (2015). They aimed to understand the dynamics of intra-Muslim ethnic relations in the U.S. and Canada by conducting an online survey. Their study consisted of 517 respondents who were composed of various ethnic and racial backgrounds. However, the results of their study predominantly spoke to the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities within the American context as only 14 percent of the respondents were from Canada. With this considered, they provided significant insight into the experiences of ethnic minority Muslims. Specifically, they found that ethnic minorities indeed experienced discrimination in their communities; however, since the survey method was utilized, there was little insight into *how* such discrimination occurred. Nonetheless, Hill et al. (2015) drew on Jackson (2011) who, in his book, described the plight of Black American Muslims within Islamic spaces in the U.S. and offered insight into the multiple ways Black Muslims are excluded in Mosques. Namely, Jackson (2011) explained how Middle Eastern conflicts are seen as more of a concern than the social causes that impact ethnic and racial minorities within Islamic spaces, which is similar to Gulsan's experiences with her Mosque's lack of concern for Kurdistan. In addition to contextualizing the experiences of ethnic minority Muslim participants of this current study, Hill et al. (2015) also provided significant insight on how Black Muslims experience their Islamic communities.

---

<sup>83</sup> Among her Islamic peers.

<sup>84</sup> Within Islamic institutionalized spaces.

### ***Anti-Black Racism in the Community Space***

As mentioned, Hill et al.'s (2015) main goal was to study intra-Muslim ethnic relations by reaching “Mosqued” and “unMosqued” spaces. Regarding the latter, they did this through creating “hashtag conversation topics including #BeingBlackAndMuslim, a conversation comprised of over 7000 tweets that highlights positive and negative experiences of identifying as Muslim and Black, African, and/or African-American” (p. 3). The authors found that Black Muslims experienced anti-Black racism within their Islamic communities across North America. However, details surrounding *how* anti-Black racism occurred were limited due to methodological limitations. With this mentioned, the hashtag #BeingBlackAndMuslim and hashtags similar to it, such as #BlackAndMuslim, have spread from Twitter to Instagram and Facebook and remain trending. Such hashtags provide significant insight into the experiences of Black Muslim girls in their Islamic communities and the content associated with these hashtags is very similar to the participants’ experiences in this study. Correspondingly, the rest of this subsection will review the participants’ experiences contextualized by such social media posts. Prior to this discussion, however, colourism will be discussed in light of the participants’ experiences with anti-Black racism within their communities.

It is apparent from the current research that the participants’ accounts discussed below are informed by widespread media misrepresentations of Black peoples as inferior as well as by the global systemic privileging of those with lighter skin tones. While Arabs, Africans, and Southeast-Asians have various complexions, one of the social problems within these communities is colourism, which stems from anti-Black racism. Consequently, not only do some lighter-skinned people within such communities benefit socially, but also those with darker skin tones are more likely to experience both racism in their larger Islamic communities and colourism in their sub-communities.

Colourism, also known as shadism, is defined as “prejudice on the basis of skin shade” (Phoenix, 2014, p. 98). While colourism’s origins are argued to predate colonization,

colonization and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade have arguably intensified lighter-skinned privilege and institutionalized this ideology in colonized lands (Phoenix, 2014). For instance, during the time of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, lighter-skinned slaves were given preferential treatment over darker-skinned slaves. Regarding colonization, the ideology of White supremacy had the colonized internalize their oppression, where they too bought into the notion that lighter skin was associated with superiority (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017). Through the lens of White superiority, lighter-skinned individuals were considered less barbaric and, thus, associated with higher status and dominance (Phoenix, 2014; Rattansi, 2020). Furthermore, darker skin was indicative of class, as the lower classes worked outside under the sun which darkened their skin, whereas the higher classes had indoor jobs (Phoenix, 2014).

Phoenix (2014) asserted that colourism particularly disadvantages women of colour compared to men of colour. Today, numerous magazines use software to digitally lighten women's skin tones, and movies prefer to have lighter-skinned leads, all of which point towards the ubiquity of colourism (Phoenix, 2014). Phoenix (2014) reasoned that magazines are more inclined to alter the skin colour of racialized women because covers with dark-skinned women are less likely to sell, which is a global issue that is pervasive in many communities and national contexts beyond the West. Such privileging of lighter skin and European features has led women to take drastic measures, such as using skin lightening creams laden with dangerous chemicals and undergoing plastic surgery to attain more European like features. Thus, this ideology maintains a multi-billion dollar skin lightening industry in addition to the multi-billion dollar cosmetic surgery industry. Drawing on bell hooks, Phoenix (2014) noted that some women of colour recognized the economic benefits of having lighter skin and "European" features and, thus, engaged in skin lightening while being critical of hegemony related to lighter skin tones being more attractive. Put differently, some racialized women engaged in skin lightening practices not because they think they have inferior skin tones, but because they are aware of the economic advantage of doing so. However, Phoenix (2014) also stated that some women of colour do indeed internalize that lighter skin is superior to darker skin tones. Through



understanding what colorism is, and its origins, we are better able to understand the experiences of Black Muslim girls as they not only experience anti-Black racism within the dominant spaces of society and their Islamic communities, but also experience colourism within their sub-communities.<sup>85</sup>

As mentioned, anti-Black racism has increasingly become a contentious topic on social media within both the American and Canadian context. Thus, I searched for public social media posts on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook within the Niagara region, London, and the GTA to contextualize the participants' experiences. A Facebook post written by Walaa Hassanien (Hassanien, 2020), who is Sudanese and was raised in the Niagara region, summed up the common challenges shared in many social media posts. Namely, she explained the problem with non-Black Arabs referring to Black people as *abeed*<sup>86</sup> or *abad*<sup>87</sup> (examples of anti-Black racism), the subtle back-handed comments of children being told to stay out of the sun—not for fear of sun cancer, but for the fear of becoming darker (examples of colourism/shadism), and other issues related to the internalized colourism/shadism and anti-Black racism among Black Muslims communities:

While we're having this conversation, I just wanted to say something to some of my Muslim Arabs, Desis and some African uncles and aunties who follow me 🙏. There's a need to work on all that internalized racism and colorism that's going on. It's hard enough for us black folk to deal with it outside of the Muslim community but to also face it within our *masjids*<sup>88</sup> and gatherings is disheartening - ya'll have to do better. Some of those small things you say and think, really need to be checked, unlearned, and are NEVER okay!!  
- Saying 3abd<sup>89</sup> عبد or 3abeed<sup>90</sup> عبيد while referring to someone, even as a joke - NOT OKAY!

---

<sup>85</sup> Black Muslim communities.

<sup>86</sup> Transliteration of the Arabic word for *slaves*.

<sup>87</sup> Transliteration of the Arabic word for *slave*.

<sup>88</sup> Transliteration of the Arabic word for *Mosque*.

<sup>89</sup> Arabic word for *slave*.

<sup>90</sup> Arabic word for *slaves*.

- Buying whitening creams or lighter foundations for yourself or the bride to be - NOT OKAY!

-Refusing someone's hand in marriage because they're a few shades darker, or not from your tribe or country - NOT OKAY!

-Telling black Muslims "well, you're not really "black black" you're Muslim (to justify your racist comments) - NOT OKAY!

- And some of my African Muslims who think they're not black like our non-black Muslims - Yes, your experience might be different, you might be privileged too, but you're black. Trust me <sup>91</sup>خالتي I grew up in Saudi, I was a <sup>92</sup>عبده to some of them too.

-Telling your kids to not play in the sun for too long so they don't get darker

خشو عشان ما تزرقر 🤔 - NOT OKAY!

-Telling your son or daughter to marry light skin "عشان نحسن النسل". - NOT OKAY!

-Telling your daughter to relax or straighten her hair because it's too curly and big خشن - NOT OKAY!

-Saying things like "she so pretty and light/white" -ماشاء الله ببييضه وحلوه - NOT OKAY

Or saying she's cute but dark, حلوه لكن خدره - NOT OKAY!

And the list goes on.....

I feel so silly having to mention these things, but I hear them regularly, as if they're nothing. Some forgot how beautiful and amazing they are because of these beliefs. Dig deep and learn the whys before the cycle continues. (Hassanien, 2020)

For the Black participants in this study, such rhetoric was not uncommon for them to experience within their communities. It is evident from their responses that they contended with the converged experiences of gendered Islamophobia and anti-Black racism in dominant society as well as unique forms of patriarchal oppression, anti-Black racism, and colourism within their homes and communities. For example, Faduma, who is Somali and Kenyan and resides in London, described her disheartening experiences with anti-Black racism in her Islamic community:

**Faduma:** It is really interesting because, first of all, we are all Muslim, but a lot of Arabs are like really racist, and something that I experienced is that Arab people in the community would believe in the stereotype of Black people and feel

---

<sup>91</sup> Arabic word for *aunty*.

<sup>92</sup> Arabic word for *slave*.

like Black people are dumb and not interested in getting better or smart... From my experience, like I said, I went to an Islamic school. I used to enter into science fairs, but I don't know if this is because of my race or not, but they would never allow me to get first place, even if I placed the highest in my school at regionals.

**S.H.:** Did you feel like you deserved first place?

**Faduma:** Yes, because when I would be up against the whole city, I would get higher than a lot of people at my school, and a lot of people who study that profession. The way my brother was treated is another example. They would also stereotype him into very negative roles, and they would always get him into trouble. Even if he wasn't the person who was making the trouble and causing a problem, they would always get him in trouble, and I would get dragged into it somehow to fix my brother, even though he was not the one causing the trouble.

**S.H.:** Do you feel comfortable in the Islamic community considering such experiences?

**Faduma:** There are some racial divides. Like there are sometimes I want to go to an event, but I know that only Arabs are going. Stuff like that would make me uncomfortable to attend because I feel like I wouldn't be fully welcomed, but other than that, I feel fully welcomed into the community.

Through Faduma's response, it is apparent that even though Muslims within her community experience various forms of marginalization, otherness, and discrimination from the larger society at both structural and interpersonal levels, some participate in the subjugation of others, namely Black peoples and other ethnic minorities. Collins (2002) highlighted the contradictory spaces we occupy, where in one context we may be oppressed, and in another, we may be privileged and can alternate between receivers and givers of discrimination. As an extension, some non-Black Muslims are quick to challenge the ideologies within the hegemonic domain that recycle Muslims' inferiority yet uncritically accept hegemonic knowledge disseminated about Black peoples. Like Faduma, Nafisa, who is Sudanese, also shared her vulnerabilities as a minority within Islamic spaces:

I feel like at the Mosque, I don't even know how to word this without it sounding wrong. At the *Masjid*,<sup>93</sup> I feel like there are more White Muslims in a way. Like lots of Arabs that go there... I feel like I'm an outcast sometimes when there are White Muslims.

Likewise, Ranya, who is Black and Sudanese, explained that while she did not personally experience anti-Black racism within her community, she has witnessed it and recognized its pervasiveness, especially among Arabs who largely dominate the Islamic community in London. As for Kowther, who is Sudanese and comes from an ethnically diverse Islamic community in the Niagara region, anti-Black racism was not a significant issue for her at her local Mosque, "Honestly, I don't experience racism in the community. It's very open; it's very diverse and multicultural...it doesn't matter where you are from." As for Fatima and Amina, sisters who are Sudanese and live in London, they recalled multiple experiences of anti-Black racism when they were at the Mosque. Nonetheless, they overall felt welcomed and accepted most of the time.

Aside from sharing experiences of anti-Black racism within their Islamic communities, some of the Black participants noted the complexity associated with developing a sense of belonging. For example, one central theme was that some felt neither fully accepted in Black spaces because they were Muslim nor entirely accepted in Islamic spaces because they were Black. As Faduma notes:

I feel like being a Black girl and a Muslim girl is a really funny situation because people only see one. Masha'Allah,<sup>94</sup> I am blessed to be both, but a lot of people would acknowledge one aspect. Like a lot of people would, like, add me onto Arabs. A lot of people would fight that Somali people are Arab...Somali people have different battles to fight in a way than an Arab person because the skin tone is completely different. That just gives it all away, and there is a different language as well, so I feel like people can't just lump up Somali people with Arabs because, like, there is a whole difference between the language and culture and everything in between to bunch it all together. I went to private school when I

---

<sup>93</sup> Transliteration for the Arabic word for *Mosque*.

<sup>94</sup> Arabic transliteration for Praise to *God*.

was younger, and it was a Muslim-run school. There was a lot of racism in the community that was very prevalent, and I feel like it wouldn't necessarily be true for Somalis to be Arabs because Arabs don't really accept us, and the Black people don't see me as Black enough because I wear *hijab* because the *hijab* represents Islam and apparently now if you wear the *hijab* you are Arab which doesn't really work that way. It really boggles my mind because the majority of Muslims are not even Arab.

Here, Faduma highlighted the complexity associated with identity. She is confident identifying as African, but she noted the complexities associated with being homogenized as an Arab within the larger society, as her experiences with being both Somali as well as a Black girl are drastically different than being Arab. She emphasized this distinction by explaining how Arabs are typically unaccepting and racist towards Black people. She further highlighted her complex experiences by sharing that she is not considered "Black enough" in the Black community because she is Muslim and wears the veil.

Such sentiments are also reflected in the literature concerning multiracial individuals. Morning (2005) defined "multiracial" as the combination of one or more racially constructed groups. As established in the literature review, Islamophobia is conceptualized as a form of racism because Muslims have been racialized to have specific physical characteristics. Namely, they have been depicted to be brown, Arab individuals with prominent facial features (Shaheen, 2003), which may lead to people from the larger society to not consider Western European-looking individuals and Black individuals as being Muslim. Nonetheless, Black Muslims can sometimes be conceptualized as multiracial as they have to struggle with being racialized in two distinct ways: as a Muslim and as Black. Like the Black participants in this study, research has found that some multiracial students feel excluded from their racial groups as they are not considered to be "authentic" members (for example, see Johnston & Nadal, 2010; King, 2008).

Moreover, Kowther described another challenge associated with self-identification. She identified herself in a hybrid manner as both Arab and African (Afro-Arab), not fully

belonging to either one or the other, but rather remaining *in a space in between*. She elaborated that in some spaces her level of identification shifts:

I feel like sometimes, even ourselves in our communities, my parents don't identify as Black. It is weird because we are Muslim; we are Afro-Arab. They [her parents] don't see it that way. They [her parents] see Black as in the typical social media mainstream idea of Black people, which is necessarily not good or bad. For me, yeah, I don't see myself as fully Arab. I don't see myself as fully Black, and I see myself as a place in between. It is okay. You are obviously going to feel some differences. Sudan is a country that is unique in that way. We speak ethnically African languages and Arabic. There are a few tribes where they don't speak Arabic; it is an obvious discomfort, and there is sometimes you feel in between or associate with this more than that. It is going to be a constant thing, but I don't try to dwell on it too much because there's things you just cannot change...The fact is sometimes you can't identify with either Arab or African...To be completely honest, I feel comfortable at the *Masjid* and the *Dar*.<sup>95</sup> I feel like the *Masjid* did a great job at being open to different cultures, but I think me having the Arab advantage is what makes me feel more comfortable in those situations.

Moreover, Kowther, like Amina and Fatima, who are also Sudanese, expressed how their parents do not perceive themselves as Black as they associate “Blackness” with the popular media depictions of “being Black,” which is also apparent in Walaa’s social media post. This speaks to the pervasiveness of anti-Blackness, especially regarding how some parents avoid being associated with the negative depictions of Black people in the media. Nonetheless, the second-generation Sudanese youth in this study, unlike some of their parents, identify as Black. Thus, unlike their parents, instead of disassociating themselves from being Black, participants are reclaiming and redefining what it means to be Black. While this is sometimes the case, some of the Black participants also identified as Afro-Arab. As Kowther described, Sudan is rich with a variety of ethnicities. Thus, Sudanese participants identified in different ways, revealing the depth of intra-group differences. Samar also highlighted the heterogeneity of Sudanese people by describing a situation where her Kurdish friend assumed all Sudanese people identify as Black which

---

<sup>95</sup> Sudanese community centre.

also highlights the intra-group tensions within Muslim girls aside from the heterogeneity of Sudanese people:

...we were basically talking about Sudanese people, and then she believed that Sudanese people are Black. Even though I'm Sudanese and Black, there's lighter skin tones, darker tones. There isn't one shade for what is Sudanese culture.

Unlike Samar, Shada identified as Sudanese, Black, and Muslim, but not as Arab. She believed her multiple identities are powerful as she has a rich history and heritage to draw upon:

I think being Muslim and Black is a superpower, even if it's never my own experiences. I have the history, the background of other Muslim women who wear the *hijab* or other Black women that wear the *hijab*, or other Black women in society, and I have their history and heritage to look back on. Who I am as a person, when I see other Black girls at my school or what not, when I start conversations with them, it's always friendly and always good vibes because we both know at the end of the day with our school and everything we are brought together by something.

Collins (2002) explained that the power associated with reclaiming the “power of a free mind” (p. 285) is important for resisting the hegemonic domain of power. It is evident that Shada engaged in this resistance strategy through “crafting counter-hegemonic knowledge that fosters changed consciousness” (p. 285) by focusing on the strengths and uniqueness of her multiple identities. Collins (2002) described that this process could occur within various social locations, such as schools, religious institutions, and families. As noted with some of the ethnic and racial minorities within the group of Muslim girls, they typically engaged with counter-hegemonic knowledge in unique ways primarily within two spaces: their schools and religious communities. Furthermore, within Shada's response, she highlighted the ease of communicating with people who are most similar to her as their experiences are derived from a similar standpoint. This is unsurprising given that some minorities within Islamic communities develop sub-community centres to feel an increased sense of belonging. Faduma made this evident by explaining how she felt more comfortable in her Somali community relative to the Islamic one in London:

Unlike the Arab community, we don't have to face racism (in the Somali community), so there's a higher sense of trust with the Somali community, and I am encouraged to complete my education.

Furthermore, while the majority of the Black participants who are Sudanese and reside in the Niagara region noted that their Islamic community is multi-ethnic and they rarely experienced anti-Black racism as often as the participants in London do, they still developed a sub-community called the *Dar*. Not only did the *Dar* act as a form of support in terms of building a strong identity, but also it served as an educational support centre where previous graduates help students in their field of study:

It's fun growing up with people at the *Dar* who are very similar. It feels like you are in your home country. (Kowther)

In my community, anytime it is around exam time, they always they host a thing. We have a thing called a *Dar* where we go. We just study for exams because we have a lot of university students in the community who probably already graduated already or are almost finished, and they come and help us. I remember in the ninth grade, I went to the *Dar*, and I was like struggling with history a lot, and there was this one Sudanese man who was very educated in history and literally taught me like every single concept I needed to know, and I literally passed the exam easy. And they do that every year, and last year, I went to one of those. They have food and drinks, and sometimes when we get a little bored, they play some music. And my parents are very supportive of my education. They always ask me how I'm doing in school or anything I'm struggling with, so they are very involved in my learning rather than not saying anything at all and they want to know what I'm doing and ask me questions and stuff. (Nafisa)

As we can see, the *Dar* is a community centre that aims to help students overcome educational barriers and to create a greater sense of belonging for Sudanese youth. By providing free support that is not offered to some of the participants within their schools, the *Dar* defies the structural challenges some Sudanese students contend with. Some of these challenges include unfamiliarity with the education system, which may inhibit their enrollment in post-secondary and, as noted in Chapter 4, the lack of support some students experience from their teachers within their schools. The *Dar* also fosters a safe space from any possible racism they may experience within their larger Islamic community.



While some educational research has included Black Muslims as participants (see Mirza & Meetoo, 2018; Collet, 2007), it did not focus on how participants experienced anti-Black racism within their communities and schools. With that mentioned, some studies have touched on the experiences of Black Muslims in the American context (for example, see Frazier, 2009; Karim, 2009); however, this work focused more on how African American women use Islam as a tool of empowerment (Frazier, 2009) and how American Muslim identities are developed among youth of various ethnic identities, including African American youth (Karim, 2009). Specifically, regarding the latter, Karim (2009) highlighted how one African American participant who was a recent convert to Islam felt more comfortable in African American Mosques and was warned to avoid South-Asian or Arab Mosques. However, the dynamics of intra-ethnic relationships in the U.S. are very different than those in Canada, especially considering the history of African American Muslims and the prevalence of ethnically and racially segregated Mosques in the U.S.

Nonetheless, conversations surrounding anti-Black racism and colourism are scant within the Canadian and American Islamic communities. Hill et al. (2015) stated that anti-racism work and sensitivity training is beginning to develop within Islamic spaces in an effort to prevent them from “becoming toxic, ethnically and racially polarized spaces” (p. 6). However, approaches are limited due to the lack of research centering minority voices within Islamic spaces. Hill et al. (2015) noted that their “survey is the first of its kind and provides a strong platform from which to direct research and programming” (p. 29), and they call for more research to be conducted on the experiences of ethnic and racial minorities within Islamic spaces—a call that has been answered by this study. Besides this, the current study builds on Hill et al. (2015) by including how sexism is further imbricated with anti-Black racism within Islamic communities using a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative one.

## **Conclusion**

In Chapter 4, participants shared how they experienced gendered Islamophobia as well as other forms of oppression in their schools. Such occurrences are significantly driven by

binary logic that has a tendency to homogenize groups of people. In Chapter 5, participants' narratives have problematized such binary logic that has routinely essentialized the experiences of Muslim women as passive victims. Indeed, the participants' experiences in this study were not intended to generalize the entire population of Muslim girls; however, they provided significant insight into some of their lives. For instance, opposite to the colonial trope of the veil being a symbol of timeless patriarchy, many of the participants in this study viewed the veil as a feminist gesture, underscoring the notion that female liberation does not equate to one definition, which arguably has been hijacked by capitalism and defined based on White middle-class femininity for far too long. Furthermore, contrary to the Western social imagination that posits that all Muslim girls are oppressed by their families and are encouraged to wed early, the participants in this study stressed their family's encouragement to attend post-secondary school and develop a career.

While the participants viewed their families as supportive, they also admitted that they experienced some challenges with them. Namely, they found it difficult to contend with sexism, where some of their parents privileged their sons over their daughters. Moreover, while the participants viewed their communities as welcoming, some of the participants experienced gendered bodily regulation where they were condemned for not adhering to modest clothing norms and "acceptable behaviour." The participants particularly emphasized that the boys in the community were congratulated for the same behaviours they were scrutinized for. Participants engaged in counter-hegemonic knowledge formation by firmly believing that such behaviours are contrary to their understandings of Islam and challenged such cultural norms by citing Islamic sources.

Overall, the participants' experiences with their families and communities problematized the essentialized stereotypes which cast all Muslim girls as being forced to wear the veil and marry early instead of pursuing higher education. Furthermore, the summarized findings thus far contribute to the body of research on the experiences of Muslim girls in Canadian public schools as there are few studies, especially within that last decade that

explored their experiences, and even fewer studies that contextualized their schooling experiences with their familial and community experiences.

Equally important, the findings of this chapter provided insight into how participants' experiences deviated based on their unique social identities. Namely, while the participants shared experiences within their community it became apparent some of the participants' experiences deviated based on their ethnicity and race. There has been one study (Hill et al., 2015) that has surveyed ethnic and racial minorities in Islamic communities within North America; however, the respondents were primarily American, and it did not focus on the experiences of Muslim girls. Thus, the current research builds on the previous research on the experiences of Muslims within their communities and is the first study, to my knowledge, that explores the educational experiences of Muslim girls and considers how they experience converged forms of oppression in addition to sexism within their communities. In other words, not only does this research build on the significant research of Muslim girls that considers their experiences of gendered Islamophobia in schools and sexism within their own communities, but it also provides new research insights into how participants experience racism and ethnocentrism in addition to sexism within their communities and schools. Applying anti-racist feminist principles throughout the research process revealed that some Muslim girls are more vulnerable than others within their schools as well as within their communities. Policy recommendations based on such findings will be outlined in the following chapter.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

#### **Introduction**

This qualitative case-study explored the experiences of 20 Muslim girls who were enrolled in public secondary schools in Ontario. I pursued this research endeavour, in part, because of my own experiences of Islamophobia in the education system as well as the increase in Islamophobia within the larger Canadian context. Having closely examined existing research exploring the experiences of Muslims girls, major gaps in the literature were apparent. Given the limitations of these studies, the main purpose of this study was to explore Muslim girls' experiences with Islamophobia in public schools and to contextualize these experiences within their homes as well as their communities. Building upon the scant research on this subject, this study has revealed how Muslim girls' school experiences are shaped by their interactions with their educators and peers, as well as with their families and communities. This research also addressed gaps in the literature by revealing how participants' myriad identities, like their racial experiences, influence their lived realities. This was made possible by drawing on anti-racist feminism as well as postcolonial feminism which fostered the ability to look beyond gender and religion to observe how other aspects of participants' social identities shaped their experiences. Overall, the findings contribute to an expanding body of research on Muslim girls' educational experiences within the Canadian context and will help with organized efforts that aim to effectively meet the needs of Muslim youth within Canadian schools. This concluding chapter begins with a summary of the major findings of this study in answer to the initial research questions posed. Before delving into the summary of the findings, it is pertinent to revisit the research questions which guided this study:

- What are Muslim girls' experiences with teachers, administrators, and other instructional staff in their school?
- How do Muslim girls' intersectional differences impact their experiences?
- Are there differences regarding how students experience their schools based on their geographical location?

Moreover, this chapter will not only address the contributions of this study to research, but also it offers educational policy recommendations. Subsequently, a discussion of the limitations of this study will be followed by suggestions for future research.

### **Revisiting the Research**

In this section, I review this study's findings organized by sub-sections that address each of the emergent themes within the research. In addition to including a summary of each emergent theme, each sub-section will also highlight research contributions as well as discuss policy recommendations.

#### ***Experiences of Islamophobia and Gendered Islamophobia in Schools***

All of the participants reported at least one incident of Islamophobia with either an educator or peer at their respective schools. As participants recounted, teachers would facilitate classroom discussions and activities that recycled colonial tropes, further reifying the constructed binary between the self-defined civilized West and the uncivilized Eastern *other* who does not belong. Similarly, participants' peers would engage in name-calling and derogatory questions, which perpetuated the *Islamic Terrorist* stereotype. While teachers and peers adopted essentialist depictions that situated participants as violent and barbaric, they also internalized gendered Islamophobic stereotypes that further complicated participants' educational and social experiences.

Furthermore, a common experience of the Muslim girls in this study was that they contemplated reporting their teachers' behaviour. This reluctance had less to do with students being fearful of their teachers and more to do with their inability to prove their teachers' subtle differential treatment, such as spending less time and energy assisting Muslim students compared to other students. Moreover, some participants felt that their

teachers ostracized them in the classroom as they would avoid calling on them to answer questions and had low expectations of them.

Participants also experienced gendered Islamophobia and detailed incidences of peers and teachers presuming they were oppressed by their families. Stereotypes that imagined their families prioritizing marriage over their education were addressed in my conversations with participants, while they noted how veiling was perceived as forced rather than a choice. The veil was the subject of much discussion in this study, largely because it is an aesthetic which has made Muslim girls hyper-visible and vulnerable to gendered forms of Islamophobia. As assumed in the Western imaginary, the veil is a signifier of backwardness of the cultures and religion of Muslims, while also symbolizing the subjugation of women. Such assumptions reflect colonial discourses that were constructed in the effort to exploit and marginalize non-White bodies. Specifically, colonial feminism (Ahmed, 1992) painted Muslim women as victims in need of rescue in order for colonizers to maintain their self-defined image of morality and to justify invading and exploiting Eastern lands under the premise of *saving*. Thus, it is unsurprising that some of the participants' peers and teachers attempted to *save* Muslim girls by suggesting that they remove their veils. Clearly, such remarks were provoked by colonial tropes that shape our social consciousness and serve as a basis for judgement that is not always rooted in the realities of Muslim girls. Indeed, the experiences the Muslim girls in this study had with their families bear no resemblance to the assumptions perpetuated by teachers, peers, and the broader society. The findings of this study address the need for more research to be conducted on Muslim youth within the Canadian context, especially with regards to gendered Islamophobia (Hindy, 2016).

### ***Muslim Girls and Intersectional Identities***

Although participants had common experiences with gendered Islamophobia, their experiences diverged based on their race, SES, and immigration status. This is significant as most of the research on Muslim girls has focused on how religion and gender shape their experiences without highlighting how other categories of social difference play a

role in their educational pursuits. This was especially evident given the unique experiences that Black Muslim girls in this study experienced both within their schools as well as within the Muslim community. Hearing the *N-Word* in the hallways amongst peers was common for some of the Black participants in the study. Alarming, their school principal was also comfortable using the racial expletive. Although participants contacted the school board to lodge a complaint, the school board silenced them by not responding. Furthermore, the participants also experienced gendered racialized discourses during their encounters with some of their teachers who recycled the *angry, loud Black girl* stereotype (Ashley, 2014), which increased participants' feelings of exclusion within their school. Thus, the Black participants in this study not only had to contend with the stereotypes associated with Muslims in general, but also dealt with gendered Islamophobia, the myth of criminality generally associated with Black people, as well as the gendered stereotypes of Black girls. Furthermore, Black Muslim participants' experiences of microaggressions converged at the intersection of Islamophobia and anti-Black racism, where participants were unsure whether their teachers' actions were because of their race or their religion.

Other than race, participants' experiences with gendered Islamophobia also diverged based on their SES and immigration status. A common finding in the literature concerning Muslim girls in schools was that their guidance counselors academically streamed them (Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Zine, 2001). The current research builds on this finding and offers further insights by uncovering that the participants who were more likely to experience academic streaming were of low-SES households and were either refugees or immigrants. This finding reveals that a sub-population of Muslims may be more vulnerable in the school system as they may experience increased challenges reaching their academic pursuits. This demonstrates that efforts to support Muslim students in education requires attention to varying social differences, which caters to their unique circumstances, rather than implementing a one-size-fits-all intervention that specifically targets Muslims as a whole. Regarding the latter, even if Muslim students achieve academic success, they still tend to experience Islamophobia within their schools,

which problematizes how they view themselves in relation to others and complicates their sense of belonging.

Furthermore, the participants described other ways in which their experiences were compounded based on their SES and immigration status. Namely, some of the participants were required to work in order to financially support their families, which limited their time for studying and interfered with their concentration in school. This speaks to the structural barriers of students who come from low SES households experience, which may lead to *academic failure*. Furthermore, those who were newcomers to Canada struggled with learning a new language while simultaneously navigating a new education system. In addition to this, they had less guidance from their parents who had little experience with the Canadian education system.

There has been limited empirical research that has addressed Muslim girls' intersecting experiences based on their race, SES, and immigration status with the Canadian public education system. As such, drawing on an anti-racist feminist framework enabled the opportunity to generate knowledge about the diversity of Muslim girls' gendered experiences while underscoring the need for future research to build on this knowledge. In addition to SES, immigration status, and race, the participants' experiences also diverged based on their geographical location in relation to their school accommodations, which will be summarized in the next subsection. However, before doing so, it is important to acknowledge that participants in this study were not passive victims. They were girls with agency and conviction who challenged preconceived notions of Muslims and built relationships with friends who supported them.



### ***Experiences With School Accommodations***

As mentioned, participants' experiences with their school accommodations drastically differed based on their geographical location. For instance, in the Niagara region,<sup>96</sup> participants experienced more challenges with accommodation relative to participants in London. Participants in the GTA did not report major challenges with their accommodations. As noted in Chapter 4, there could be a link between their experiences in their respective geographical locations and their local school board's religious accommodation guidelines and policies. Equally important, a geographical location's demographics pertaining to diversity may also influence how educators deliver religious accommodation.

The findings of this study contribute to research in several pertinent ways. Namely, there has been limited research to date that has compared how Muslim students' experiences with accommodation differed based on their unique geographical location within a larger region that has a shared policy commitment to equity and inclusion. Based on such findings, significant policy recommendations are highlighted. Namely, as there is a shared commitment that students of a minority faith are not to be treated with discrimination and exclusion, school boards and schools located in regions with a less diverse demographic are recommended to draw from the strategies of boards located in diverse regions to ensure that their minority students are effectively accommodated. However, these must be genuine efforts that are informed by an understanding of how the shared well-being of students not only benefit marginalized students, but also the school community and the society at large. Furthermore, the findings serve as a starting point for reimagining how religious accommodations can be reformed to effectively address the challenge with requesting accommodation as well as the limitations that accompany the

---

<sup>96</sup> The Niagara region has a significantly lower population of Muslims relative to London; whereas, the GTA has the highest population of Muslims compared to the Niagara region and London (National House Survey, 2011).

lack of accountability measures that schools and school boards have instituted. Finally, the findings also contribute to the scant literature on how Muslim students are accommodated within their schools in the Canadian context. It is important to acknowledge, however, that while there is limited research on the experiences of Muslim students, the role teachers play in the lives of Muslim students is contested within the literature. As the findings of this study demonstrated, participants shared both positive and negative experiences with their teachers, and such experiences were influenced by their geographical location, SES, race, and immigration status.

### ***Perceptions of the Veil, Family, and Community***

Participants' perceptions of their families, communities, as well as the veil is an overarching theme that emerged from the findings. This is of particular importance as it underscores that while Muslim girls experience challenges that may be culturally specific, they were drastically different than the media tropes informed by gendered colonial myths. The participants revealed that their parents do not force them to veil, and furthermore, the participants shared that they viewed the veil as a feminist gesture.

Moreover, the participants contested such taken-for-granted beliefs associated with Muslim girls by revealing that the challenges with their families predominantly had to do with sexism, where their parents gave preferential treatment to their male siblings. In addition, a significant finding was that all the participants' parents hoped that their daughters attain post-secondary degrees as they viewed educational success as important. Thus, the participants viewed their families as an unwavering form of support irrespective of their familial challenges which, in addition to sexism, also included SES and their immigration status. Regarding SES, some of the participants who came from a low SES household shared how their parents' support was limited at times due to their inability to sustain them financially and, as previously mentioned, some parents who immigrated to Canada had challenges supporting their daughters as they had limited knowledge about the Canadian education system. Such findings of this study are important in several ways. Namely, they challenge educators' essentialized conceptions

of and preoccupation with Muslim girls being prone to familial abuse. Moreover, the findings also provide insight into the unique but common challenges of Muslim girls, which can inform structural efforts aimed at improving the experiences of marginalized youth within schools. Specifically, by drawing from anti-racist feminism, it is recommended that policymakers and other educational stakeholders offer tailored support to Muslim students who come from lower SES households and/or have parents who are not familiar with the education system.

Regarding participants' experiences with their community, they contended with gendered challenges. Specifically, actions such as speaking to the opposite gender or dressing in tight clothes were grounds for Muslim peers to negatively evaluate participants, whereas participants noted that boys did not have to contend with such scrutiny; rather, boys were congratulated for some of the behaviours girls were criticized for. While the participants shared these common gendered experiences, their perceptions of their communities diverged based on their race and ethnicity, further highlighting how anti-racist feminist principles contribute to research.

Much of the pioneering research on the experiences of Muslim girls in relation to their school experiences has revealed that they not only experience Islamophobia and sexism in their schools, but also experience sexism within their own communities and families (Rezai-Rashti, 1994, 2005). The findings of this study build on this theme within the literature by revealing how participants' experiences within their communities were also compounded by their race and ethnicity in addition to their gender. Specifically, Black participants revealed that they not only experienced anti-Black racism within their larger Islamic community as a result of White supremacist ideologies, but also they encountered shadism/colourism within their own communities as a consequence of internalized oppression. This both contributed to their feelings of exclusion at times and complicated their sense of belonging. Nonetheless, Black participants, unlike some of their parents, engaged in redefining what it means to be Black (see Collins, 2002). Moreover, participants who are ethnic minorities within their Islamic communities also experienced

compounded challenges. Namely, some of them felt excluded because they did not speak Arabic and because charity efforts were predominately targeted towards the majority ethnicity within their community.

Qualitative research on the experiences of ethnic and racial minorities within Islamic communities in the Canadian context is limited. While there has been limited research on this topic within the American context, the history as well as the demographics of Muslims in the U.S. are drastically different than those of Canadian Muslims given the unique history of African American Muslims in the U.S. Such research underscores that while there are differences between the American and Canadian contexts the racial and ethnic minority Muslims within Islamic spaces share common experiences and outcomes associated with anti-Blackness as well as ethnocentrism, namely, feelings of exclusion and unease entering Mosques or attending community events.

Understanding how racial and ethnic minorities experience their Islamic communities contributes to research in multiple ways. First, the findings serve as a starting point for educational researchers to consider how the space of community influences the educational experiences of students who are considered racialized within their own communities so they can be better supported. Also, the research further highlights the need for policymakers to comprehensively adopt an effective intersectional approach when revising equity policies. These findings also suggest that it may be beneficial if Islamic community leaders across Canada began collecting demographic information in addition to surveying the perceptions of racialized community members so interventions can be developed to improve the experiences of Black Muslims with Islamic communities. As this research suggests, considering social campaigns for charitable efforts that also reflect ethnic and racial minority members would be a good starting point as well as developing sermons which reflect the Islamic philosophy of racial equality. Pertaining to the latter, this research presents specific mannerisms among community members that subtly and overtly reflect anti-Black racism and shadism as well as ethnocentrism. As such, sermons can be used as a vehicle to problematize these common

occurrences that reflect anti-Blackness and ethnocentrism so community members as a collective can become conscious of the harmful effects of their actions and realize that such behaviours are not in accordance with Islamic teachings. Understanding the educational experiences of marginalized youth should not be limited to their experiences within school walls; instead, it should consider multiple aspects of their life, including their communities, in order to holistically understand their experiences (Watt, 2016).

### **Research Limitations**

There were several research limitations associated with this study. Adopting a qualitative case study comes with research limitations as mentioned in Chapter 3. Yet, these limitations can also be viewed as strengths. Namely, a case study's inability to generalize to a population is perceived as a weakness; however, the goal of this research was not to engage in statistical generalization. Rather, it was to engage in analytical generalization by comparing findings to previous theory and research (Yin, 2014) and to gain extensive insights that generate detailed and comprehensive accounts of a particular group of students in a given time and a given location. As such, the aim of this research was exploratory and descriptive and builds on previous research by revealing both the similarities and differences associated with Muslim girls' educational experiences.

Furthermore, some limitations associated with this study relate to the research participants' diversity. Namely, all the participants in this study, veiled and non-veiled, were faith-oriented, practicing Muslims. In order to capture the essence of Muslim girls' diverse experiences, it would have been more fruitful to also include non-practicing girls who identify as Muslims. Another related limitation with this study is that participants were recruited from Islamic community centres rather than from their respective schools. As my goal was to ensure a diverse sample, I was interested in sourcing participants from a variety of schools and school boards. As this is a time-limited doctoral dissertation, accessing ethics approval from various school boards would be time consuming. As Nizoyov and Pluim (2009) asserted, researchers gaining access to school boards is challenging. Thus, to remedy this possible limitation associated with gaining access to participants from community centres rather than school boards, one of the criteria for

girls to participate in this study was that they be registered at an Ontario Public Secondary School.

### **Future Research**

The findings of this research serve as multiple starting points for future research. Namely, little is known about the educational experiences of Black Muslim students against the backdrop of how race, gender, and religion intersect. Therefore, a future analysis that focuses on Black Muslim girls' educational experiences is recommended.

Correspondingly, including a more diverse sample of Muslim girls may result in future research contributions describing how unaddressed social identities may further compound Muslim girls' schooling experiences. Finally, as there is a gap in the literature concerning teachers' voices, future research needs to include the voices of teachers and other educational leaders as participants.

## References

- Abukhattala, I. (2004). *Educational and cultural adjustment of the Arab Muslim students in Canadian university classrooms* (Publication No. NA). [Doctoral dissertation, McGill University].
- Abu-Lughod, L. (2013). *Do Muslim women need saving?* Harvard University Press.
- Ahmed, L. (1992). *Women and gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate*. Yale University Press.
- Al-deen, T. J. (2019). Agency in action: Young Muslim women and negotiating higher education in Australia. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 40(5), 598-613. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2019.1576120>
- Al-Saji, A. (2010). The racialization of Muslim veils: A philosophical analysis. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 36(8), 875-902. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453710375589>
- Ali, S. (2012). *The experiences of Muslim girls with curriculum/schooling in public secondary schools in Ontario, Canada* (Publication No. NA) [Master's thesis, University of Toronto]. [https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/33630/1/Ali\\_Sana\\_201211\\_MA\\_thesis.pdf](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/33630/1/Ali_Sana_201211_MA_thesis.pdf)
- Ali, S., & Bagheri, E. (2009). Practical suggestions to accommodate the needs of Muslim students on campus. *New Directions for Student Services*, (125), 47-54. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.307>
- Alimahomed-Wilson, S. (2020). The matrix of gendered Islamophobia: Muslim women's repression and resistance. *Gender & Society*, 34(4), 648-678. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243220932156>
- Alizai, H. (2017). *Impact of Islamophobia on post-secondary Muslim students attending Ontario universities* (Publication No. 4716) [Master's thesis, Western University]. Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository.
- Allen, C. (2010). *Islamophobia*. England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Allen, J. (2017). *She just wanted to" be like any Canadian teenager: Representations of Muslim women in local newspapers, legislation and political debates in post 9/11 Canada*. [Master's Research Project, University of Toronto]. <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/94135/1/she%20just%20wanted%20to%20be%20like%20any%20other%20canadian.pdf>

- Alvi, S. (2008). *An analysis of how hijabi youth experience social activities in Ottawa secondary schools* (Publication No. AAT MR48586) [Master's thesis, University of Ottawa]. <https://ruor.uottawa.ca/handle/10393/27749>
- Amjad, A. (2018). Muslim students' experiences and perspectives on current teaching practices in Canadian schools. *Power and Education*, 10(3), 315-332. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757743818790276>
- Anderson, J. (1988). *The education of Blacks in the south, 1860-1935*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Anyon, J. (2008). *Theory and educational research: Toward critical social explanation*. Routledge.
- Archer, L. (2002). Change, Culture and Tradition: British Muslim pupils talk about Muslim girls' post-16 'choices'. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 5(4), 359-376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332022000030888>
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1995) *The post-colonial studies reader*. Routledge.
- Ashley, W. (2014). The angry Black woman: The impact of pejorative stereotypes on psychotherapy with Black women. *Social work in public health*, 29(1), 27-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19371918.2011.619449>
- Aslam, M. (2011). *Muslim Pakistani-Canadian women's experiences in Canadian higher education: A case study at one Ontario university campus* (Publication No. NA) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto]. [https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/30073/1/Aslam\\_Mariam\\_201111\\_MA\\_thesis.pdf](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/30073/1/Aslam_Mariam_201111_MA_thesis.pdf)
- Asmar, C. Proude, E. & Inge, L. (2004). Unwelcomed sisters? An analysis of findings from a study of how Muslim women (and Muslim men) experience university, *Australian Journal of Education*, 48(1), 47-63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000494410404800104>
- Azimi, S. (2011). *Female Muslim-American students' perceptions of socio-cultural accommodation in California public high schools* (Publication No. 3500444) [Doctoral Dissertation, University of the Pacific]. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/927747264?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>



- Bagguley, P. & Hussain, Y. (2007). *The role of higher education in providing opportunities for South Asian women*. The Policy Press.
- Baker, N. V., Gregware, P. R., & Cassidy, M. A. (1999). Family killing fields: Honor rationales in the murder of women. *Violence against women*, 5(2), 164-184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780129952005>
- Bannerji, H. (2020a). Introducing racism: Notes towards an anti-racist feminism. In H. Bannerji (Eds.), *The Ideological Condition: Selected Essays on History, Race and Gender* (pp. 195-203). Brill.
- Bannerji, H. (2020b). The paradox of diversity: The construction of a multicultural Canada and 'women of colour'. In H. Bannerji (Eds.), *The Ideological Condition: Selected Essays on History, Race and Gender* (pp. 327-363). Brill.
- Basford, L. E. (2008). *From mainstream to East African charter: East African Muslim students' experiences in US schools* (Publication No. NA) [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Minnesota]. <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/45637>
- Basit, T. (1997). 'I want more freedom, but not too much': British Muslim girls and the dynamism of family values. *Gender and Education*, 9(4), 425-439. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540259721178>
- Barber, J. (2015 October 2). Canada's Conservatives vow to create 'barbaric cultural practices' hotline. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/02/canada-conservatives-barbaric-cultural-practices-hotline>
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The qualitative report*, 13(4), 544-559. <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR13-4/baxter.pdf>
- Bleich, E. (2012). Defining and researching Islamophobia. *Review of Middle East Studies*, 46(2), 180-189. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41940895>
- Bowleg, L. (2012). The problem with the phrase women and minorities: Intersectionality—an important theoretical framework for public health. *American Journal of Public Health*, 102(7), 1267-1273. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2012.300750>
- Brooks, A., & Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2007). An invitation to feminist research. In S.N. Hesse-Biber and P.L. Leavy (Eds.), *Feminist Research Practice*. Sage Publications Ltd.

- Brown, L. (2009). A failure to communicate on the cross cultural campus. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13, 439-454.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315309331913>
- Bullock, K. (2002). *Rethinking Muslim women and the veil: Challenging historical & modern stereotypes*. IIIT.
- Bullock, K. H., & Jafri, G. J. (2000). Media (mis) representations: Muslim women in the Canadian nation. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 20(2), 35-40.
- Chaney, C., & Robertson, R. V. (2015). Armed and dangerous? An examination of fatal shootings of unarmed Black people by police. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 8(4), 45-78.
- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). Part 1 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982* (UK), c 11.
- Christoffersen, A. (2017). Intersectional approaches to equality research and data. *Equality Challenge Unit*. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.ecu.ac.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2017/04/Research\\_and\\_data\\_briefing\\_2\\_Intersectional\\_approaches\\_to\\_equality\\_research\\_and\\_data.pdf](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2017/04/Research_and_data_briefing_2_Intersectional_approaches_to_equality_research_and_data.pdf)
- Codjoe, H. M. (2001). Fighting public enemy of Black academic achievement—the persistence of racism and the schooling experiences of Black students in Canada. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 4(4), 343-375.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320120096652>
- Collins, P. (1986) Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of Black Feminist thought. *Social Problems*, 33(6), S14-S32.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/800672>
- Collins, P.H. (1990). *Black Feminist Thought*. Nueva York.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). Gender, Black feminism, and Black political economy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 568(1), 41-53.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/000271620056800105>
- Collins, P. H. (2002). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.
- Collins, P., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality*. Polity Press.

- Collet, B. (2007). Islam: National identity and public secondary education: Perspectives from Somali diaspora in Toronto. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 10(2), 131–157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320701330668>
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *U. Chi. Legal F.*, 139-167.
- Crenshaw, K. (1998). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. In A. Phillips (Ed.), *Feminism and politics*, (pp. 314-343). Oxford University Press on Demand.
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2ndEd.) Sage.
- Cristillo, L. (2008). *Religiosity, education and civic belonging: Muslim youth in New York City public schools*. Teachers College Press.
- Cuadraz, G. H., & Uttal, L. (1999). Intersectionality and in-depth interviews: Methodological strategies for analyzing race, class, and gender. *Race, Gender & Class*, 156-186.
- Davis, K. (2008). Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful. *Feminist theory*, 9(1), 67-85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700108086364>
- Davis, K. (2014). Intersectionality as critical methodology. *Writing academic texts differently: Intersectional feminist methodologies and the playful art of writing*, 17-29.
- Dei, G. J. S. (1997). Beware of false dichotomies: Revisiting the idea of “Black-focused” schools in Canadian contexts. *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 31(4), 58-79. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcs.31.4.58>
- Dei, G. (2003). Challenges for anti-racist educators in Ontario today. *Orbit*, 33(3), 2-5.
- Dei, G. J. (2008). Schooling as community: Race, schooling, and the education of African youth. *Journal of Black studies*, 38(3), 346-366. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934707306570>

- Delic, Z. (2014). *Canadian Islam: Belonging and loyalty*. Kirtas Publishing.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (Vol. 2). Sage.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2011). Chapter 1: Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, (4th ed., pp. 1-19). Sage.
- Diab, R. N. (2008). *Visible Muslims in a non-Muslim world: Muslim girls' experiences in Canadian public high schools* (Publication No. NA). [Master's thesis, University of Windsor]. <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/8259/>
- District School Board of Niagara. Religious Accommodations Guidelines (2013). Retrieved from: <https://www.dsbn.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/dsbn-religious-accommodations-guidelines.pdf?sfvrsn=39407b1f0>
- Dovidio, J. F., Gaertner, S. E., Kawakami, K., & Hodson, G. (2002). Why can't we just get along? Interpersonal biases and interracial distrust. *Cultural diversity and ethnic minority psychology*, 8(2), 88-102. <https://doi/10.1037/1099-9809.8.2.88>
- Drolet, M., & Arcand, I. (2013). Positive development, sense of belonging, and support of peers among early adolescents: Perspectives of different actors. *International Education Studies*, 6(4), 29-38.
- El Guindi, Fadwa; Sherifa Zahur (2009). Hijab, In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the IslamicWorld*. <https://doi/10.1093/acref/9780195305135.001.0001>
- El Habti, R. (2004). Laicite, women's rights and the headscarf issue in France. Retrieved from: [http://www.karamah.org/docs/veil\\_paper.pdf](http://www.karamah.org/docs/veil_paper.pdf)
- El Nour, A. M. (2012). *Learning in the Company of Women: The Intersection of Race, Gender, and Religion in the Educational and Career Experience of Immigrant Professional Sudanese Muslim Women in the United States* (Publication No. NA). [Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University]. [https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws\\_etd/send\\_file/send?accession=osu1354658748&disposition=inline](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=osu1354658748&disposition=inline)
- Elmir, R. (2016 September 16). How Muslim women bear the brunt of Islamophobia. Retrieved from: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/09/16/how-muslim-women-bear-the-brunt-of-islamophobia/?utm\\_term=.053b128e9f81](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/09/16/how-muslim-women-bear-the-brunt-of-islamophobia/?utm_term=.053b128e9f81)
- Evans-Winters, V. E., & Esposito, J. (2010). Other people's daughters: Critical race feminism and Black girls' education. *Educational Foundations*, 24(1-2), 11-24.

- Fahmy, S. (2004). Picturing Afghan women: A content analysis of AP wire photographs during the Taliban regime and after the fall of the Taliban regime. *Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands)*, 66(2), 91-112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016549204041472>
- Fanon, F. (2004). Algeria unveiled. In P. Duara (Ed.), *Decolonization: perspectives from now and then*, (pp. 42-55). Routledge.
- Fine, M. (1994). Working the hyphens: Reinventing the Self and Other in qualitative research. In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln. (Eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 70- 82). Sage.
- Fine, M., & Sirin, S. R. (2008). *Muslim American youth: Understanding hyphenated identities through multiple methods*. NYU Press.
- Fine, S. (2015 February 27). Quebec judge's no-head-scarf rule contradicts prior Supreme Court case. Retrieved from: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/quebec-court-supports-judge-who-refused-case-unless-hijab-removed/article23229155/>
- Francis, L. J., & McKenna, U. (2018). The experience of victimisation among Muslim adolescents in the UK: The effect of psychological and religious factors. *Religions*, 9(8), 243. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9080243>
- Frazier, R. K. (2009). *Power and Surrender: African American Sunni Women and Embodied Agency*. Georgia: Institute for Women's Gender, and Sexuality studies.
- Freeman, M., & Vasconcelos, E. F. S. (2010). Critical social theory: Core tenets, inherent issues. In M. Freeman (Ed., *Critical social theory and evaluation practice* (pp. 7-19). New Directions for evaluation (127).
- Gaertner, S. L., & Dovidio, J. F. (2005). Understanding and addressing contemporary racism: From aversive racism to the common ingroup identity model. *Journal of Social issues*, 61(3), 615-639.
- Gentrup, S., Lorenz, G., Kristen, C., & Kogan, I. (2020). Self-fulfilling prophecies in the classroom: Teacher expectations, teacher feedback and student achievement. *Learning and Instruction*, 66, 101-296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2019.101296>
- Goldstein, T. (2000). Classroom doors at Christmas: Negotiating religious difference in public school. In C. E. James (Ed.), *Experiencing difference* (pp. 99-105). Fernwood Publishing.

- Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Noguera, P. A. (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 59-68. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X09357621>
- Groeneveld, E. (2009). 'Be a feminist or just dress like one': BUST, fashion and feminism as lifestyle. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 18(2), 179-190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589230902812471>
- Gunel, E. (2007). *Understanding Muslim girls' experiences in midwestern school settings: Negotiating their cultural identities and interpreting the social studies curriculum* (Publication No. NA). [Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University]. [https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws\\_etd/send\\_file/send?accession=osu1181845395&disposition=inline](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=osu1181845395&disposition=inline)
- Guo, Y. (2011). Perspectives of immigrant Muslim parents: Advocating for religious diversity in Canadian schools. *Multicultural Education*, 18(2), 55-60.
- Hamdani, D. (2015). Canadian Muslims: A statistical review. *The Canadian Dawn Foundation*.
- Hassanien, W. (2020 June 7). In *Facebook* [Status update]. <https://www.facebook.com/walaa.hassanien/posts/10163581080035545>
- Hill, M., Kowalski, D., Kocak, M., Muhammad, H., Ahmed, S., Islam, N., & Collaborative, M. A. R. (2015). Study of Intra-Muslim Ethnic Relations. Retrieved from: <https://www.thefyi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/MuslimARC-InterEthnic-Study-2015.pdf>
- Hirschfield, P. J. (2008). Preparing for prison? The criminalization of school discipline in the USA. *Theoretical Criminology*, 12(1), 79-101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480607085795>
- Halliday, F. (1999). Islamophobia reconsidered. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22(5), 892-902. <https://doi.org/10.1080/014198799329305>
- Hamilton, G. (2015 February 26). You are not suitable dressed: Quebec judge refused to hear single mother's because of hijab. Retrieved from: <http://nationalpost.com/news/canada/quebec-hijab-judge>
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. Routledge.
- Hammond, R. A., & Axelrod, R. (2006). The evolution of ethnocentrism. *Journal of*

- Conflict Resolution*, 50(6), 926-936.
- Hancock, A. M. (2007). When multiplication doesn't equal quick addition: Examining intersectionality as a research paradigm. *Perspectives on politics*, 63-79.  
<https://doi/10.1017/Si53>
- Handa, A. (2003). *Of silk saris and mini-skirts: Girls walk the tightrope of culture*. Women's Press.
- Hanson, P. A. (2009). *American Muslim Girls' Experiences in Public High Schools in the Post 9/11 Era* (Publication No. 636596246). [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee]. WorldCat.
- Haraway, D. J. (1997). The virtual speculum in the new world order. *Feminist Review*, 55(1), 22-72. <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1997.3>
- Harding, S. (1992). Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is "strong objectivity?". *The Centennial Review*, 36(3), 437-470.
- Haw, K. Shah, S. & Hanifa, M. (1998). *Educating Muslim girls: Shifting discourses*. Open University Press.
- Hesse-Biber, S. (2007) An invitation to feminist research. In P. Leavy & Hesse-Biber (Eds.). *Feminist research practice: A primer* (pp. 1-24). Sage.
- Hindy, N. (2016). Examining Islamophobia in Ontario public schools. *Tessellate Institute*. Retrieved from: <http://tessellateinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Examining-Islamophobia-in-Ontario-Public-Schools-1.pdf>
- Hirji, F. (2011). Through the looking glass: Muslim women on television--an analysis of 24, Lost, and Little Mosque on the Prairie. *Global Media Journal: Canadian Edition*, 4(2), 33-47.
- Hirschfeld, L. A. (2008). Children's developing conceptions of race. In S. M. Quintana & C. McKown (Eds.), *Handbook of race, racism, and the developing child* (pp. 37–54). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Hoodfar, H. (2001). The veil in their minds and on our heads: Veiling practices and Muslim women. In E. Castelli & Rodman, R. (Eds), *Women, gender, religion: A reader* (pp. 420-446). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hoodfar, H. (2003). More than clothing: Veiling as an adaptive strategy. In Alvi, S.S., H. Hoodfar, & S. McDonough (Eds.), *The Muslim veil in North America: Issues and debates* (pp. 3-40). Women's Press.



- hooks, B. (1981). *Ain't I a Woman Black Women and Feminism*. Routledge.
- hooks, B. (2014). *Ain't I A Woman: Black women and feminism*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Horvat, E. M., & O'Connor, C. (2006). *Beyond acting White: Reframing the debate on Black student achievement*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Ignatius, D. (2015 October 29). How ISIS spread in the Middle East. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/how-isis-started-syria-iraq/412042/>
- Jackson, S. A. (2011). *Islam and the Black American: Looking for a Third Resurrection*. Oxford University Press.
- Jaffe-Walter, R. (2019). Ideal liberal subjects and Muslim “Others”: liberal nationalism and the racialization of Muslim youth in a progressive Danish school. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 22(2), 285-300.
- James, C. E. (2012). Students “at risk” stereotypes and the schooling of Black boys. *Urban Education*, 47(2), 464-494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085911429084>
- James, C. E., & Turner, T. (2017). *Towards race equity in education: The schooling of Black students in the Greater Toronto Area*. York University. <https://youthrex.com/report/towards-race-equity-in-education-the-schooling-of-black-students-in-the-greater-toronto-area/>
- James, R. (2017). Post-feminism’s “new sexual contract” and electronic dance music’s queered femme voices. *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*, 9(1), 28-49. <https://doi.org/10.12801/1947-5403.2017.09.01.02>
- Jandali, A. K. (2012). Muslim students in post-9/11 classrooms. *School administrator*, 69(9), 32-35.
- Javed, A. (2011). *Muslim Pakistani and Indian students in their New York school system Experience* (Publication No. NA) [Doctoral thesis, Liberty University]. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/431/>
- Karim, J.A. (2009). *American Muslim women: Negotiating race, class, and gender within the ummah*. New York University Press.
- Kay, B. (2015 February 17). Barbara Kay: Zunera Ishaq does a disservice to women



- forced to wear the veil. Retrieved from: <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/barbara-kay-zunera-ishaq-does-a-disservice-to-women-forced-to-wear-the-veil>
- Khosrojerdi, F. (2015). *Muslim female students and their experiences of higher education in Canada* (Publication No. 2896) [Doctoral dissertation, Western University]. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/2896/>
- Kline, D. (2017). The pragmatics of resistance: Framing antiblackness and the limits of political ontology. *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 5(1), 51–69. <https://doi.org/10.5325/critphilrace.5.1.0051>
- Jandali, A. K. (2012). Muslim Students in Post-9/11 Classrooms. *School Administrator*, 69(9), 32-35.
- Javed, A. (2011). *Muslim Pakistani and Indian students in their New York School system Experience* (Publication No. 431) [Doctoral Dissertation, Liberty University]. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/431/>
- Jenkins, J (2016, January, 20). Anti-Muslim profiling at airports goes beyond the TSA. *Think progress*. Retrieved from: <https://thinkprogress.org/anti-muslim-profiling-at-airports-goes-beyond-the-tsa-4e4a6265610d>
- Jiwani, Y. (2018). Doubling discourses and the veiled other: Mediations of race and gender in Canadian media. In T. Das Gupta, C.E. James, C. Andersen, G.E. Galabuzi, & Maaka, R. (Eds.), *Race and Racialization, 2E: Essential Readings*, (pp. 485-497). Canadian Scholars.
- Johnston, M., & Nadal, K. (2010). Multiracial microaggressions. *Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestation, dynamics, and impact*, 123-144.
- Juha, J., Bridge, T., Sims, J., Leon, C. (2021 June 11). ‘Isolated,’ ‘estranged,’ ‘angry’: Who is accused mass killer Nathaniel Veltman? Retrieved from: <https://lfpress.com/news/local-news/isolated-and-estranged-who-is-accused-mass-killer-nathaniel-veltman>
- Kassam, A. (2007). Locating identity and gender construction in a post 9/11 world: The case of the *hijabi* girl. *Intercultural Education*, 18(4), 355–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980701605303>
- Katz, J. (2006). *The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help*. Sourcebooks
- Kearns, E. M., Betus, A. E., & Lemieux, A. F. (2019). When data do not matter:

- Exploring public perceptions of terrorism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1-22.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1543145>
- Keaton, T. (2005). Arrogant assimilation: National identity politics and African-origin Muslim girls in the other France. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 36(4), 405-423.
- Keddie, A. (2011). Supporting minority students through a reflexive approach to empowerment. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 32(2), 221-238.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2011.547307>
- Keshavjee, R. (2004). *The redefined role of the Ismaili Muslim woman through higher education and the professions* (Publication No.58544708) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto]. Retrieved from <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/services/theses/Pages/item.aspx?idNumber=58544708>
- Levy, A. (2005). *Fame chauvinist pigs: Women and the rise of raunch culture*. New Free Press.
- Lindkvist, H. L. (2008). The reach and limits of cultural accommodation: Public schools and Somali Muslim immigrants in Maine. *Just schools: Pursuing equality in societies of difference*, 164-203.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry* (Vol. 75). Sage.
- Lopez, A. E. (2020). Anti-Black Racism in Education: School Leaders' Journey of Resistance and Hope. *Handbook on Promoting Social Justice in Education*, 1935-1950. <https://doi/10.10072F978>
- Lopez, A. E., & Jean-Marie, G. (2021). Challenging anti-Black racism in everyday teaching, learning, and leading: From theory to practice. *Journal of School Leadership*, 31(1-2), 50-65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684621993115>
- Macdonald, M. (2006). Muslim women and the veil: Problems of image and voice in media representations. *Feminist Media Studies*, 6(1), 7-23.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14680770500471004>
- Macdonald, A. (10 September 2013). Quebec Charter of Values gets slated online. Retrieved from: <http://www.cbc.ca/newsblogs/yourcommunity/2013/09/quebecs-charter-of-values-gets-slated-online.html>
- Maddy-Weitzman, B. (2016). Berbers (Amazigh). *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of*

*Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*. Retrieved from:  
<https://dayan.org/content/berbers-amazigh-wiley-blackwell-encyclopedia-race-ethnicity-and-nationalism>

Maddy-Weitzman, B. (2015). A turning point? The Arab Spring and the Amazigh movement. *Ethnic and racial studies*, 38(14), 2499-2515.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1061139>

Madison, D.S. (2005). *Critical Ethnography: Method, ethnics, and performance*. Sage Publications.

Maeder, E. M., & McManus, L. A. (2020). Mosaic or melting pot? Race and juror decision making in Canada and the United States. *Journal of interpersonal violence* 00(0), 1-22. <https://doi/10.1177/0886260520917512>

Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press.

Mahmud, A. (2012). *Moving Beyond the "Mosqueteria:" A Critical Analysis of the Media's Coverage of Religious Accommodation at an Ontario Public School* (Publication No. 648) [Masters thesis, Western University].  
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/648/>

Mansouri, F. & Kamp, A. (2007). Structural deficiency or cultural racism: The educational and social experiences of Arab-Australian youth. *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 42 10): 87-102. <https://doi/10.1002/j.1839-4655.2007.tb00041.x>

Martino, W. & Rezai-Rashti, G., (2008). The politics of veiling, gender and the Muslim subject: On the limits and possibilities of anti-racist education in the aftermath of September 11. *Discourse: Studies in the Culture Politics of Education*, 29(3), 417-431. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300802259178>

Mazurski, L. (2016). Exclusion in the Canadian context: Full-face veils as a barrier to citizenship. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, 9(1), 3-20.  
[https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr.9.1.3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr.9.1.3_1)

McBean, M. (2018). *Black youth educational under-achievement problem: How peer influence, societal attitudes, education policy, & family circumstances unite to main this problem in the Ontario public school system* (Publication No. NA) [Master's thesis, York University].  
[https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10315/35468/McBean\\_Marcell\\_A\\_2018\\_Masters.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y](https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10315/35468/McBean_Marcell_A_2018_Masters.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y)

- McCall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs: Journal of women in Culture and Society*, 30(3), 1771-1800.
- McDermott-Levy, R. (2011). Going alone: The lived experience of female Arab-Muslim nursing students living and studying in the United States. *Nursing Outlook*, 59, 266. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2011.02.006>
- McDonough, S., & Hoodfar, H. (2009). Chapter seven Muslims in Canada: From Ethnic Groups to Religious Community. In P. Bramdat, & D. Seljak, *Religion and ethnicity in Canada* (pp.133-153). University of Toronto Press.
- McKirdy, E., & Newton, P. (2017 January 30). 6 dead in Quebec mosque shooting. Retrieved from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/29/americas/quebec-mosque-shooting/index.htmlFughu>
- McRobbie, A. (2007). Top girls? Young women and the post-feminist sexual contract. *Cultural Studies*, 21(5), 718-737. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380701279044>
- Minikel-Lacocque, J. (2013). Racism, college, and the power of words: Racial microaggressions reconsidered. *American Educational Research Journal*, 50(3), 432-465. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831212468048>
- Minsky, A. (23 January 2017). Hate crimes against Muslims in Canada increase 253% over four years. Retrieved from: <https://globalnews.ca/news/3523535/hate-crimes-canada-muslim/>
- Mir, S. (2006). *Constructing third spaces: American Muslim undergraduate women's hybrid identity construction* (Publication No. NA) [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University]. <https://iucat.iu.edu/iuk/7000386>
- Mir, S. (2014). *Muslim American women on campus: Undergraduate social life and identity*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Mir, S., & Sarroub, L. K. (2019). Islamophobia in US education. In I. Zempi, & I Awan (Eds.) *The Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia* (pp 298–309). Routledge.
- Mirza, H.S., & Meeto, V. (2018). Empowering Muslim girls? Post-feminism, multiculturalism and the production of the ‘model’ Muslim female student in British schools. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39(2), 227-241. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2017.1406336>

- Moghissi, H., Rahnema, S., & Goodman, M. J. (2009) *Diaspora by design: Muslims in Canada and beyond*. University of Toronto Press.
- Mohanty, C. T. (1989). On race and voice: Challenges for liberal education in the 1990s. *Cultural Critique*, 14, 179–208. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354297>
- Mohanty, C. T. (2003) *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Duke University Press
- Mohanty, C. T., Russo, A., & Torres, L. (Eds.). (1991). *Third world women and the politics of feminism* (Vol. 632). Indiana University Press.
- Morning, A. (2005). Multiracial classification on the United States census. Myth, reality, and future impact. *Revue Européenne des migrations Internationales*, 21(2), 111-134. <https://doi.org/10.4000/remi.2495>
- Morris, E. W. (2007). “Ladies” or “loudies”? Perceptions and experiences of Black girls in classrooms. *Youth & Society*, 38(4), 490–515. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X06296778>
- Na, C., & Gottfredson, D. C. (2013). Police officers in schools: Effects on school crime and the processing of offending behaviors. *Justice Quarterly*, 30(4), 619-650. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2011.615754>
- Nash, J. C. (2008). Re-thinking intersectionality. *Feminist review*, 89(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.3200/CHNG.38.2.22-27>
- National House Survey (2011). NHS Profile. Retrieved from: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>
- Newman, B. M., Lohman, B. J., & Newman, P. R. (2007). Peer group membership and a sense of belonging: their relationship to adolescent behavior problems. *Adolescence*, 42(166).
- Ng, R. (1993). “A Woman out of control”: Deconstructing sexism and racism in the University. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne de l'Education*, 25(2), 189-205. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1495382>
- Nieto, S. (2004). *Education and students' perspectives*. Routledge.
- Niyozov, S., & Pluim, G. (2009). Teacher's perspectives on the education of Muslim

- students: A missing voice in Muslim education research. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 39(5), 637–677. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2009.00463.x>
- Öcal, D. K. (2020). Mosques as spaces of everyday geopolitical tensions. *Geopolitics*, 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2020.1820485>
- Omi & Winant (2005). The theoretical status of the concept of race. In C. McCarthy, & W. Crichlow. (Eds.) *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education* (pp.3-13. Routledge.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. (3rd Ed). Sage.
- Patton, M. (2015). Chapter 1: The nature of qualitative inquiry. In M. Patton (Ed.), *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (pp. 1-37). Sage.
- Peoples, J., & Bailey, G. (2011). *Humanity: An introduction to cultural anthropology*. Nelson Education.
- Phoenix, A. (2014). Colourism and the politics of beauty. *Feminist Review*, 108(1), 97-105.
- Phinney, J.S., Ferguson, D.L., & Tate, J.D. (1997). Intergroup attitudes among ethnic minority adolescents: A casual model. *Child Development*, 68(5), 955-969. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1997.tb01973.x>
- Omercajic, K., & Martino, W. (2020). Supporting transgender inclusion and gender diversity in schools: A critical policy analysis. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 5, 27. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2020.00027>
- Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants [OCASI] (2017 January 23). Coalition agencies launches ad campaign to challenge Islamophobia. Retrieved from: <https://ocasi.org/coalition-agencies-launches-ad-campaign-challenge-islamophobia-and-racism>
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2009a). Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2009b, June 24). Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119. Retrieved from: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/119.html>
- Rattansi, A. (2020). *Racism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Razack, S. (1998). *Looking White People in The Eye*. University of

Toronto Press.

Razack, S. (2008). *Casting out: The eviction of Muslims from Western law and politics*. University of Toronto Press.

Rezai-Rashti, G. (1994). Islamic identity and racism: Muslim students and Ontario education. *Orbit*, 37-38.

Rezai-Rashti, G. (1998). The travails of using an anti-racism and feminism approach when teaching on women and Islam. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 17(4), 80.

Rezai-Rashti, G. (2005a). The persistence of colonial discourse: Race, gender, and Muslim students in Canadian schools. In V. Zawiliski (Ed.) *Inequality in Canada: a reader on the intersections of gender, race, and class* (pp.147-155). Oxford University Press.

Rezai-Rashti, G. (2005b). Unessential women: A discussion of race, class and gender and their implications in education. In N. Mandell (Ed.) *Feminist issues: race, class and sexuality* (pp.83-99). Pearson Education.

Rezai-Rashti, G., Segeren, A., & Martino, W. (2017). The new articulation of equity education in neoliberal times: the changing conception of social justice in Ontario. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 15(2), 160-174.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2016.1169514>

Ricks, S. A. (2014). Falling through the cracks: Black girls and education. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 4(1), 10-21.

Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). Pygmalion in the classroom. *The urban review*, 3(1), 16-20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02322211>

Ruby, T. F. (2006). Listening to the voices of hijab. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29(1), 54-66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2005.10.006>

Ruck, M. D., & Wortley, S. (2002). Racial and ethnic minority high school students' perceptions of school disciplinary practices: A look at some Canadian findings. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 31(3), 185-195.  
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015081102189>

Sabry, N. S., & Bruna, K. R. (2007). Learning from the experience of Muslim students in



- American schools: Towards a proactive model of school-community cooperation. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 9(3), 44-50.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960701443730>
- Saeed, A. (2007). Media, racism and Islamophobia: The representation of Islam and Muslims in the media. *Sociology Compass*, 1(2), 443-462.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00039.x>
- Said, E. W. (1994). *Culture and imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Said, E. W. (1997). *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*. (Revised ed.). Vintage Books.
- Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Vintage Books.
- Sarroub, L. K. (2001). The sojourner experience of Yemeni American high school students: An ethnographic portrait. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(3), 390-416.  
<https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.71.3.m8190855254316p1>
- Sarroub, L. K. (2007). Seeking refuge in literacy from a scorpion bite. *Ethnography and Education*, 2(3), 365-380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457820701547427>
- Seggie, F. & Sanford, G. (2010). Perceptions of female Muslim students who veil: Campus religious climate. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 13(1), 59-82.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320903549701>
- Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal?: An introduction to key concepts in social justice education*. Teachers College Press.
- Shah, S. (2012). Muslim schools in secular societies: Persistence or resistance!. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 34(1), 51-65.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2011.601897>
- Shaheen, J. G. (2003). Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood vilifies a people. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social science*, 588(1), 171-193.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716203588001011>
- Shier, A., & Shor, E. (2016). “Shades of foreign evil” “honor killings” and “family murders” in the Canadian press. *Violence against women*, 22(10), 1163-1188.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215621176>
- Shingler, B. (2018 June 28). Judge suspends Quebec face-covering ban, says it appears to



violate charter. Retrieved from:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/quebec-bill-62-face-covering-july1-1.4724863>

- Shohat, E., & Stam, R. (1994). Stereotype, realism and the struggle over representation. In E. Shohat & R. Stam (Eds.) *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (pp. 178-219). Routledge.
- Siann, G. & Clark, A. (1992). Muslim women in the workplace. *Employee Counselling Today*, 4(5), 20. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13665629210019775>
- Sirin, S. R., & Fine, M. (2007). Hyphenated selves: Muslim American youth negotiating identities on the fault lines of global conflict. *Applied Development Science*, 11(3), 151-163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888690701454658>
- Speck, B. (1997). Respect for religious differences: The case of Muslim students. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 70, 39-46.
- Smith, L. (1999). Chapter 2: Research through imperial eyes. In L. Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies* (pp.42-57). Zed Books.
- Snyder-Hall, R. C. (2010). Third-wave feminism and the defense of "choice". *Perspectives on Politics*, 8(1), 255-261. <https://doi/10.1017/S1537592709992842>
- Stafiej, S. T. (2012). *Exploring the Educational Experiences of Gifted Muslim Women at High School in Canada* (Publication No. NA) [Masters thesis, University of Alberta]. <https://era.library.ualberta.ca/items/92fb1fe1-8714-4689-a69f-780d762d7e43>
- Stake, R.E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications.
- Stake, R. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 443-466). Sage.
- Stanley, T. J. (2009). The banality of colonialism: Encountering artifacts of genocide and white supremacy in Vancouver today. In S. Steinberg (Ed), *Diversity and multiculturalism: A reader*, (pp. 143-159). Peter Lang.
- Statistics Canada, (2011). National Household Survey. Catalogue no. 99-010-X2011032.
- Stubbs, B. & Sallee, M. (2013). Muslim, too: Navigating multiple identities at an

- American university. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 46(4), 451-467.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2013.838129>
- Sway, M. A. (2005). Islamophobia: Meaning, manifestations, causes. *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture*, 12(2-3), 15-23.
- Teo, T. (2010). What is epistemological violence in the empirical social sciences? *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 4(5), 295-303. <https://doi/10.1111/J.1751-9004.2010.00265.X>
- Thames Valley District School Board (2011 June 28). Religious and Creed-Based Accommodation of Students (Procedure 2022a).
- The Canadian Press (2015 March 11). Stephen Harper doubles down on niqab debate: 'Rooted in a culture is anti-women'. Retrieved from  
<https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/stephen-harper-doubles-down-on-niqab-debate-rooted-in-a-culture-that-is-anti-women>
- Thomas, J. (1993). *Doing critical ethnography* (Vol. 26). Sage.
- Toronto District School Board. Guidelines for Religious Accommodations (Date: NA). Retrieved from:  
<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/0/HighSchool/docs/Guidelines%20and%20Procedures%20for%20Religious%20Accommodations.pdf>
- Uprichard, L. (2019 June 17). What is Quebec's Secularism law-and how does it affect women? Retrieved from: <https://www.chatelaine.com/news/quebec-secularism-bill-21-women/>
- United Nations (2021 March 4). Anti-Muslim hatred has reached 'epidemic proportions' says UN rights expert, urging action by States. Retrieved from:  
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086452>
- Von Sikorski, C., Matthes, J., & Schmuck, D. (2021). The Islamic State in the news: Journalistic differentiation of Islamist terrorism from Islam, terror news proximity, and Islamophobic attitudes. *Communication Research*, 48(2), 203-232.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650218803276>
- Watt, D. (2016). Muslim female students confront Islamophobia: Negotiating identities in-between family, schooling, and the Mass Media. *Journal of Family Diversity in Education* 2(1), 21-36.
- Welch, K. (2007). Black criminal stereotypes and racial profiling. *Journal of*

- contemporary criminal justice*, 23(3), 276-288.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986207306870>
- Wherry, A. (2015 October 7). The one sentence that sums up the niqab debate. Retrieved from: <http://www.macleans.ca/politics/ottawa/the-one-sentence-that-sums-up-the-niqab-debate/>
- Van den Bergh, L., Denessen, E., Hornstra, L., Voeten, M., & Holland, R. W. (2010). The implicit prejudiced attitudes of teachers: Relations to teacher expectations and the ethnic achievement gap. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(2), 497-527. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831209353594>
- Veinot, T. C., & Williams, K. (2012). Following the “community” thread from sociology to information behavior and informatics: Uncovering theoretical continuities and research opportunities. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 63(5), 847-864. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.21653>
- Welch, K. (2007). Black criminal stereotypes and racial profiling. *Journal of contemporary criminal justice*, 23(3), 276-288.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986207306870>
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Doing case study research*. Thousand Oaks.
- Yin, R.K. (2014) *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Zaal, M. (2012). Islamophobia in classrooms, media, and politics. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55(6), 555-558. <https://doi.org/10.1002/JAAL.00066>
- Zine, J. (2000). Redefining resistance: Toward an Islamic sub-culture in schools. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 3(3), 293-316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713693042>
- Zine, J. (2001). Muslim youth in Canadian schools: Education and the politics of religious identity. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 34(2), 399-423.
- Zine, J. (2003). Dealing with September 12th: The challenge of anti-Islamophobia education, *Orbit Education*, 33(3), 1-3.
- Zine, J (2006a). Between orientalism and fundamentalism: The politics of Muslim women’s feminist engagement. *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights*, 3(1), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1554-4419.1080>
- Zine, J. (2006b). Unveiled sentiments: Gendered Islamophobia and experiences of veiling

- among Muslim girls in a Canadian Islamic school. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 39(3), 239-252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680600788503>
- Zine, J. (2007). Safe haven or religious ‘ghettos’? Narratives of Islamic schooling in Canada. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 10(1): 71-92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320601100385>
- Zine, J. (2008a). *Canadian Islamic schools: Unravelling the politics of faith, gender, knowledge, and identity*. University of Toronto Press.
- Zine, J. (2008b). Honour and identity: An ethnographic account of Muslim girls in a Canadian Islamic school. *Topia*, 19, 35-61. <https://doi.org/10.3138/topia.19.35>
- Zine, J. (2009). Special feature article: Unsettling the nation: Gender, race and Muslim cultural politics in Canada. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 9(1), 146-163. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9469.2009.01036.x>
- Zine, J. (2012). *Islam in the hinterlands: Muslim cultural politics in Canada*. UBC Press.
- Zine, J. (2017). Let’s worry more about violent Islamophobes- and less about writers who fear being called ‘Islamophobic’. Retrieved from: <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/lets-take-the-violence-of-islamophobes-more-seriously-than-writers-worried-about-being-branded-islamophobic>

## Social Media Recruitment



### PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON ISLAMOPHOBIA AND SEXISM IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study that explores the experiences of Muslim students with Islamophobia and sexism in secondary schools who meet the following criteria:

- Identify as Muslim
- Identify as a girl/woman
- In between the ages of 14-19 years old
- A student in an Ontario public secondary school located in either: the Niagara Region, London, or the Greater Toronto Area

If you are interested and agree to participate you would be asked to:

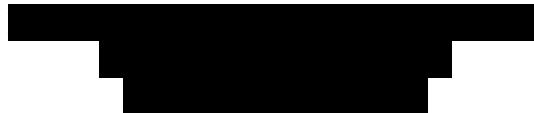
- Take part in an interview with the researcher where several measures will be taken to secure your identity
- Interviews will be audio-recorded and will not be shared with anyone else except the researchers involved in the study

Your participation would involve 1 session,  
and will be about 60 minutes long.

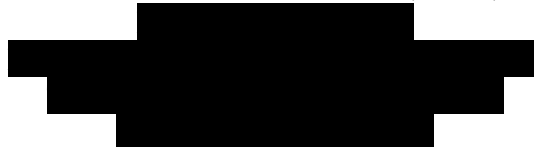
**IMPORTANT:** To protect your identity, please avoid commenting on this post. Instead please contact the researchers using the contact information below. The researchers will not respond to any questions on the post as it is a publicly viewable channel.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,  
please contact:

Sarah Halabi



Professor Goli Rezai-Rashti, PhD.,





## **PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON ISLAMOPHOBIA AND SEXISM IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study that explores the experiences of Muslim students with Islamophobia and sexism in secondary schools who meet the following criteria:

- Identify as Muslim
- Identify as a girl/woman
- In between the ages of 14 -19 years old
- A student in an Ontario public secondary school located in either the Niagara Region, London, or the Greater Toronto Area

If you are interested and agree to participate you would be asked to:

- Take part in an interview with the researcher where several measures will be taken to secure your identity
- Interviews will be audio-recorded and will not be shared with anyone else except the researchers involved in the study

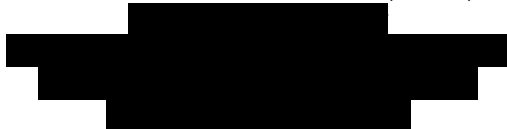
Your participation would involve 1 session,  
and will be about 60 minutes long.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,  
please contact:

Sarah Halabi



Professor Goli Rezai-Rashti, PhD.,





## **Recruitment verbal script**

Hello, my name is Sarah Halabi and I am a 3rd year PhD student in the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am studying the experiences of Muslim girls in Ontario schools and am recruiting participants who meet the following inclusion criteria:

- Identify as Muslim
- In between the ages of 13 years old or older
- Identify as a female
- A student in an Ontario public school located in one of the following three cities: St. Catharines, London, or Toronto

This research aims to improve equity and inclusion practices within Ontario schools.

If you volunteer as a participant in this study, you will be asked to partake in one interview that will last for approximately 1 hour .

If you are interested in participating, please contact me via e-mail at [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] We can also meet at [the location where I am recruiting depending on city] at a mutually convenient time.

Thank you.

## Letter of Information and Consent

### **Project Title**

Muslim girls' experiences with Islamophobia and sexism in Ontario secondary schools

### **Document Title**

Letter of Information and Consent – Parental Consent and Student Assent

### **Principal Investigator + Contact**

Professor Goli Rezai-Rashti, PhD, Education

### **Additional Research Staff + Contact**

Sarah Halabi, PhD Candidate, Education

### **1. Invitation to Participate**

You are being invited to participate in this research study about the experiences of Muslim girls with Islamophobia and sexism in secondary schools because you meet the eligibility requirements. Specifically, you are invited to participate because you identify as a Muslim female who is enrolled in an Ontario public high school located in either the Niagara region, London, or the Greater Toronto Area, and is in between the ages of 14 - 19 years old.

### **2. Why is this study being done?**

2.1. A 2017 report by Statistics Canada has noted that Islamophobia has increased by 263% in the past three years. Of the reported incidents of Islamophobia, Muslim women have been experiencing the brunt of Islamophobic violence (Elmir, 2016). Past research on the school experiences of Muslim girls reveal that they face a unique form of Islamophobia where they are perceived as oppressed, shy, lack agency, and where educators believe they were bound for marriage rather than complete post-secondary education, among other challenges (e.g., Rezai-Rashti, 2010; Zine, 2006). These experiences were found to impact Muslim girls' academic achievement and well-being (e.g., Aslam, 2011; Rezai-Rashti, 2010). Overall, there are gaps in the literature concerning the experiences of Muslim girls.

2.2. The aim of this research is to observe whether there are shifts in the way Muslim girls experience Islamophobia and sexism in light of heightened Islamophobia and to address the gaps in the literature concerning the experiences of Muslim girls. The intended use of the study results is to contribute knowledge on the experiences of Muslim girls in secondary schools so that researchers, policy makers, and educators can improve the school experiences of Muslim girls.

### **3. How long will you be in this study?**

It is expected that there will be 1 visit which will take approximately 1 hour.

### **4. What are the study procedures?**



This document will be given to you before the interview so that you and your parent or guardian may sign it. If you are 18 years or older, it is unnecessary that your parent or guardian sign the form. The researcher will go over the document with you.

If you agree to participate you will be asked to:

- 4.1. Partake in an interview that will take approximately 1 hour of your time
- 4.2. Agree to be audio-recorded
- 4.3. Be interviewed in a mutually agreed upon place

#### **5. What are the risks and harms of participating in this study?**

The risk associated with participation is that it may trigger emotional upset or distress as you may discuss negative experiences. As such, the researcher will give you a list of organizations you may contact if you need further assistance.

#### **6. What are the benefits?**

There are several benefits to this research:

- It will produce knowledge on how Islamophobia and sexism in relation with other forms of oppression, shape the experiences of Muslim girls in high schools
- It will assist educators and policymakers with improving equity and diversity initiatives, and will shed light on how institutional oppression can be more effectively resisted
- It may also benefit you and other Muslim girls by acting as a guide to help provide insight into the ways Muslim girls can navigate Islamophobia and sexism in their schools and society

#### **7. Can participants choose to leave the study?**

If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you. Upon request, the information will be withdrawn. If you wish to have your information removed please let the researcher know.

#### **8. How will participants' information be kept confidential?**

- 8.1. All files will be collected, coded, analysed and kept on a private computer protected by a password for a minimum of 7 years. You will be granted a unique study number. A list linking your study number with your name will be kept in a secure place separate from your study file. The study file will include your pseudonym and study number. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used and your identity will remain confidential. Participants will be provided with a copy of the final report upon request
- 8.2. All efforts will be made to keep your identity and all data confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. You will be given a pseudonym and a study number to ensure anonymity; all consent forms, audiotape records, interview notes and observation notes will be filed and kept in a locked safe throughout this study.
- 8.3. The following identifiable information will be collected: your full name, telephone number, e-mail address, and an audio recording of the interview. We collect your full name so that we can obtain consent. Your telephone number and e-mail may be collected so that we can communicate location, date, and time of the interview. Furthermore, we may use your e-mail address to send you a future publication, if you requested it. Lastly, the audio recording is collected so the researcher can transcribe the interview. All identifiable information will not be

tracked on the master list with your name, study number, and pseudonym. All identifiable information will be encrypted.

- 8.4. We may use your direct quotes from the interview; however, the quotes will be associated with your pseudonym, not your real name, and your identity will remain anonymous and protected. If a participant's name happens to be Cassandra, we would assign her a pseudonym, for example, Carol. Therefore, if we were to use Cassandra's direct quotes in our final report, we would refer to her as Carol to protect her identity. We would also give a pseudonym for the school she goes to so that her identity remains anonymous.
- 8.5. While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. If data is collected during the project which may be required to report by law we have a duty to report. Data that identify you (i.e., field notes, audio recordings) may be inspected by a regulatory agency and/or the University of Western Ontario. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

#### **9. Are participants compensated to be in this study?**

You will be compensated with a \$5 gift card from the personal funds of the researcher.

#### **10. What are the Rights of Participants?**

- 10.1. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on your academic and community standing. We will give you new information that is learned during the study that might affect your decision to stay in the study. You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form
- 10.2. If you are a First Nations or an indigenous person who has contact with spiritual 'Elders', you may want to talk to them before you make a decision about this research study. Elders may have concerns about some genetic procedures.

#### **11. Whom do participants contact for questions?**

##### **Principal Investigator**

Professor Goli Rezai-Rashti, PhD, Education

[REDACTED]

Or

##### **Additional Research Staff**

Sarah Halabi, PhD Candidate, Education

[REDACTED]

#### **Consent**

Informed consent will be indicated by signing the consent form that accompanies this letter.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics

[REDACTED]

**This letter is yours to keep for future reference.**

## Consent Form

### 1. Project Title

Muslim girls' experiences with Islamophobia and sexism in Ontario Secondary schools

### 2. Document Title

Consent Letter – Parental Consent and Student Assent

### 3. Principal Investigator + Contact

Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti, PhD, Education

### 4. Additional Research Staff + Contact (optional)

Sarah Halabi, PhD Candidate, Education

-I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

#### CONTACT FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Please check the appropriate box below and initial:

☐ I agree to be contacted for future research studies

☐ I do NOT agree to be contacted for future research studies

I agree to be audio recorded

☐ YES ☐ NO

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

☐ YES ☐ NO

I would like to be e-mailed with a copy of the publication

☐ YES ☐ NO

If yes: Please provide your e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Person

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)

Obtaining Consent

If the participant is under the age of 18 years old:

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent / Legal Guardian / Substitute Decision Maker (Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent / Legal Guardian / Substitute Decision Maker (Sign): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent / Legal Guardian / Substitute Decision Maker (Date): \_\_\_\_\_

## DEBRIEFING FORM

**Project Title:** Muslim girls' experiences with Islamophobia and sexism in Ontario secondary schools

**Principal Investigator:** Professor Goli Rezai-Rashti, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Thank you for your participation in this study. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences that Muslim girls have with Islamophobia and sexism in Ontario public secondary schools. The results of this study are intended to help researchers, policy makers, and educators to help improve the school experiences of Muslim girls.

If you experienced any type of emotional upset or distress during the interview please consider contacting any of the organizations listed below:

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

All efforts will be made to keep your identity and all data confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. You will be given a pseudonym and a study number to ensure anonymity; all consent forms, audiotape records, interview notes and observation notes will be filed and kept in a locked safe throughout this study.

Participants in this study are compensated from the personal funds of the researcher.

Please feel free to contact the researchers if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you,

Sarah Halabi, Western University, [REDACTED]

### Interview Topics

1. Can you tell me about yourself?
  - a. Are you born in Canada? If not, where were you born?
  - b. What grade are you in?
  - c. What school do you go to?
  - d. What kind of student do you think you are?
  - e. What would you like to do after you have finished high school?
2. Can you tell me about your family?
  - a. How many brothers and sisters do you have and what do they do?
  - b. What do they think about your education? Are they encouraging you to go to university? What are their expectations after you finish school?
3. Other than being a Muslim girl, how else do you identify yourself?
  - a. Do you identify yourself as Canadian, if not, why?
4. What are some of the challenges and advantages associated with being a Muslim girl in society?
5. What do you think people generally think of Islam and Muslims?
  - a. What do you think people generally think of Muslim women?
6. [If participant wears veil] When did you start wearing the veil? Why did you start wearing it?
7. What are your views on the veil? How do you think others view the veil?
  - a. Why do you think stereotypes of Muslim girls and the veil exist? How do you think people generally view the veil?
8. Can you tell me about your school?
  - a. What is the name of your school?
  - b. How many people go to your school approximately?
  - c. In what ways does your school accommodate Muslim students?
  - d. Does your school have many people of different races and ethnicities?
  - e. Are there other Muslim girls at your school? What are their backgrounds? Do you feel comfortable with them?
9. As a Muslim girl, do you feel welcomed and represented in your school?
  - a. Are there times where you feel excluded at your school? Can you share some examples?
10. Have your teachers, other educational personal, or peers ever stereotyped you because of your identity? If so, can you give me some examples?
11. Can you tell me about any experiences you may have had where you had to defend your religion and/or the image of Muslim women in your school?
12. Do you feel as if you have to maintain a certain image as a “good Muslim girl” by your Muslim peers or educators? If so, can you give me some examples?
  - a. Do you ever feel discriminated against by your Muslim peers because of your race/ethnicity/or sexuality?
13. Do you ever feel as if you have to try to fit in to the school culture? If so, how?
  - a. Are you ever bullied because of your Islamic/racial/ethnic/gender/sexual identity?

14. Other than being Muslim and female, how do other aspects of your identity impact your educational experiences?
  - a. How do you think Muslim girls, who have other aspects of their identity (for example, their race, socio-economic status, sexual orientation) challenged, feel at your school?
  - b. How does your family and community influence your educational experiences?
  - c. What kinds of support and/or pressure does your Islamic or ethnic community provide you with?
15. What advice, in terms of succeeding in school would you give to a Muslim girl who may be reading this paper when it is published?
  - a. What are some things teachers and schools can do to improve the educational experiences of Muslim girls?
16. Is there anything else you want to talk about that I did not ask?



**Date:** 13 July 2018  
**To:** Prof. Goli Rezai-Rashti

**Project ID:** 111811

**Study Title:** Muslim girls' experiences with Islamophobia and sexism in Ontario secondary schools

**Application Type:** NMREB Initial Application

**Review Type:** Full Board

**Full Board Reporting Date:** 01/Jun/2018 12:30

**Date Approval Issued:** 13/Jul/2018 10:07

**REB Approval Expiry Date:** 13/Jul/2019

---

Dear Prof. Goli Rezai-Rashti

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.

**Documents Approved:**

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
June 28 Debriefing form	Debriefing document	28/Jun/2018	clean
June 28 Letter of Information and Consent Form Sarah Halabi	Written Consent/Assent	28/Jun/2018	clean
June 28 Social Media Research Poster Sarah Halabi	Recruitment Materials	28/Jun/2018	clean
May 10 Interview Guide Sarah Halabi	Interview Guide	10/May/2018	1
May 10 Recruitment Verbal Script Sarah Halabi	Oral Script	10/May/2018	clean
May 10 Research Poster Sarah Halabi	Recruitment Materials	10/May/2018	1

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us

if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Katelyn Harris, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

***Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).***



# Curriculum Vitae

## EDUCATION

*Bachelor of Arts in Psychology* at Brock University (2013)

*Master of Education in Teaching, Learning, and Development* at Brock University (2015)

*PhD Candidate in Critical Policy, Equity, and Leadership Studies, Education*, Western University

## EMPLOYMENT

2018 – 2019	Professor, School of Language and Liberal Studies, Fanshawe College
2017 – 2018	Teaching Assistant, Teacher Education, Western University
2017 – 2018	Teaching Assistant, Master of Professional Education, Western University
2015 – 2018	Research Assistant, Critical Policy, Equity, and Leadership Studies, Western University
2012 – 2015	Information Technology Services Senior Associate, Client Services, Brock University
2012 – 2015	Research Assistant, Marketing, International Business, and Strategy, Brock University
2010 – 2012	Research Assistant, Psychology Department, Brock University

## SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS

2015 – 2019	Western Graduate Research Scholarship
2014	Jack Noble Book Prize – Given to the graduate student with the highest overall GPA
2013	Dean's Honour Roll
2008	Scholarship from the Canadian Federation of University Women – Given to the student with highest GPA in Math

## UNPUBLISHED THESES

2013	Undergraduate Thesis: The Belief in a Just World and its Impact on Memory
2015	Master Thesis: Who am I? The Role of Identity for Inclusive Education

## LECTURES & INVITED PRESENTATIONS

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 2017 | Anti-Muslim Racism/Islamophobia. Guest lecture for the <i>Urban Education class</i> at Western University's Faculty of Education (second time) |
| 2016 | Anti-Muslim Racism/Islamophobia. Guest lecture for the <i>Urban Education class</i> at Western University's Faculty of Education               |
| 2015 | Multi-Faith Event. Panelist for <i>Co-existence Symposium</i> at Brock University (second time)  |
| 2014 | Multi-Faith Event. Panelist for <i>Co-existence Symposium</i> at Brock University  |
| 2013 | Multi-Faith Event. Guest Lecture for <i>Brock Faith and Life Centre</i> at Brock University  |

## CONFERENCES

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 2019 | Presenter. Challenging Islamophobia in the Context of Antiracism Education. Affiliate Teaching and Learning Conferences: Intersections Educating Within, at, and Beyond the Margins. May 2019, London, ON            |
| 2018 | Workshop Facilitator. Challenging Islamophobia in the Context of Antiracism Education. Ministry of Education Forum 2018 – Equity: Complexities in Action, May 2018, Toronto, ON [accepted proposal; event cancelled] |
| 2018 | Workshop Facilitator. Muslim Student's Experiences of Islamophobia in Schools. Ontario Education Research Symposium – Advancing Equity and Achievement in Ontario Classrooms, March 2018, Toronto, ON                |
| 2017 | Presenter. The Contested Definition of Islamophobia and Canadian Politics: Educational Implications. Robert Macmillan Graduate Research in Education Symposium, London, ON   |

## TEACHING

### PROFESSOR – FANSHAWE COLLEGE

Race and Inequality, School of Language and Liberal Studies  
Racism in Canada, School of Language and Liberal Studies  
Sociology of Fame, School of Language and Liberal Studies  
Culture of Fame, School of Language and Liberal Studies  
Violence: Mean Girls and Thugs, School of Language and Liberal Studies  
Sociology of Sport, School of Language and Liberal Studies  
Reason and Writing, School of Language and Liberal Studies

### TEACHING ASSISTANT – WESTERN UNIVERSITY

Social Foundations, Bachelor of Education  
Race, Ethnicity, and Education, Master of Professional Education