A Qualitative Study of Muslim Mothers' Perceptions and Motivations to Homeschool

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Dedication

All praise and thanks is due to Allah.

Without His Help and Guidance, nothing would be possible.

This work, and all that I do, is dedicated to my mother, Dr. Hamida Siddiqui, rahimahullah (May God have mercy on her). May this serve as a means of sadaqah jaariyah for her (a charity which continues to benefit). Her patience, mercy, and generosity in raising me are what made me into the woman I am today.

May Allah be pleased with her. Ameen

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Abstract

Background: Homeschooling has long been an educational practice in the United States, though much of the research in existence documents the journey and results of non-Hispanic, white families (Mazama & Lundy, 2012). While some motivations run parallel between all communities of homeschoolers, a growing body of research shows racism to be a strong motivation for families from marginalized communities (Ray, 2015). Though Islamophobia continues to permeate traditional schools, particularly after 9/11, little to no research has been done to look specifically at the motivations of Muslim-American families to home educate their children. **Purpose**: When large numbers of students begin leaving the classroom in favor of alternative forms of education, educators must take notice. But when those swarms come specifically from historically marginalized and more vulnerable communities, the educational community may take *greater* heed. The purpose of this narrative inquiry study is to qualitatively examine the stories and experiences of Muslim-American mothers concerning traditional schooling and to understand their motivations to home educate their children. **Research Question:** This study addresses the following research question: What are the perceptions and motivations of Muslim-American mothers regarding homeschooling their children in the United States? **Method:** This narrative inquiry study explored the stories of homeschooling, Muslim-American families. Participants were chosen from a pool of students taking a home education course taught by the researcher. They must have school age (5+) children and be residing in the United States. A minimum of two semi-structured video interviews were used to collect data, with an optional third interview presented if needed. Member checking was done during the interview process as well as afterwards by email. The researcher checked her understanding of events during interviews, over emails following the interviews, and at times sent participants excerpts of her journal or written analysis in order for participants to check accuracy of understanding. As she goes through her process of burrowing, broadening, and restorying, she rewrote participants' stories using thick, rich language which participants were invited to give feedback on (Stake, 1995). Transcripts were narratively coded and themes explored. The researcher began restorying after the initial interview, using email to have participants read and offer feedback. Restorying continued throughout the research process. The researcher used journaling to document observations and understanding during the interviews, as well as to write her own reflections afterwards. Journaling was also used to document the researcher's own story. In addition to the validation strategies above, the researcher worked collaboratively with peers to gain insight and get a better perspective on her research methodology. She used her own journaling as a means of reflecting on her own biases. **Results:** After researching the motivations of these mothers, it is clear that their reasons for choosing homeschooling were complex and interwoven, but that their identity as a Muslim was a central idea that permeated much of their motivation. Major themes that emerged were: racial and cultural identity, religion and character development, and academic or schooled concerns. **Conclusion**: While the individual stories of these women varied, it was clear that raising their children with a strong sense of self and identity was a major motivation in rethinking traditional educational paths.

Keywords: homeschooling, unschooling, Muslim, American, mothers, race

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Among the goals of public education in the United States is the desire to create a constituency that will participate in preserving the liberties designed by the founding fathers in the constitution. In 2019 a poll was released by the Phi Delta Kappa Foundation which showed that an astounding 97% of Americans believe that schools should teach civics (PDK, 2019). There is a belief that by teaching the stories of the past, alongside the constitution—the law of the land—future generations will continue to hold on to the liberties upon which this country was founded. Indeed, this is how a national identity could be preserved. A young Abraham Lincoln once said:

> Upon the subject of education, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in. That every man may receive at least, a moderate education, and thereby be enabled to read the histories of his own and other countries, by which he may duly appreciate the value of our free institutions, appears to be an object of vital importance, even on this account alone, to say nothing of the advantages and satisfaction to be derived from all being able to read the scriptures and other works, both of a religious and moral nature, for themselves. (Busch & White, 2013, p.4)

According to Busch and White, Lincoln believed that education could be the means through which a thriving citizenry holds onto and preserves the liberties established in the constitution (2013).

But who was included in this citizenry? Whose history was being taught? What identity have we hoped to maintain? And what happens when the curriculum taught in schools and the values perpetuated are not inclusive in the liberties of *all* of the citizenry? What happens to those children and families who come from marginalized communities?

At the time of these words being spoken by Lincoln, many were denied the rights and responsibilities that came with citizenship (Busche & White, 2013). If schools were encouraged to teach civic education to hold on to the liberties established in the past, there can be little doubt that *that* education only served a certain percentage of the population, ie, white, land owning males. Until the United States embraces the idea of a diverse citizenry, schools will continue to fail in providing an education to meet the needs of *all* its citizens. And as families from marginalized communities continue to face a system that fails their children, many will continue to revert to alternative means of educating their children.

Personal Narrative

Though I was born in North Carolina, and spent most of my growing years in a small town in Ohio, there were numerous times throughout my years of schooling where I felt like a foreigner. Whether it was my race or my religion, core pieces of my identity served as a barrier between myself and my classmates. Canton, Ohio was a homogenous place to live in the 1980's. It consisted of mostly middle to upper-middle-class (and mostly white), Christian families—my family served as its single anomaly. My mother and father were originally from Pakistan and India, respectively, and I was raised as an American-Muslim.

Differences aside, I did everything a young, pre-teen girl could do to fit in. I pegged my jeans and curled my bangs (half up and half down, in line with the latest eighties fashion). Every morning, while listening to Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation, I'd apply my Bonnie Bell Lip Smacker chapstick and run out the door to the bus stop. Yet despite my best attempts to fit it, nay, *blend* in, I always felt like an outsider.

The absence of one's story is often just as powerful as one's story being told untruthfully. I didn't know it at the time, but my civic education often bounced between these two phenomena; feeling unseen in the curriculum or being seen incorrectly. Throughout the course of my schooling, rarely, if ever, did I see faces that looked like mine in school. None of the books that we read told the stories of immigrants from Asian countries, or their children. Instead, the story of America told to me was one of white people, who celebrated Christmas (although sometimes Hanukkah), and were grounded by their parents (a cultural phenomena I found utterly confusing as an Asian-American child raised with deep obedience to my parents and only emotional consequences to disobedience). On the occasion that my faith, though not my people, were mentioned in class, my teacher would undoubtedly turn to me and ask me to verify the textbook, or worse, teach the class myself. I was insecure and lacking the confidence that often comes with knowing oneself, and yet here I was, tasked with holding the weight of all things that made me different, in front of a class full of ambivalent peers.

As I grew older, seemingly benign ignorance made way for miseducation. During my ninth grade English class, I was verbally assaulted by a male student over an opinion I had voiced during a classroom discussion. I had advocated peaceful mediation. He immediately turned around and shouted in my direction, "You're such a hypocrite!"

Having hardly spoken a word in class before, it was clear he thought there was hypocrisy in my words and my religious headscarf, perhaps a symbol of violence for him. Despite the inappropriateness of the encounter, the sole authority in the room, my teacher, sent a clear message to us all by her silence. She looked at me, and without acknowledging or addressing what had just transpired, continued with her lesson, validating his outburst with tacit approval.

Perhaps she was ignorant of my faith or culture. Perhaps she held her own bias. Or perhaps, in those days, she was not given the necessary anti-bias, culturally responsive training necessary to mediate conflicts that might arise from having a diverse student body. Whatever the case may be, her inability to act left me feeling unsafe and isolated.

Years later, during my teacher education program as an undergraduate student at the University of Houston, I refused to say the pledge of allegiance as a form of political protest. I was called out into the hallway by one of my professors from the college of education and told, “You’ll have to accept, sooner or later, that this is a Christian country.” Her message was clear. I, for whatever reason in her mind, was not an American, and she was taking it upon herself to “teach” me what being American truly meant.

Despite all the messaging I received from the media, from my peers, and even from my teachers, I found my way towards claiming an American identity for myself. I read the “Autobiography of Malcolm X”. This had an enormous impact on my sense of self. Malcolm was an American Muslim. Yet even he was rejected from the master narrative of belonging because he was Black (X & Haley, 1992). I used his model of self-education; creating a curriculum of books to read. I tried to decolonize my mind. Books like “Lies My Teacher Told Me” by James Lowen were instrumental in the self-realization that the public school system failed to provide a civic education that reflected anything other than the story of white men with power (1995). I read about the struggles of Black-Americans, Asian-Americans, and other hyphenated identities. I read about microaggressions and tokenization. I read about unconscious and conscious bias. And as I read, I learned about the history of the United States in otherizing peoples, allowing those in power to retain their power. Unknowingly, I awakened my own critical consciousness.

My growing education revealed a narrow perspective offered within the school system. This narrow perspective, as Takaki (2008), Zinn (2015), and Lowen (1995) discussed, seemed to intentionally limit students from learning the history of brown, Black, and working class peoples in the United States. As I continued to unschool, deriving my own curated curriculum rather than relying on the outlined standards found within the public education system, I began to realize the importance of filling in the gaps in perspectives on my own. This would be the key to creating my American identity, one that years of schooling had failed to instill in me.

Years later, when I became a mother, this journey towards constructing my own, multicultural American identity, began to fill my thoughts as I struggled to make choices about my own childrens’ education. I wondered if they, too, would feel lost or not accepted within traditional schooling. I thought about the lack of representation in the curriculum and what kind of impact this would have on them, as well as their peers, who I’d come to realize were also disserviced by the lack of culturally responsive pedagogy. But more than that, I thought about the tools that are necessary to deconstruct, not just a colonized curriculum, but a colonized society—one in which certain individuals are taught that *they* do not have any history “worth knowing” (Sant, Davies, Pashby, & Shultz, 2018, p.40). Would my children be able to thrive, not simply survive, in a socially unjust society? Slowly, I began to settle on the decision to home educate my children. They would be raised with the critical pedagogy I had missed out on in my traditionally schooled years.

Statement of the Problem

My story is one of many. Muslim-American students today find themselves surrounded by increasing levels of Islamophobia. Parents of these children are left wondering what they will need to rise above the white supremacy and bias directed towards them, and which educational path will best give them these tools. Though there is little research on the impact that an increase in Islamophobic acts has on children, specifically, there is numerous data showing a rise in these acts of hate in the community at large (Elkassem et al., 2018). Whether it be in the curriculum, inherit in policy, within individual teachers or faculty, or from their peers, there is no question that anti-Muslim sentiment often comes from multiple directions with our educational system. What is unclear, however, is what affect this racism bears on Muslim families and whether this has impacted the growing numbers of homeschoolers in the United States.

Significance of the Study

When we examine cases of Islamophobia within our public education system, we find that bias against Muslims can come from students, teachers, policy, and curriculum. These cases, outlined in chapter two, give only a snapshot of where and how Muslims struggle within our public education system. In a conversation with Mustafa Carroll, Executive Director of CAIR's (Council for American Islamic Relations) Houston Branch, he stated that the biggest issue they are currently facing is the lack of data (personal communication, October, 2015). This tends to be a recurring theme when looking more closely at the Muslim student population.

One of the main reasons for this is that Muslim students and parents are scared to come forward for fear of further persecution. Carroll said that many families will come to CAIR to complain of instances of Islamophobia within a school setting, but few feel comfortable filing official reports. And some, as in the case of the student who came forward to file a report against Herby Woolverton, they will experience high levels of stress and anxiety afterward for fear that their anonymity will be lost (M. Carroll, personal communication, October 2015).

It's clear from this that more data is needed about the American-Muslim experience. Little comprehensive research exists to show how many students are affected by Islamophobia within our public schools, and what actions are taken to remedy it. While acts of Islamophobia are not rampant, the incidents that do occur are increasing and have mixed results. Some cases are resolved through lawsuits. Others are resolved through remedied actions and apologies. Yet, again, little evidence is available to show whether any steps were taken to prevent future incidents from occurring. As Howard states in his book, "diversity is not a choice" (Howard, 2006, p.3). Our schools are continuing to be more diverse settings. We must renew our commitment to providing an equitable education for all our students, regardless of religion.

Purpose Statement

"The growing presence of diversity in our public-school population is the face of our future" (Howard, 2006, p.6). Our public education landscape, just like that of our nation, is growing increasingly diverse. Now, more than ever, it becomes imperative that schools do their part to meet the varying needs of *all* their students. When large numbers of students begin leaving the classroom in favor of alternative forms of education, educators must take notice. But when those swarms come specifically from historically marginalized and more vulnerable communities, the educational community may take *greater* heed. The purpose of this narrative inquiry study is to qualitatively examine the stories and experiences of some Muslim-American families concerning traditional schooling and to understand their motivations to home educate their children.

Theoretical Framework

This inductive qualitative study uses the theoretical lens of critical multiculturalism, critical race theory and culturally responsive pedagogy. The idea behind critical multicultural education stems from the awareness that not all students have an equal opportunity to learn within the classroom (Banks & McGee Banks, 2010). Inequality in school is not simply a discussion of teachers not knowing their increasingly diverse student population, but an issue that is seeped into the very foundation of our school system.

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and critical race theory look critically at the discrepancies that exist in society, and the world of education, and call for the teaching of critical skills that help students dismantle systems of oppression (Friere, 1993). It is through these lenses that home education, amongst other forms of alternative education, were viewed in this study. It is through the lens of critical race theory that the motivations of Muslim-American home educators can be fully appreciated.

While matters of homeschooling are often discussed and studied under the neo-liberal debate regarding privatization, this study hopes to view it under the lens of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism and culturally responsive teaching are movements designed to bring back equity in learning, whether discrepancies in student achievement are caused by race, religion, gender, language, social class, ethnicity, learning abilities, or cultural characteristics (Banks & McGee Banks, 2010) (Gay, 2000). bell hooks validates the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy by stating that there can never be “too many” Black, female writers. Marginalized voices are imperative in a culturally responsive learning environment (hooks, 1994). Without culturally responsive teaching, schools will continue to fail its diverse populations.

Research Question

This study addresses the following research question: What are the perceptions and motivations of Muslim-American mothers regarding homeschooling their children in the United States?

Definition of Terms

Homeschooling/Home Education

Homeschooling is a form of education whereby families forego traditional public schooling or traditional private schooling in favor of a more customized learning path for their children. Ray states that “Homeschooling is a form of private education that is parent-led and home-based” and that “homeschooling does not rely on either state-run public schooling or institutional private schooling for a child’s education” (Ray, 2015). Where once homeschooling strictly referred to schooling within the home, now homeschoolers can be found engaging in community-led co-ops, online charter schools, micro-schools, and more (Hirsh, 2019).

Islamophobia

“Phobia” is used in psychology to denote an irrational or unfounded fear. Islamophobia, thereby, would refer to “an irrational or unfounded fear of Islam or its followers” (Driel, 2004, p.1-2) “perpetuated by negative stereotypes, resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civic life” (“Islamophobia”, 2015). Though this definition could be problematic, for our purposes the term is necessary due to the need for vocabulary that references any prejudice against a Muslim minority group.

Unschooling

Unschooling is a form of home education where children do not follow a prescribed curriculum and, instead, allow learning to be student-led (Riley, 2016). Unlike traditional homeschooling in which the curriculum found in schools is used at home, unschooling allows more creativity and flexibility in what is learned.

Research Design

Through the use of narrative inquiry, the researcher qualitatively explored the personal narratives of three Muslim-American home educating families, along with her own story. At least one family who decided to homeschool after the 2016 Presidential election was selected. Only parents of Muslim-American students were interviewed, as they would best be able to explain and their decision to home educate their children. Through the use of video interviews, journaling, and email correspondence, the researcher reconstructed each families' journey towards homeschooling. She then analyzed the information provided to look for trends and themes that might emerge.

Conclusion

Anti-Muslim sentiment is at an all time high in the United States. With the election of Donald Trump, racial tensions continue to escalate. This research hopes to look more closely at the impact this, and other acts of Islamophobia has on the educational landscape. More specifically, it hopes to explore the rise in homeschooling amongst families that come from diverse populations and what motivations Muslim-Americans have to turn to home education.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Homeschooling is a form of education whereby families forego traditional public schooling or traditional private schooling in favor of a more customized learning path for their children. Ray stated that “Homeschooling is a form of private education that is parent led and home based” and that “homeschooling does not rely on either state-run public schooling or institutional private schooling for a child’s education” (Ray, 2015). Where once homeschooling strictly referred to schooling within the home, now homeschoolers can be found engaging in community led co-ops, online charter schools, microschools, and more (Hirsh, 2019).

In the last five decades, homeschooling has been on the rise. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) cites that in 2016, a little less than 1.7 million children were homeschooling, or 3.3% of the total number of school-age children (2017). This is almost double the 1.7% that were homeschooling less than two decades prior in 1999. Schalkwyk & Bouwer argued that homeschooling was trending across the world (2011). In the United States, homeschooling has long been practiced but has increased in popularity since the 1970’s (Ray, 2015), particularly amongst certain demographics. Not only has the nature of homeschooling shifted, so too have the *faces* of those who find themselves drawn to this alternative form of education.

Black families (Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013), Hispanic families, Asian families (Hirsh, 2019), and the families of LGBTQ children (Riley, 2018) have increasingly turned to home education, along with others from marginalized communities. The NCES report from 2017 cited that in 1999, non-Hispanic white homeschooling families outnumbered homeschoolers of other races 640,000 to 161,000 (numbers only included Black and Hispanic families as no other data was available). But by 2016, homeschooling families from marginalized communities now numbered 662,000. While the number of white non-Hispanic homeschoolers still dominate the homeschooling community (disproportionately higher than their overall population ratio), the number of non-white participants is rising. The biggest jump came from within the Hispanic community, though almost no research has been conducted, to date, to explore the reasons for this surge.

So why *are* families who come from marginalized communities increasingly seeking out alternative forms of education? Is this a reflection of traditional schooling's failure to meet the needs of these students and/or their families?

There are several reasons *why* parents chose to home educate their children found in the existing literature regarding homeschooling, including a desire for better education and/or because of their religious beliefs (Mazama & Lundy, 2012). But most of this research was conducted with broad strokes that included the majority of homeschoolers, who are non-Hispanic whites. There was an assumption made by researchers that *all* families homeschool for the same reasons.

Without looking more closely at each of these subgroups, however, we cannot assume that their journey towards home education looked the same, especially when we know that their schooled experiences vary greatly. And it is only by examining the motivations of these subgroups, that we may stumble upon where traditional schooling possibly failed to live up to the need for culturally responsive pedagogy.

Though there is little research that discussed the motivation of Muslim homeschoolers (along with families from other marginalized communities), there is *some* concerning the Black homeschooling community in the US. By looking more closely at the circumstances that lead other families from marginalized communities to leave traditional school settings, we hope to gain some insight into what *might* be happening within the Muslim community as well.

Review of the Relevant Literature

Theoretical Framework

This inductive qualitative study uses the theoretical lens of critical multiculturalism, critical race theory, and culturally responsive pedagogy. The idea behind critical multicultural education stems from the awareness that not all students have an equal opportunity to learn within the classroom (Banks & McGee Banks, 2010). This inability to meet the needs of *all* students has led to

> "disproportionate academic outcomes for different racial groups, increasing incidents of racially motivated violence and hate-group activity, inequalities in educational funding, inadequate preparation of teachers to deal effectively with increasing diversity, curriculum that remains Eurocentric and monocultural, political manipulation of ethnic and racial fears and hostilities, and resistance from educators, school boards, and communities to face the realities of their changing populations" (Howard, 2006, p.4).

Inequality in school is not simply a discussion of teachers not knowing their increasingly diverse student population, but an issue that is seeped into the very foundation of our school system. Diane Ravitch wrote often of the history of public education in the United States and its long-standing discrepancies in educating Black and white children (2010). The growing popularity of neo-liberal educational reforms such as vouchers, publicly funded charters, and other school reform systems of privatization are just new ways of eliminating government oversight and furthering the divide between the education of white and non-white students (Saltman, 2014).

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and critical race theory (CRT) look critically at the discrepancies that exist in society, and the world of education, and call for the teaching of critical skills that help students dismantle systems of oppression (Friere, 1993). It is through these lenses that home education, amongst other forms of alternative education, were viewed in this study. While homeschooling is traditionally examined from an academic framework, it is through the lens of CRP and CRT that the motivations of Muslim-American home educators can be fully appreciated.

In an article in the Atlantic, Jon N. Hale discussed the longstanding history of communities of color in relying on themselves to provide a quality education for their children (2017). “Community controlled schools”, or “freedom schools”, were schools created within Black communities to serve Black children and were taught by well-educated, Black professionals within the community. While Ravitch argued that privatization is a form of continuing a history of suppression of Black education, Hale argues that during the civil rights era, many Black communities used these tools as a means of leaving newly desegregated and subpar schools in favor of an education that would prepare them for a racially charged society. Whether one is a proponent of using privatization as a means of providing a more equitable education or feels that these are simply tactics designed to further the racial divide, the fact remains that a growing number of students from marginalized communities are leaving traditional public schools.

While matters of homeschooling are often discussed and studied under the neo-liberal debate regarding privatization, this study hopes to view it under the lens of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism and culturally responsive teaching are movements designed to bring back equity in learning, whether discrepancies in student achievement are caused by race, religion, gender, language, social class, ethnicity, learning abilities, or cultural characteristics (Banks & McGee Banks, 2010) (Gay, 2000). Bell Hooks validates the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy by stating that there can never be “too many” Black, female writers. Marginalized voices are imperative in a culturally responsive learning environment (Hooks, 1994). Without culturally responsive teaching, schools will continue to fail its diverse populations.

Howard noted that language and religion are two areas of increasing diversity, with Islam being “the fastest-growing religion in the United States” (2006, p.ix). The number of Muslims in the United States is hotly contested and highly politicized. The Pew Research Center cites the number at 2.75 million, the American Jewish Committee claims there are only 1.86 million, while the Council for American Islamic Relations accounts for 7 million (a number that would make Muslims 2% of the American population) (Johnson, 2011; Khan, 2011). Islam is the fasting growing religion worldwide as well as here in the United States (Lipka & Hacket, 2015). Arguably, now more than ever, schools must embrace culturally responsive pedagogy to ensure that *all* students have the opportunity to learn.

Growing diversity, Howard argues, is not a choice. But what we *can* choose is how we respond to it. In workshops with teachers, Gary Howard often asks participants, "What evidence is there that we have not yet solved the problems of ... inequality in our schools and society?" (Howard, 2006, p.4). In an effort to ensure that the needs of all Muslim students are being met, we begin with this very question.

Islamophobia in the United States

The Historical Context of Islamophobia.

Although Islamophobia existed before 9/11 (as seen by the 1997 report by the Runnymede Trust in the UK in which eight components of Islamophobia are identified), it has increased significantly in the last two decades in the United States. ("Islamophobia", 2015). Since 9/11, research has shown that although the United States has identified more than 160 Muslim-Americans terrorist suspects, this constitutes only a small percentage of the thousands of acts of violence committed in the U.S. each year. Yet media coverage of terrorist activity disproportionately covers Muslim terror, creating the impression there is more to fear. Little to no coverage is given to the fact that the Muslim-American community has worked with law enforcement to prevent 2 out of every 5 al Qaida terrorist plots within the United States ("Islamophobia", 2015).

Kinchloe referred to 'contemporary Islamophobic miseducation' of the West as being shaped in large part by a cultural conflict model originating during the time of the Crusades, and continuing throughout Colonialism. The clash of civilizations model, popularized by Samuel P. Huntington and Bernard Lewis, argued that there will inevitably be a clash between Eastern Islamic and Western Christian nations (Kincheloe, 2004). This model now serves as the undercurrent of U.S. foreign policy. Kinchloe further argued that Western Scholars, when researching Islam through the “lenses of Western modernity, employing its assumptions about knowledge production, the ways human societies should develop, the nature of civilization, and the writing of history”, found Islamic culture inferior (Kincheloe, 2004, p.18).

That’s not to say that criticism of the Islamic World is unfounded. Questioning or disagreeing with Islam or Muslims is not Islamophobia, nor is denouncing crimes that are committed by individual Muslims or by some who claim to use Islam as a motivation for their actions (Legislating Fear, 2013, p.ix). Looking at history through a critical lens is not meant to right wrongs or rewrite events. It is simply calling on the importance of providing multiple narratives in order to understand the complexity of history. Kincheloe argues that Islamophobic miseducation was and is a strategy used to paint the Islamic world as inferior to the Western world, thereby creating a Western self-consciousness of superiority (Kincheloe, 2004). It is this self-consciousness that justifies the United States’ intervention in the internal affairs of other sovereign nations, installing new governments that are more favorable to U.S. interests. And it is this lens that permeates our educational system.

Americans, in large part, understand Islam through a single lens which Kincheloe describes as being run by ‘corporate knowledge producers’ that control the ‘American Empire’s politics of knowledge’ (Kincheloe, 2004, p.7). With the exception of the Pacifica Radio Network, many Americans have little variable viewpoints outlining the history of American-Muslim relations. It is through this single, narrow lens that erasure often goes unchecked, and a singular view of the Islamic world is presented (devoid of any critical perspective on the ramifications of U.S. involvement in the Islamic World) (Kincheloe, 2004).

Dalia Mogahed, who served as the former Executive Director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, finds that polls taken from 2000-2013 of anti-Muslim sentiment, backup Kincheloe's argument. Spikes in anti-Muslim views from the public didn't occur after the terrorists' attacks during 9/11 or the Boston bombers. Instead, they rose in the buildup to the Iraq war and during the election cycles of 2008 and 2012. Islamophobia, she argues, is a manufactured political phenomenon (Mogahed, 2015).

"The Bridge Initiative, a Georgetown University research project on Islamophobia, released Twenty Years of Americans Views on Islam and Muslims. This report traces 20 years of polling data on Americans' views on Islam and Muslims. The key finding was that the Iraq War, not 9/11 was a turning point for Americans' views of Islam. Polling data found that during the middle of the Iraq War, positive views of Muslims declined, with negative views outweigh positive ones, the report states" (Zuberi, 2015). In other words, it is not the negative actions of some Muslims that increase Islamophobia. It is a phenomena manufactured, often by politicians, to drum up support, whether that support is for military campaigns abroad, or election cycles at home.

Islamophobia Today.

Since the 2012 CAIR report on Islamophobia in the Classroom, Islamophobia in the United States has, in many ways, become more open. In the 2016 presidential election, and the run-up towards it, then-presidential candidate, Donald Trump, made many inflammatory statements towards the Muslim community like "I think Islam hates us. There's something there that — there's a tremendous hatred there. There's a tremendous hatred. We have to get to the bottom of it. There's an unbelievable hatred of us". He also said, "We are not loved by many Muslims", creating a dichotomy between being "us" (Americans) and "Muslims" (Johnson & Hauslohner, 2017). Since taking office he also issued a ban on immigrants from majority Muslim countries, often termed the Muslim Ban.

Mogahed, who also served as the Director of Research at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, conducted research which showed that rises of Islamophobia do not coincide with terrorist attacks, but in response to inflammatory words used by politicians (Mogahed, 2013). Mogahed argues that words matter most. Based on the increase of anti-Muslim rhetoric in the 2015-2016 election cycle, we can infer that there has likely been a rise in Islamophobic racism within schools since the CAIR report was issued.

How Islamophobia affects Muslim-American students.

In 2012, CAIR's California Chapter issued a report entitled, "Growing in Faith" (Growing, 2012). In it, they cited a Muslim Youth at School Survey in which 471 Muslim-American students across 21 counties in California were asked ten multiple-choice questions with room to comment. The questions focused on how American-Muslim youth felt in their public-school experience.

The majority of students reported feeling safe in their schools, feeling respected by teachers, and having little backlash from peers for their faith choices. Of those who did experience Islamophobia, however, a whopping 52% said they would "never" or "rarely" tell a teacher or principal. And 40% said they would not tell a parent. When asked if reporting the incident to an adult solved the problem, 64% said "rarely" or "never". This would imply that there is either no mechanism for dealing with issues of Islamophobia, or that it is flawed.

There are several examples of Islamophobia taking place within all levels of education, from the classroom to the administration, and even within the curriculum. While the stories mentioned here do not give a birds' eye view of the overall situation of Muslim students in the educational system, they do provide a more intimate understanding of the conflict they may find themselves in. And as many Americans alive at the time of Lincoln's speech, these stories make clear that Muslim students have not been afforded the same opportunities and privileges as their peers.

Multicultural Education

Why Black Families Choose Homeschooling.

The United States Department of Education documented a 90% increase in Black homeschoolers in 2010 from the previous ten years (Ray, 2015). Despite this growth, there is little research on why Black families are increasingly choosing to home educate their children (Ray, 2015; see also Mazama & Lundy, 2012).

Mazama & Lundy interviewed 74 Black homeschooling families to find out more about their motivations for choosing home education (2012). The families came from urban and suburban settings, ranging from the Mid-Atlantic South up through the Midwest. The authors discovered that many Black families *did* homeschool for the same reasons as their non-Hispanic white counterparts. But by failing to delve more deeply into this community's specific motivations, we fail to see the part race plays in these motivations.

The findings indicated that while the quality of education was their most cited reason for homeschooling, racism was listed second (Mazama & Lundy, 2012, p.733). Families often cited several reasons for homeschooling, not one, and racism, though a separate reason, served as an underlying issue with several other motivations as well. "That is to say, for example, parents who mention religion or family bonds as their motivation for homeschooling do so within a context that acknowledges institutional racism and the imperative of a curriculum that espouses a positive self-image of African American people" (Mazama & Lundy, 2012, p.733). Racism was a common thread that wove through many factors, including curricular issues (their Eurocentric perspectives), teachers (and their bias against black and brown students), as well as failures and limitations of integrating schools.

Fields-Smith & Kisura conducted a study of 54 Black home educators (2013). Unlike Mazama & Lundy, they restricted their study to families within the Metro areas of Washington D.C. and Atlanta. "The researchers focused on five "key motivations" (p. 272) in their article. These were the negative experiences in schools of a "culture of low expectations" (p. 272), the "plight of Black boys" (p. 274), the "psychology of safety" (p. 276), and the "positive opportunities in home education" (p. 276) of "imparting Black/African American culture" (p. 277) and "seeking a global perspective" (p. 277)" (Ray, 2015).

Both studies conclude that racism played a major role in the motivation of Black families to homeschool. Feagin concludes this is "not surprising since there is hardly any other area of African American life that is not severely impacted by White racism" (Mazama & Lundy, 2012, pp. 725-726).

Ray conducted his own study of Black homeschoolers from grades four through eight (2015). Although he studied academic performance, he also drew conclusions about the motivations of Black homeschooling families. Like the previous researchers, Ray also found commonalities amongst Black homeschoolers' motivations and their non-Hispanic white counterparts. Like other researchers who looked more closely at the Black homeschooling population, he also found a thread of racial motivations. Unlike Mazama and Lundy, however, Ray did not find that these families wanted to learn more about and promote the idea of Afrocentrism. "Data from this study show that a notable portion of homeschool Black parents want their children to understand and appreciate the history and value of culture related to Africa and Black Diaspora," (Ray, 2015, p. 88).

Why Families with LGBTQ Students Choose Homeschooling.

Similar to the Muslim student community, there is little research done on students who grew up identifying with the LGBTQ community and who homeschooled/unschooled. Gina Riley conducted one study in which 18 formerly homeschooled students who identified as LGBTQ were given a questionnaire (2018). Riley explained that the sample size was small because she estimates that only 5-10% of the homeschooling community falls within this community.

While this is the only study conducted on LGBTQ students and homeschooling, the study did not delve into the motivations of these families to homeschool. Instead, it focused on their actual homeschooling experiences. Many discussed the benefits that came from the freedom of homeschooling, the room to be oneself and discover oneself without added pressure, and the benefit of being away from the "straight culture" of the schooled environment (Riley, 2018). Some noted, though, that they continued to face bullying outside the classroom.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.

Freire said, “The oppressors do not favor promoting the community as a whole, but rather selected leaders” (Freire, 1993). It is possible that Freire, too, would argue that Lincoln’s statements referred to a civic education that propagated the stories of those in power, not of the community as a whole. And yet, it is an essential component of culturally responsive pedagogy that *all* children feel included in the master narrative in order to be fully educated (Takaki, 2008).

Culturally responsive pedagogy pertaining to Muslim-American students is often hidden under other, sometimes irrelevant labels. As mentioned previously, much of the research regarding the creation of an inclusive learning environment is hidden under the umbrella of “Arab-American”. Schwartz outlines a list of several measures schools can take, including staff development to eliminate prejudice and discrimination, including Arab culture in courses and activities, creating culturally rich curriculum (that includes accurate and culturally sensitive depictions of Arab culture in textbook and other media), and showing understanding and sensitivity to cultural distinctions, language hurdles, and extended family values when communicating with the familes of these students (1999). But as Gay (2000) and Takaki (2008) would argue, educators must be wary of broadstroking all Muslims with one stroke. Many of these accommodations seem ill fitting for Muslim-American students of Black, white, or Indigenous heritage, amongst others.

Unschooling

Unschooling is a type of home education, or home schooling, which is less structured. In lieu of using a boxed curriculum, “unschoolers learn primarily through everyday life experiences--experiences that they choose and that therefore automatically match their abilities, interests, and learning styles” (Gray, 2013). This type of free, or autonomous, learning has existed for at least four decades, as John Holt’s writings on home education were published around that time. Despite this, little research existed on this community because researchers, often influenced by what they ‘know’, tended to lack the skills needed to study the families who subscribed to this form of education they, themselves, had not encountered before (Rolstad & Kesson, 2013).

How Unschooling Reflects Issues of Multiculturalism.

Unschooling is a form of home education where children do not follow a prescribed curriculum and, instead, allow learning to be student-led (Riley, 2016). In “Unschooling in Hong Kong: A Case Study” and “Implementation of Multicultural Education in Unschooling and Its Potential”, the authors examined how unschooling related to issues of multiculturalism and diversity (Chase & Morrison, 2018; Riley, 2016). In each article, the position of unschoolers as “outsiders” was more closely examined.

In their research, Chase and Morrison focused on finding out whether unschoolers were more likely to meet the criterion of studying multicultural education as outlined in the curricular reform by James Banks (Banks, 1989). The difficulty of the study lay in the fact that unschoolers did not follow a particular curriculum. As such, Chase and Morrison conducted their study on old issues of the magazine *Growing Without School (GWS).* *GWS* was a foundational text for unschoolers in the late 70’s and early 80’s. This qualitative study took place by assigning numeric values to diverse language coded throughout the issues of *GWS*, i.e., a directed content analysis approach. The context of those words were studied, and further numeric values were given to those places where higher levels of social understanding of multicultural issues took place.

The results of the study showed that, though some of the unschoolers, themselves, came from marginalized communities, they were not more likely to engage in multicultural education than their school-going counterparts or less likely to engage in multicultural education than their school-going counterparts. Though unschoolers had a deeper understanding of Bank's multiculturalism's first two levels than school going students, neither unschoolers or traditional students showed depth in the higher two levels and were not equipped with an understanding of how to end inequality (Banks, 1989).

The limitations of Chase and Morrison's study are many. To begin, the method of using a specific magazine that was curated by one individual-John Holt-is problematic to produce broad generalizations on the entire body of unschoolers. Since they used a criterion designed for curriculum, and it was not a curriculum but a magazine that was studied, gaps were likely. There was also an assumption that the magazine curated content that represented the body of unschoolers at the time. However, having one individual, and that individual being a white male, particularly, already affects the results of the study since higher points were given to those articles written by members of marginalized communities. Just as research on predominantly White homeschoolers cannot be applied to *all* homeschoolers, more research is needed that looks specifically at unschoolers from marginalized communities.

In "Unschooling in Hong Kong: A Case Study", Riley examined unschooling in a multicultural context: by looking more closely at an unschooling family in Hong Kong (2016). Her study documented the journey Karen Chow, one of the first documented unschooling mothers in Hong Kong, took to break through the legal hurdles to unschooling her children. Because Hong Kong is a culture in which adult wisdom is valued, home education, but particularly unschooling, is considered to be high risk (Riley, 2016). Parents must provide documentation to show that children are learning, and once approved, receive a status known as "non-disapproval".

This qualitative case study relied on the use of interviews to look more deeply at how one mother unschooled her children in an environment that valued traditional schooling as far superior. Unlike the previous study (which studied unschooling documents from previous decades), Riley relied on exchanges that took place as late as 2015 (2016).

Through Chow's efforts in working with government education bodies, she opened the door to make it easier for other families to unschool their children in Hong Kong. In fact, in one specific incident with another family, a case officer noted that Chow made it easier for him or her to understand unschooling. Chow's efforts helped bring about institutional changes.

Though both articles attempted to tackle aspects of multiculturalism and unschooling, at their root they looked at their studies from different sides of the same coin. Chase and Morrison wanted to find out how unschooling addressed the issue of multiculturalism so they used a method better suited for traditional schooling (2018). Riley, on the other hand, conducted her research through the lens of unschooling (2016). She explored how unschooling became a tool in which a marginalized family thrived, and how that family went on to pave the way for others to follow in their footsteps. As unschooling increases in popularity, it will, perhaps, become all the more important to find methods of studying this educational philosophy through its *own* lens, rather than through the lens of other philosophies.

Muslims and Education

According to the Pew Research Center, at the time of this publication there are 3.45 million Muslims in America. Since Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States due to rising birth rates and immigration, experts estimate that it will be the second largest religion in the US by the year 2040 (Pew, 2018). That said, Muslim-American populations tend to cluster in primarily 8 states, causing overall ratios of Muslims to non-Muslims to increase in certain areas (Muslim, 2016). According to an earlier study by Pew, the Muslim-American population in the U.S. is younger than the general population, leading to the assumption that the percentage of school age Muslim-Americans is higher (Muslim, 2016).

Despite the growing presence of Muslim-American youth, there is little research on this specific student poplution. Information on Muslim-American students is often pooled from other, overlapping racial demographics. Studies on Arab-American students, for example, describe how these students can be made to feel more welcome (Schwartz, 1999). This research is helpful, but incomplete when one considers that the majority of Muslims are not Arab, they are ethnically Asian. Additional information on Asian-American students is also examined. The “invisibility” of Asian-American students and the model minority myth are important cultural phenomena to note, but again, cannot be applied to the stories of *all* Muslim-American students (Wing, 2007). Though diverse, this student population needs more specific research aimed directly at their community as a whole.

Conclusion

Although there is very little research on homeschooling and/or unschooling with respect to marginalized communities, there is enough to reveal a pattern amongst Black homeschooling families. That is, these families often choose to homeschool not simply for academic motivations. Race plays a factor. In pulling their children out of traditional schools, Black families hope to provide an environment free from bias against their children so that they can thrive. While there is little evidence detailing the *Muslim* homeschooling experience, by looking at the existence of Islamophobic bullying within the educational system as a whole, as well as the increase in Islamophobic rhetoric in the media, one can infer that their motivations run parallel with the Black homeschooling community. It is probable that racism may also be a major motivating factor for Muslim homeschooling families.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter explains the rationale for choosing narrative inquiry as the research methodology best suited for this study. It also explains which research procedures were used for this narrative inquiry and it outlines the analytic and interpretive tools used to address the following research question: What are the perceptions and motivations of Muslim-American mothers regarding homeschooling their children in the United States?

This study lends itself to a qualitative method of research in that it isn't trying to test theories or specific behaviors as is done in quantitative studies. Rather, the goal was to explore human conditions. In an effort to better understand these mothers' motivations, questions emerged that steered the course of further investigation. Qualitative studies are those which are suited to diving in deep and understanding the rich complexities of human behavior (Creswell, 2014). As this study was done with a critical race lens, multiple layers of identity must also be explored in addition to motivation.

Theoretical Framework of Narrative Inquiry

For this study I chose to use the qualitative research methodology of narrative inquiry. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and motivations Muslim-American mothers have regarding homeschooling their children. By examining the stories of those who decided to leave traditional education, we are able to arrive at a more complete understanding of education in the United States as a whole.

Dewey spoke of the importance of lived experience (Dewey, 2015). Narrative inquiry research is predicated upon the idea that humans lead storied lives (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000). By this we mean that those experiences are interpreted by us in the form of stories. And these stories—these complexities of thought and feeling—are often woven together like threads, producing a single cloth. We cannot simply examine a single thread without seeing how it fits together with the whole. Indeed, to pull an individual thread would simply unravel the complex story.

Robert Evans, an American film producer who produced the Godfather, Rosemary's Baby, amongst others, said, "There are three sides to every story: your side, my side, and the truth. And no one is lying. Memories shared serve each differently" (Evans, 2013, p.11). The experience that Dewey references is separate from the stories that humans tell themselves *about* the experiences that have lived. And as Evans states, different people tell different sides of the story.

In this study, I looked more closely at the stories, or narratives of those who fall outside the dominant discourse. "Since many stories advance White privilege through "majoritarian" master narratives, counter- stories by people of color can help to shatter the complacency that may accompany such privilege and challenge the dominant discourses that serve to suppress people on the margins of society" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p.24). Narrative inquiry not only allows those whose voices have been marginalized to tell their stories, but it does so on their terms. The interviews often take place in spaces where participants naturally reside and feel safe (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990).

When looking at the research which closely examines the motivations of Black homeschooling families in turning to home education, we see that race is a theme that underpins others. Their motivations are complex, interwoven and cannot be understood fully unless one looks through a wider lens. It is for this reason that I chose to use narrative inquiry for this study. It allows researchers to explore the complexity of the stories that humans tell themselves (Bruner, 2004).

Another reason for choosing qualitative research is that this is a type of research that evolves over the course of the study. Because this research uses a critical race lens, "stories by people of color can help to shatter the complacency that may accompany such privilege and challenge the dominant discourses that serve to suppress people on the margins of society" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p.24). In the effort to try and understand these mothers' motivations, the researcher must pay attention to participants' context and the intricate relationship that takes place between the present and the past and our memories and thinking about both.

Context

Islamophobia in the United States has been on the rise both inside and outside of the classroom. Since the 2012 CAIR report on Islamophobia in the Classroom (in which 40% of *all* Muslim students in California reported experiencing Islamophobia at school), Islamophobia in the United States has, in many ways, become more open (Growing, 2012). In the 2016 presidential election, and the run-up towards it, then-presidential candidate, Donald Trump, made many inflammatory statements towards the Muslim community (Johnson & Hauslohner, 2017). Since taking office he also issued a ban on immigrants from majority Muslim countries, often termed the Muslim Ban.

Mogahed, who also served as the Director of Research at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, conducted research which showed that rises of Islamophobia do not coincide with terrorist attacks, but in response to inflammatory words used by politicians (Mogahed, 2013). Mogahed argues that words matter most. Based on the increase of anti-Muslim rhetoric in the 2015-2016 election cycle, we can infer that there has likely been a rise in Islamophobic racism within schools since the CAIR report was issued.

We also know that homeschooling has been on the rise, particularly amongst certain demographics. Not only has the nature of homeschooling shifted, so too have the *faces* of those who find themselves drawn to this alternative form of education. Black families (Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013), Hispanic families, Asian families (Hirsh, 2019), and the families of LGBTQ children (Riley, 2018) have increasingly turned to home education, along with others from marginalized communities.

As a writer/blogger, I have written about my own family's journey towards homeschooling, along with my own childhood experiences inside the traditional, public education classroom. As my audience grew, I could see that there was a desire to learn more about unschooling, a form of home education that follows a less traditional, curricular course and instead, allows children and families to chart their own learning journeys according to their own needs. In response to this desire, I created the course Unschooling Unveiled, an 8-12 week online course which provides a sort of step by step guide to self-directed learning. Many of the students who signed up were Muslim-American mothers who were unhappy with their child's schooled experiences and wanted to opt out.

At the close of the 2019-2020 school year, an even greater number of parents were thrust into online and/or homeschooling with little to no warning because of the pandemic. At that time many teachers, themselves, were unprepared to transition to this nontraditional form of schooling (Wadley, 2020). The impact of this new, virtual schooling, affected children differently depending on access to different resources, the availability of adults at home, etc. Also, students in different parts of the world were controlled by different schooling laws put in place.

As this school year began, parents found themselves in a unique and often new schooling situation since the pandemic hit. Some faced the task of sending their children back to school with greater protective measures in place. Others opted for a virtual/homeschooling option. Some turned to alternative forms of education, including other, non-traditional forms of home education. It was because of this new wave of homeschoolers who, perhaps, were motivated by the pandemic, that I chose to limit my research to only those who homeschooled before the spring of 2020.

Positionality

I am a freelance writer/blogger who curates an audience of parents who strive to parent conscientiously. My blog revolves around the topics of critical thinking, social justice and anti-racism. I am also an online instructor who teaches parents. In the fall of 2019 I created a course teaching parents how to unschool, or allow their children to self-direct their education. It is from this student body that I plan to pull participants, as these are parents I have easy access to.

Within my audience I am considered an authority on the topic of home education, unschooling (self-directed learning and critical thinking), and anti-bias education. It is possible that participants' knowledge of my area of expertise may influence their responses. It’s also possible that this may engender more honesty as I am a trusted figure for this group. Personally, my areas of expertise, as well as my own experiences and motivations to home educate my children, may lead to a bias in my expectations. Because I, too, am a Muslim-American mother who has chosen to home educate my children, my own narrative may influence my interpretation of others' narratives. In addition to serving as the role of interviewer, my journal entries and blog posts were reviewed and used within the research.

Participants

The participant group was chosen through purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research to most effectively utilize limited resources by choosing individuals that are knowledgeable about a specific phenomena (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). More specifically, maximum variation sampling was used to counter personal bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For this study, I am seeking to understand the motivations of Muslim-American mothers to home educate their children. As such, three to five Muslim mothers residing within the United States with their children (from the moment homeschooling was entered into) were selected. I currently have an Instagram profile with 37k followers. Participants were chosen from my former students, who come from this audience and matched its demographics. 81% are between the ages of 25-44, and the participants also fell within this age range.

I teach personal development courses online for which students pay to enroll. The courses are not affiliated with any educational body, nor are grades given. More specifically, participants had enrolled in Unschooling Unveiled, a course in which I taught interested parents how to unschool, or help their children self-direct their education. Because of the rise of Covid-19 and the increase in homeschoolers in 2020 due to safety concerns, only participants from the 2019 cohort were chosen.

Participants may have any number of children, but for this study only participants with school age (5+) were chosen. This minimum age restriction is being imposed because, while parents of preschoolers may still choose to homeschool, the intent behind this study is to determine why these parents are choosing home education over traditionally schooled education. For mothers whose children are young, they are not yet choosing home over school.

An email was sent to all students of the Unschooling Unveiled 2019 cohort explaining the study and asking for volunteers to participate in the research project, and their potential involvement and time commitment. Respondents were sent a google form with specified selection criterion, including their age, location, race/ethnicity, number of years homeschooling and ages of children. If enough participants had not been found, potential participants outside of this course would have been recruited through my personal network.

Once the basic criteria were met, which reflected the intent of the research question, maximum variation sampling was used to choose a diverse pool of participants in order to reflect different perspectives. If it became possible to have parents in different geographic areas (East coast, West coast, etc) or to have parents with children of different age demographic (elementary age children, middle school age children, etc), attempts to create a more heterogeneous sample were made. Attempts were also made to select a racially diverse sample group as well, to reflect the racial diversity of American Muslims. This intentional diversification helped to decrease my own personal bias as I chose other

Muslim-American mothers whose circumstances and experiences were different from my own. Once qualifying participants were selected, they received a consent form to participate. Consent forms were completed prior to initial interviews.

	Kids' ages	Location	Started prior to Spring '20	Former Student (of mine)	Muslim	Race/Ethnicity	Age of mom	Year began HS'ing
Participant 1	6, 4.5, 1.5	Suburb of Chicago, Illinois	Yes	Unschooling Course	By birth	Indian	33	2019
Participant 2	7, 5, 3	Sacramento, California	Yes	Reboot, Unschooling Course	converted at 19	White (Jewish/Turkish)	34	2018
Participant 3	12, 11, 9, 6	Phoenix, Arizona	Yes	Unschooling Course	By birth	Subcontinental Asian	43	2019
Researcher Participant	12, 12, 9	Houston, Texas	Yes	N/A	By birth	Indian/Pakistani	41	2012

Data Collection

Within narrative inquiry, data is often referred to as field-texts. For the purposes of this study, field-texts came primarily from two in-depth, semi-structured interviews with mothers of home educated children. Researcher journals, transcripts, and email exchanges were also collected as field texts.

The initial round of interviews lasted over an hour. Follow up questions were asked for member checking purposes. The interview questions, though brief, are broad in nature. The intent was to allow as complete a story as possible as to what led to the decision to homeschool their children. As motivations tend to be multi-layered, participants were given enough time to fully explore their reasoning and responses. The researcher journaled her reflections and observations throughout the course of the interviews. A follow up interview was scheduled for further exploration or clarification. Before this interview took place, the researcher noted possible gaps in each participants' story and created new questions accordingly. After each interview, email exchanges with participants allowed for further member checking as participants had the opportunity to read the researcher's restorying of their narratives and give feedback. All interviews were conducted virtually and recorded.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Analysis and interpretation, or making meaning of participants' motivations through the use of narrative, begins with the archival task of reading and rereading all field texts. In this study, this included all transcripts, journals, and email correspondence. In order to transition from field texts to research texts, all field texts were coded narratively. "For example, names of the characters that appear in field texts, places where actions and events occurred, story lines that interweave and interconnect, gaps or silences that becomes apparent, tensions that emerge, and continuities and discontinuities that appear are all possible codes" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.131)

Narrative coding rests upon three analytic tools: broadening, burrowing, storying and restorying (Kim, 2016). These three tools were used to transition from field to interim texts. Broadening allows the "narrative researcher to introduce more general knowledge of the culture than is contained in the text itself to be able to interpret a broader cultural framework of meaning as part of narrative analysis" (Mishler, 1986, p.244). Burrowing focuses on an "event's emotional, moral, and aesthetic qualities...aimed at reconstructing a story of the event from the point of view of the person at the time the event occurred" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p.11). Storying and restorying allows the participants' lived experiences to be reconstructed.

Following the initial interview, field texts were placed in chronological order in order to begin the process of restorying. Throughout the course of the interview, the narrative inquirer may make note of specific moments where burrowing and broadening occur. Questions arose as the narrative inquirer moved from reading the experiences to trying to analyze the significance of the experiences, and it is these questions that drove the creation of themes around which stories were retold.

It should be noted that this process of burrowing, broadening, restorying, and deriving themes is not isolated from the participant. The researcher utilized member checking by asking participants to give feedback or to affirm if the researcher's understanding is correct. In doing so, the researcher hoped to increase validity and accuracy, but to also decrease the likelihood of personal bias.

Journaling was the primary interim text used in this research. The researcher journaled her own observations and understanding during the collection of field texts. She also journaled her own story parallel to her participants' stories. Transcripts were coded as additional interim texts.

This process, though seemingly linear, happened in no particular order, throughout the entire research process from field text to research text, and was repeated several times (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry's process of analysis is complex, and the researcher's own experiences played a part in the meaning making of participants' experiences.

Ethical Considerations & Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, ethical considerations must be made throughout the entire research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In addition to informed consent forms issued at the beginning of participants' involvement in the study, I as the researcher, continued to build a relationship with participants built upon trust. I was mindful of my research participants as my "first audience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.173).

Participants face no risks from sharing their stories, from employers and/or minimal risk from the public) pseudonyms were not needed. However, since much of the research may include intimate information related to participants' children, all participants and their family members had pseudonyms assigned.

Member checking took place throughout the entire course of research. The researcher checked her understanding of events during interviews, over emails following the interviews, and at times even sent participants excerpts of her journal or written analysis in order for participants to check accuracy of understanding. As she went through her process of burrowing, broadening, and restorying, she rewrote participants' stories using thick, rich language which participants were invited to give feedback on (Stake, 1995).

In addition to the validation strategies above, the researcher also worked collaboratively with peers to gain insight and get a better perspective on her research methodology. Peers in her doctoral cohort provided peer feedback on her interview questions. She had them read excerpts of her research to check for any flagrant biases that might impede her work. She also used her own journaling as a means of reflecting on her own biases.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the rationale for choosing narrative inquiry as the research methodology best suited for this study. It explained which research procedures were used for this narrative inquiry. It also outlined the analytic and interpretive tools used.

Chapter IV: Findings

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to qualitatively examine the stories and experiences of participating Muslim-American families concerning traditional schooling and to understand their motivations to home educate their children. The following research question guided this study: What are the perceptions and motivations of Muslim-American mothers regarding homeschooling their children in the United States?

This study examined the perceptions of three participants who chose to homeschool their children. The researcher was also included as a participant. Virtual interviews were conducted at participants' preferred time and place. In the first interview, participants responded to open-ended questions related to their family history, culture, values, schooled experiences, and their path to home education. Subsequent interviews were more specific to each participant and served to fill in any gaps in their story as well as to delve deeper into things they had mentioned in the first interview. E-mail exchanges were used between interviews to allow for member checking and to give participants an opportunity to offer more reflection through written form. Research findings were based on interviews, researcher journaling, emails, and narratively coded transcriptions.

The findings presented here begin with a general background narrative. A general introduction to each participant, including the researcher, is included. What follows are the themes, or recurring patterns in the narrative, between all participants. These emerging themes are then discussed.

Background

Jameela

Jameela is a 33 mother of three, living in the suburbs of Chicago, a place where she lived most of her life. She is a wife to Ahmed, who was born and raised in Kenya. Together, Jameela and Ahmed have three children ages 6, 4, and 1.

Her parents immigrated to the United States in the 70's from India. Both her parents worked full-time throughout her childhood. As a result, the normal parental duties were often relegated to one of her three older sisters.

Jameela, with caramel colored skin and hijab draped in ruffles around her neck, describes her family growing up as both religiously and culturally conservative. They highly valued education, excellence, and wanted their daughters to pursue medicine.

> Growing up we were very conservative, culturally and religiously. My parents are very practicing and very much about deen (religion) and religion. Also very education-minded. You know, like a typical brown parent, you know, 'you didn't get a hundred what's wrong with you..' So it was all about, like, excel excel excel do your best to your best. (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 03, 2021)

Jameela eventually went on to study engineering.

As the youngest of four, Jameela's experiences with school often came as a result of her sisters' *earlier* experiences. Though her older sisters, several years her senior, had gone through the public school system, when the time came for Jameela to enter school her parents moved the family across town where a new Islamic private school had opened up. Her family bought a home across the street from the school and Jameela enrolled there from age three through the second grade. She was then sent to public school for the remainder of her elementary years.

When the time for Jameela to enter middle school arrived, her parents were adamant that she not experience that time at a public school. This decision came after one of their daughters went to eighth grade and was repeatedly harassed and bullied. The school had a primarily White student body and only a handful of Muslim students. Jameela describes the community as one lacking diversity and very ignorant of difference. Jameela's sister wore her hijab to school and over the course of one year would frequently have students spit on her, throw their shoes at her, and pull her hijab off. Jameela recalls her backpack being covered, by the end of the year, in swear words written by the other students.

Having had one daughter undergo intolerable, Islamophobic bullying, they opted instead for an Islamic, private middle school. So Jameela returned to that school and stayed until she graduated high school.

As a parent, Jameela's values slightly differ from her parents. While they focused heavily on academics and work ethic, Jameela tends to value her children's emotional well-being and creative spirit. She began homeschooling her children after seeing and learning from her older sister's experiences with home education and following her example.

Mona

Mona is a 34 year old mother of 3 living in Sacramento, California though she grew up in San Francisco. She is the wife of Kareem, a descendant of Iraqi parents who grew up in Maryland. Together, Mona and Kareem have three children ages 7, 5, and 3.

Mona’s father is Turkish while her mother descends from Polish Jews. They married in Turkey before moving to the United States. Neither of Mona’s parents were Muslim, nor were they religious, and she was raised with no religion (although she identified Jewish).

At the age of seven, Mona’s parents got a divorce. She and her younger sister continued living with their mother, who Mona describes as being warm, caring, and active in the community. She was “kind of like a hippie, but that’s what I loved about her”, Mona recalls. It was from her mother that Mona learned the importance of compassion.

Her father struggled to get on his feet. He lived out of his truck for a brief period of time and had difficulty with his employment. Despite this, Mona says she continued to see him weekly. He eventually remarried and Mona describes her relationship with her step-mother as positive.

As a child, Mona enjoyed her school experiences. She began her school years in a private school in an old Victorian mansion in San Francisco. The school seemed to focus on play and experiential learning in nature. Mona describes the school community as being “like a small family”. She entered public schools in the mission district during her middle school years. Despite some difficulty, she thrived there, forming positive relationships with others and participating in student leadership. Her high school years were spent in a public charter school, a smaller school focused on developing students into leaders.

Mona describes her early experiences as lacking in discussions about faith or God. Religion was not a part of her everyday life and would occasionally make an appearance during the Jewish holiday seasons.

> Religion was not really that much a part of my upbringing.. I felt [that] I believed in God but I didn't really know that much about God.. But I always felt drawn to that belief in God. Growing up there was no, we didn't even talk about God. There was no discussion about religion. I mean Judaism was like.. We knew we were jewish, but it was not a belief system.. It was like a culture and it wasn't a part of like our everyday life or anything. It was like, we celebrated hanukkah, we learned the prayer, but we didn't know what it meant. (M. Scott, personal communication, Feb 04, 2021)

Despite this, Mona had a curiosity about God. Around the age of 19, Mona converted to Islam.

Like Jameela, Mona had some exposure to homeschooling prior to making this decision for her family. A friend in college had chosen this path, and though Mona was still young at the time, she became exposed to the idea of choosing something different. When the time came for her own children to be educated, Mona decided against sending her kids to a traditional school.

Sana

Sana is a 43 year old married mother of 4 living in the Phoenix area. Her children are ages 12, 11, 9 and 6 years old. She is a working physician, specializing in geriatrics, who owns her own practice. A native of Houston, TX, Sana was raised by parents who hailed from the Indian subcontinent. Her father was born in south India, but moved to

Pakistan after high school. When the visa lottery opened up to the US her grandfather applied for her father and he immigrated to the States in ‘72.

Her mother was born in East Pakistan, which is now known as Bangladesh, though she too was from south India. In ‘72 she was a teenager who had been evacuated from East Pakistan when it declared its independence. She left as a refugee on a plane early in the morning without shoes, fleeing massacre.

Her parents agreed to marry by photograph, meeting for the first time in 1976 when her father returned to Pakistan to marry and pick up his new bride. After arriving in the United States, Sana and her siblings were born.

Sana describes her childhood as fun, without a lot of rules. She and her siblings didn’t have a fixed bedtime, nor were there a lot of routines, which Sana equated to feeling a sense of freedom.

Sana says she only ever went to public school and she did “school well”. She was always at the top of her class academically and she enjoyed learning. Her experiences at school were almost all positive, save for about two years of her time in middle school. This, Sana recalls, were the years she remembers being bullied.

Growing up, Sana was raised to be confident and resilient, despite the challenges she faced. She speaks specifically of her father who repeatedly told her, “You can do anything.. You are a proud Muslim, Pakistani woman.” (S. Khan, personal communication, Feb 08, 2021) For her father, both her religious and ethnic heritage defined her in a strong, powerful way.

Sana initially enrolled her eldest in a private Montessori school around the age of 3. The freedom there felt unfamiliar to her in a school setting. She describes how she and her husband bought a house close to an empty lot where a new public elementary school was slated to be built but lack of funding stalled the project. As a result, Sana decided to send her son to a public charter school. Again, the experience felt unfamiliar, with its rigidity and excessive homework.

Almost like a modern “schooled” version of goldilocks with its “this one feels too free” and “this one feels too rigid”, Sana decided to try a more traditional public school, hoping it would be just right. She felt that *that* experience would be more familiar. It was there that her eldest stayed, until the fifth grade, at which time Sana was not happy with how her son was developing, and made the decision to pull him out and homeschool him.

My story

I, myself, am a 41 mother of three children, ages 12, 12, and 9. I currently live in Houston, TX, although I moved quite a bit growing up. Most of my childhood was spent in a small town in Ohio where we were one of only a handful of non-white residents.

My father’s family hailed from northern India for many generations. He grew up amongst the architectural glory of the mughal empire, which later became the seat of british imperialism in the subcontinent. After completing his Masters in India, he followed his brothers to England where he lived and worked for several years, establishing himself as a financially capable bachelor, worthy of caring for a wife.

My mother’s trajectory was unusual for women in her time and place. She hailed from Pakistan, although her family bounced around the subcontinent, even spending a generation in Burma, as it was known at the time. Though all her sisters longed for a college education, it was my mother, the baby of the bunch, who was given permission to not only study medicine, but to live away from her family in order to pursue her education. Education above all else became *the* central value she (and her future partner) would pass on to their children and grandchildren. She became a pediatrician, focusing on infant care, when she "met" my father through a mutual acquaintance. They exchanged letters and photographs. He sought an educated woman. She sought some one who would value her education. Eventually, my parents settled in the United States and my siblings and I spent time in both private, Christian schools and traditional public schools.

The one common thread throughout my schooling is that it was very white. Rarely did we come into contact with any students of color. And though I always did well academically, I hated school. It was a place of confusion and discomfort. I forever felt like an outsider. Rarely would I see familiar faces or hear familiar stories and as a result, I spent a lot of time feeling invisible.

When the time came to send my children to school I hesitated to send them to public school, where I knew the majority would be different whether by faith or by race. Instead, I turned my attention to the local private Islamic schools. But after visiting several campuses I felt underwhelmed by their lack of attention to how children really learned. Desks were still in rows and worksheets lined their workspaces. Reluctantly, I decided to homeschool them "until a better alternative presented itself" I said to my husband at the time. It's been eight years since that decision was made, and we still find ourselves homeschooling today.

Study Findings

I began this research with broad, semi-structured, open-ended questions so as to allow participants to drive the conversations. Taking into consideration my own experiences as a Muslim-American mother who chose to homeschool, I wanted to be sure not to allow my positionality to influence outcomes. What followed were deep conversations in which three primary themes emerged. To my surprise, there were parallel patterns that emerged from all participants' stories, despite variations in background and upbringing. After an exhaustive review of interviews, journals, participants' correspondence, and transcripts, in which the data was analyzed using the narrative coding techniques of broadening, burrowing, storying and restorying, the following themes emerged: racial and cultural identity, religion, and academics.

Despite the division of these themes, it should be noted that their emergence often overlapped. While race and cultural identity is outlined here as its own theme, it arguably was also a motivation that was woven together with all the other themes. Tatum, in her bestseller Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria, and Beydoun in his monumental work American Islamophobia, both discuss the framing of islamophobia as a form of racism, and of a "Muslim" identity being categorized as a racial identity, not simply a religious one. "Islamophobia is a form of racism in the sense that it is the result of the social construction of a group as a race and to which specificities and stereotypes are attributed." From a critical race lens, as Muslim-Americans navigate American society, their religious identiy is not simply one reserved to spiritual matters. It is for this reason that, though racial and cultural identity have been given space here as their own distinct motivation, in reality, it is a theme that bleeds through all the others as well. In a similar vein, I have opted not to include culturally responsive pedagogy as its own theme and have chosen instead to simply weave this topic through the other emerging themes.

Theme 1: Racial and Cultural Identity

One of the main themes that emerged is the need to help children establish their own identity. Each participant expressed awareness that raising their children in America, as members of one or more marginalized communities, would present unique challenges. Whether they, themselves, had grown up facing these challenges or not, each participant articulated a deep understanding of the difficulties in growing up different from the majoritarian narrative. And each had thought carefully about what their children would need to face those challenges.

Jameela

Growing up, identity construction and development was a major challenge for Jameela. She juggled multiple identities; being Muslim, being Indian, and being American. Each of these subordinate identity constructions fell outside the dominant narrative and often led to bullying which will be discussed later as its own subtheme.

For Jameela, her choice to home educate her children often boiled down to one reason; "I wanted to be in charge of the Muslim narrative." For her, being in charge of the narrative meant that *she* could establish a new *normal*. "My kids barely know they're Muslim" she says (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 25, 2021). By this she means that being Muslim is so normalized, that the friction she felt growing up in a subordinate identity community is removed.

Her children are surrounded by other Muslims, giving them a strong sense of community and connection. This was an important part of the normalizing of their subordinate identities. That said, Jameela makes sure to note that she isn't opposed to her children having non-Muslim friends. Indeed, they have formed friendships with neighborhood children. But even within these friendships, she is careful to make sure that they are safe spaces for her children. “I don’t want my children to ever be bullied” she says emphatically. “I don’t want anyone to ever break her spirit.” (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 25, 2021)

Mona

Unlike the other participants in the research study, Mona did not grow up with many of the identity issues they felt being a part of subordinate identity groups. She identified white, thrived in school, was liked by her teachers, and considered herself to be a sociable person.

Even though she was not raised Muslim, she felt it was important for her to lay a strong foundation for her children. She describes this foundation as one in which they know that “being Muslim is something normal and not other.” (M. Scott, personal communication, Feb 04, 2021) She talked about her own childhood in which she didn’t know many Muslims and did not see it as normalized.

Mona, like Jameela, also talked about the importance of surrounding her children with a strong, Muslim community. She, too, had no qualms with her children befriending non-Muslim children and often found them playing with neighbors who weren’t Muslim, she did so with a “heightened sense of caution.” (M. Scott, personal communication, Feb 16, 2021) Knowing who her children were around, what they were being exposed to, and knowing that they were safe was a big concern.

Overall, Mona mentioned repeatedly the desire to have her children “be comfortable with who they are.” She knows that being visibly Muslim causes her to stand out and invites unwanted stares and verbal conflicts (this will be explored more later), as an adult she is able to “tune it out.” (M. Scott, personal communication, Feb 04, 2021) Her son, however, struggles with this subtle form of ostracization. “I don’t like it when people stare at you,” he tells her. In settings like the playground or the grocery store, Mona feels she has “more control in helping him work through those types of situations,” which is important and necessary as he grows up and must grapple with multiple identities. (M. Scott, personal communication, Feb 16, 2021)

Sana

Unlike her own growing up where she was hyper cognizant of her construction as a person of color, Sana describes her children’s childhood as one in which they “thought they were white.” By this she means that they felt comfortable in their skin and did not feel as though they belonged to a *subordinate* identity.

Whereas she grew up feeling not quite Pakistani enough for the Pakistani’s and not quite American enough for the Americans, her children seemed completely comfortable in their American skin. In fact, this was something she would repeatedly tell them—that they were American—despite her own conflict about assuming that label. It wasn’t until she was well into her adult years that she finally owned that she, too, was American and the realization was “so freeing.”

Once, when one of her sons was younger, the family was spending time at their local gym. He went to buy a popsicle and the woman at the concession stand asked him where he was from. Unbeknownst to him what she was really asking, he replied "Phoenix". "No, where are you really from?" she pressed on. Confused, he went back to his mother asking, "What's wrong with her." The idea of having to trace himself back to his grandparents home country of Pakistan never crossed his mind.

Me

I, too, had my own unique story when it came to my early childhood identity construction. Surrounded by difference I received very little positive validation for those labels that separated me from the dominant narrative; primarily my ethnic and religious background. Despite the fact that I was not raised in a very religious home, nor was I raised with strong ties to my parents home cultures, the external pressure from others to be placed inside those boxes led to my inevitable feelings of not fitting in anywhere.

Like many non-white children of immigrants I was forever asked, "where are you from?" by teachers, parents of peers, and strangers on the street. This constant phrase repeated through my psyche like a broken record, forbidding me from owning any kind of American identity. I became astute at the game Sana's son never figured out how to play—how low can we go. Did the questioner want to know my present? That I was from here? Likely not. Did they want to know my point of origin? Since that was still within the United States, I probably needed to go lower. I knew the game well enough to skip the decades my parents had collectively spent in England and go back to their countries of origin. I know that my children were familiar with "the game" and needed to track themselves back to their grandparents home countries.

When the time came to raise my children, their sense of self was the most pressing concern. I knew by that point that the dominant narrative in the classroom was not one that reflected many of their parts. But I also knew that growing up as an *other* was not something I wanted for their young minds and hearts. From the time they were born they were surrounded with toys and books that reflected and were created from multicultural perspectives. Diversity and cultural differences *were* the norm.

Media

Jameela

Jameela has also chosen to protect her children from the negative narratives of Muslims found in the media. She doesn't allow her children to be exposed to advertisements or news soundbites. Her children don't know about the political climate that is anti-Muslim.

> I wanted to be in charge of their muslim narrative, you know. I wanted to kind of guide that and I didn't want it to be defined by what other crap people are saying to them at school or what—you know they don't, *we* don't watch, I don't watch news.. At least I really don't watch news and we don't have cable tv. We just have streaming services so they actually get no ads no commercials no news. So they don't really know the political climate or attitude towards muslims at all.

This is important, she feels, so that her children can grow up feeling proud of who they are without worrying about any vitriol against their community.

Mona

Mona also chooses to exert control over what her children are exposed to in the media. During the rioting at the Capitol in the days prior to Joe Biden taking office as president of the United States, she showed her children a clip where a commentator discussed what would have happened if the rioters were Black or Muslim. She regrets that she had not previously screened the clip.

> He's very sensitive. He'll often say he doesn't want me to talk about something anymore. Like during the riots at the capitol I remember I was like, I told my kids about it and then they wanted to see what was going on so I went on instagram, on some of the accounts that I follow that were sharing things. But then one of the clips was like—I don't.. It was on the news station and it was a guy saying, you know, he was giving these differences about what would happen if these people were Black.. What would happen if they were Muslim.. And he said that if they were Muslim they would have been sniped, you know, and I didn't expect him to—I wasn't, I hadn't watched that particular clip—yeah and so that was really traumatic for my son and since then he is always like why don't people like Muslims. (M. Scott, personal communication, Feb 16, 2021)

She went on to say that he wants people to like Muslims, and that she has had to reframe this by telling him that they don't need to do *anything* differently. This was their issue, not ours.

> And he's trying to think of ways of trying to get people to like us and I am really having a hard time with that because I want him to understand that he doesn't need to do anything, you know? And that it's *their* problem, it's not our problem, kind of thing. And that.. Yeah so we.. You know, the way he feels is not

> something I've ever felt about, you know, my Islam. And so he says like he's happy to be Muslim, he's proud to be muslim, but he really struggles with knowing that there's people who hate Muslims so much and I have trouble even addressing this because I still, like, I know that I'm affected by islamophobia and stuff like that. Even though I am like, you know, I don't always know what to say when he's like why don't people like muslims. I don't always want to give him the example of, oh well Muslims have done this and Muslims have done that and that's why people don't like us like because then it makes it like it's *our* fault that people don't like us and then we, as if we did all of these things and stuff, so I'm already like you know that's a big thing going on right now for him. And I'm struggling with how to address it in a way that still empowers my child and doesn't make him feel like he should be ashamed or anything like that. (M. Scott, personal communication, Feb 16, 2021)

Though she was not Muslim at the time, Mona recalls how, after 9/11, there was an increase in the visibility of Islam. This visibility was not positive, however, and was often laced with ignorance.

Sana

Like Jameela and Mona, Sana also restricts some of what her children view in the media. She shielded her kids from watching the rioting that took place at the Capitol in January of 2021 because she didn't want to normalize the event.

She also spoke at some length about the media portrayal of the shooters' home after the San Bernardino shooting. During the days following the shooting, conducted by a Muslim couple, the press broke into their home, a crime scene, and broadcase live as their rifled through the family's belongings.

> By then my kids had a very good understanding that Muslims were deemed terrorists because when my oldest seven, so first grade, he said I'm muslim.. Like it was ramadan, I'm muslim. One of his classmates was like oh so you're ISIS. So my son came home and asked me what ISIS was. And then San Bernardino happens.. Muslims are allegedly who did it. And, you know, we're watching and we're seeing you the press go through a potential crime scene and pointing out normal muslim household hangings and books and art and decor and criminalizing you for choosing to post Arabic things. And I'm like well don't come in my house because it's all over here too. Don't come in any Muslim's house that I grew up with because that's what our form of art [is]. And I had to explain that to my kids. I was like, 'Do you see anything that's wrong here? They're showing their prayer scarves. They're showing their prayer mats. That's not a sin and that's certainly not a crime in America.' These people are trying to make a story out of stories that don't exist. I did use it as a lesson to tell the truth and not embellish when you're tattling on your brothers or sister so.. (S. Khan, personal communication, Feb 19, 2021)

Following the incident Sana had to counter this narrative with her children.

Me

Unlike the other participants, I took a very different approach to dealing with bias in the media. While I, too, sheltered my children from an "everything goes" approach, I was mindful of bringing in current events and utilizing a critical perspective of the media. When my children were 6 and 9 we began examining heroes and villains in cartoons, paying attention to color and accents of characters.

I also began deconstructing Islamophobia and perceptions of Muslims in popular culture. My children were around the age of 5 or 6 when I showed them limited footage of 9/11. We talked about the capacity of all people to do good and wrong, and the problems with collective blame. While others might have felt these topics too heavy for children so small, I have always erred on the side of age appropriate truth telling. Besides, I thought, my children were exposed to so many kinds of people in their community involvement, team sports, classes at local museums, etc, that I felt as though I wanted to prepare them for inevitable confrontations.

Bullying/Islamophobia

Bullying and Islamophobia were so prevalent in each participants' interviews, I felt it important to discuss it separately. I chose to place this sub theme under the umbrella of identity development because the direct result or consequence of Islamophobic bullying is that it creates challenges in identity development.

Jameela

Jameela describes a string of intense bullying she and her family faced over several years. At times the bullying came from peers, but it also came from adults, whether it be teachers and administrators, or from community members. When her sister was in middle school, she had a "horrible, traumatic experience." (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 03, 2021) Shoes were thrown at her, she was spit on frequently, and her backpack would often be covered in swear words transcribed by other students.

She was in the ninth grade when 9/11 happened. She can remember mobs of angry white people trying to vandalize her mosque. Her full time Islamic school was patrolled by several police officers for months due to bomb threats. Even her street, which was close to the school, had to be shut down. She describes an incident in which she and her sisters were driving with her aunt and she told the girls to duck down because they were wearing their hijabs.

Jameela, herself, would face similar bullying. “Are you the type of Indian that dances around fires or wears a dot on your head?” she would be asked. “Why do you have a moustache?” (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 03, 2021) Like other students, she would be made fun of for the clothes she wore, but the attacks from her peers often revolved around her racial and cultural identities, or what made her different.

As Jameela recounts the attacks on her identity, it’s clear that it wasn’t just an issue with students who perhaps didn’t have the emotional or social maturity to maneuver differences. Often, it was the adults who made it worse and left her confused. She describes an incident during a field trip in which a teacher came up to her saying “*She’s* the one who was disrespectful to me!” (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 03, 2021) It seems that the teacher had confused her with someone else, but at the time Jameela didn’t understand why she would be accused of something she was innocent of. She had no idea that the teacher simply couldn't tell the difference between her and another brown person.

In another instance, she was sent to the office for having henna designs on her hands, a cultural phenomena often practiced and celebrated around holidays. The teacher had assumed that she had drawn on her hands and disciplined her.

> Also when I was in third grade and fourth grade I got sent to the principal's office for having mehndi (hennah) on my hands. I was around 8 years old at the time. They thought I wrote with a marker all over my hands and I remember being asked, “Does your mom know you did this?!” and I said yeah my aunt did it for me. (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 03, 2021)

If more culturally responsiveness had been present, this misunderstanding could have been clarified before escalating, and without any punitive action taken on Jameela simply for practicing her culture.

It should be noted that attacks and bullying wasn’t the only type of inappropriate behavior Jameela experienced with the adults who surrounded her. Around the age of 8 or 9, she recalls being called into the principals office, this time to explain some posters which taught about Islam. The lack of cultural responsiveness was clear in expecting a child to teach her principal about her faith.

These events were a major driving force in Jameela’s decision to home educate her children. She talked at length about wanting to be in charge of her children’s Muslim narrative, not allow it to be led by others. “I want them to feel so proud and feel so good in their skin as muslims. I never want them to struggle” with their identity. (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 03, 2021)

Mona

Though Mona did not grow up Muslim, she narrates several incidents of Islamophobic bullying she faced as an adult navigating public spaces as an open Muslim. She's often accosted by others verbally. She recounted one incident in which she was driving and heard something hit her windshield. She looked up to see a man giving her the finger, enraged, and screaming at her to roll down her window.

> I was just driving down the street. I was at a red light and something hit the window of my car. I turned and I just saw this man and he just had so much hate in his face. He was mouthing things and he was giving me the middle finger. And then he started yelling, "Open your window! Roll down your window! Roll down your window!" Then at one point he got out of the car and, this was at a red light, but you know it seems like it happened so fast. But I think–he seemed to have slowed down. And he got out of his car—whatever he'd thrown, I think was a cell phone, obviously I wasn't rolling down my window or anything like that. I was just trying—I think I was just ignoring him and yeah, he just kept yelling at me. (M. Scott, personal communication, Feb 16, 2021)

She contacted the police but there was no action taken.

In another instance, she was verbally assaulted at Trader Joe's by a woman who took issue with the way she was dressed. Though the store took no steps to restrain or penalize the woman, they apologized to Mona and gave her flowers. In another store Mona decided to fight back to a verbal assault. After the exchange was over, her son started crying. "Why is she saying these things?" he said. (M. Scott, personal communication, Feb 04, 2021)

Interestingly, Mona blamed herself, feeling as though she had exposed her son to the hostility even though she was simply defending herself. In other situations she recollected, she also questioned if certain attacks were because she was Muslim, or for some other reason. Regardless, she is certain that her children would not get the needed tools to navigate this types of Islamophobic bullying if they went to school.

Sana

Growing up Sana never felt as though she suffered from a great deal of bullying, with the exception of her 7-8th grade years. During this time the first Gulf War took place, leading to what she would term “severe bullying”. “sand nigger”, “do you have a michete?”, “you’re hindu.. where’s your dot?” were just some of the things she remembered hearing. (S. Khan, personal communication, Feb 08, 2021) She was also made fun of for the ethnic clothing she wore to school. Sana noted later that the Gulf war was the first time she noticed that adults were suspicious of her too.

She also saw others, particularly brown boys, getting picked on. Though most of the incidents were verbal, she recalls one Indian boy getting picked up and shoved on the bus. Vandalization was also a regular occurrence on her street. She describes homes being spray painted, toilet papered, condoms being thrown on lawns, bricks being placed behind tires (so as to cause a flat), and even fecal matter being dropped on doorsteps.

In one incident, after toilet papering the homes, her family’s mailbox was uprooted.

> This particular ramadan morning we heard something outside. My dad opened the door and he saw some kids running away and they had put a bag of some kind of

> fecal matter. We think it was animal, we're not sure.. So that was left on the doorstep. But, you know, they had the decency to put in a plastic bag. And then they put bricks behind the tires so that when you went back they would all deflate. And then our post box, our mailbox, which was at the end of our driveway, was pulled out and then it was gone. Somebody else's was thrown on our lawn.. toilet papered.. and my dad just ran after these guys and I was afraid for my dad and I ran after them. (S. Khan, personal communication, Feb 19, 2021)

The police were called and even they were shocked to hear the mother of one of the boys admitting, "We only gave them permission to toilet paper one house." (S. Khan, personal communication, Feb 19, 2021) No charges were filed because Sana's father felt it wasn't neighborly. Instead, he simply insisted that the boys clean up the mess.

Despite all that she witnessed, Sana was taught to be confident of her faith and cultural identity. "You are better than everybody else," was her father's constant reminder to her and her siblings. Despite this confidence, she was also raised to doubt her American identity. "You will never be an American," her father also told her. "They will never let you be." Sana remembers that her father would often point to the condition of Black Americans as an example of how "they" will never let them rise up after all "they" did to them. (S. Khan, personal communication, Feb 08, 2021)

While Sana's children didn't struggle with the identity confusion she had grown up with, the final straw that led to her pulling her children out of school was when her oldest son found *himself* in the position of the bully. He had made a sexually suggestive comment to a girl and had gotten suspended. At the time, Sana had wanted the school to gender etiquette and education for all the students in his grade, but this was not allowed.

She says that she knew he wouldn’t get what he needed to change this behavior at school and so she felt compelled to take him out.

Me

Almost all the participants describe their experiences navigating life as a visible Muslim in positive terms. The bullying almost dissipates from their memory until they’re asked to specifically remember it. My experience was the same. Looking back, I too would say that I didn’t receive that much racially motivated bullying. But, in truth, there were several incidents I can remember.

The first was when I was in the sixth grade. I can remember being called “a hindu” several times over the course of the year. I started wearing hijab after moving to Houston in the eighth grade and being exposed to a lot of ethnic and religious diversity for the first time. The exposure led me to exploring my own heritage, which led me to wearing hijab. As a freshman at Memorial High School, I was thrust back into a world with limited diversity. “Turban woman”, “towel head”, “why do you wear that rag on your head?” were things I remembered hearing frequently from peers on the bus or walking down the hall.

The most painful bullying, though, came from the adults in my life. Though my principal and all my counselors were incredibly supportive of me (going as far as to trust me with the keys to their offices when I needed a place to pray during school hours), I can recall several teachers who seemed to look down on me. One in particular would often share her daily musings from listening to Rush Limbaugh, someone I knew regularly spewed vitriol towards Muslims. When others in the class attacked me, her silence spoke volumes.

Another teacher also gave me a bad feeling. The most she did, though, was talk to me with a stern tone from time to time, as though I was a trouble-maker. In truth, I was a shy, quiet kid that did well and caught on quickly. The most egregious moment was when I asked her to write me a recommendation for the G/T program and she told me that she refused and would not recommend me. Ultimately, I was able to get in without her help.

In each of these encounters with adults, nothing was so open I could report the mistreatment. And yet every day in these classes felt unbearable. This undercurrent of quiet, seeming islamophobia continued through my college experiences at the University of Houston. One professor in the college of education, after seeing that I refused to stand during the pledge of allegiance on site at a classroom, pulled me out of class to inform me that, "sooner or later you'll have to accept that this is a Christian country."

Summary

Identity construction was a major motivation for the participants to choose home education. Some of the obstacles to a healthy sense of self were (but were not limited to) media bias and stereotyping, as well as bullying from peers and grown ups alike. Despite whatever culturally responsive teaching was taking place in classrooms, the benefits of these improvements did not outweigh the harms that came from school settings.

Interestingly, a common stereotype of homeschoolers is that they exist within a bubble. This stereotype is used as a negative descriptor, implying that homeschooled children are different or anti-social. Several of the participants addressed this stereotype head on by stating, unequivocally, that they were opposed to the "bubble". But, in truth, they *did* create a protective shelter for their children. As critical race theorists would argue, the dominant culture is not equal to the subordinate. For white, Christian homeschoolers, a bubble can signify something completely different than for homeschoolers from marginalized communities. Indeed, for these families, bubbles serve as a necessary protection from the harm directed towards them intellectually, emotionally, verbally, and physically.

Theme 2: Religion/Character Development

Religious identity and practice were also ideas that came up repeatedly, often in the form of character development as well as spiritual practice. But even in this, the social construct of raising children as members of a subordinate community came forward.

Jameela

Religion played a part in Jameela's decision to home educate her children. Her children have time to take Quran classes on ZOOM, and to keep up with daily reading, recitation, and memorization with their mother. But more than that, Jameela once again talks about being able to be in charge of their Muslim narrative. She's able to present Islam to them in a good way, as a way of developing good character, not just that of ritual practice. "Giving sadaqa (charity), praying, helping out, fasting, going to the mosque," Jameela describes, are important to her. But "having a positive relationship with religion," not one of fire and brimstones, was also equally important. (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 25, 2021) She talks about the rigidity she saw in the Islamic school she attended, and the bullying she saw others students receiving from their teachers there.

It's for this reason that she knew she would never send her children to a full time Islamic school.

Mona

Mona describes a desire to raise her children in which they were not only strong in their faith, but in a way where it would be considered "normal" to practice it, once again tying even religious practice back to power dynamics and identity construction. She talks about how her son has been able to go to the mosque with his father to pray his prayer in congregation. Even in the rituals of faith, being a part of the community helps establish his identity. Like Jameela, she too talks about how her children are able to connect with the Quran, but through the blending of religious instruction with secular, co-op activities. And like Jameela, Mona, too, is wary of handing over religious instruction to others within the community. She doesn't like the way many Muslims mix their cultural preferences with their practice of Islam and wants to ensure a positive space for her children.

Sana

Sana cites character development as the number one driving force for her pulling her first child out of school. "Kindness and being a good person matter a lot" to how she is raising her kids. "Part of being a good person is finding out about all issues." (S. Khan, personal communication, Feb 19, 2021)

Like Mona and Jameela, Sana wanted her children to memorize quran. She and her husband had previously discussed pulling them out for a couple of years while they all memorized quran. But character became an even more pressing concern as the children grew.

When asked what aspect of character was important, she mentioned that the things she was seeing were more lying and talking back, social behaviors that might be normalized in school culture but ones that were not ok for her. She also added that it was important for her to be in charge of the narrative around consent, gender equity, social cues, etc. As a feminist, she didn't feel that her sons would adopt these same values in school.

Me

Religion did serve as a motivation for my decision to home educate my children, but as a means of character development. As a former classroom teacher, I knew that certain behaviours were normalized in schools. Bullying, power struggles, picking on differences, and quite frankly just being mean, were often the norm. I felt like kids spent a significant amount of time worrying about fitting in and the "kind ones" were few and far between. Public service, contributing to the community, giving and doing for others, and standing up for what we believed in were values I wanted my children to absorb from me. In essence, I wanted time with my kids to inculcate our values in them.

Familial Connection

All the participants mentioned a strong desire for familial connection. I have listed this here as a sub theme because, when questioned further, they each held the value that having strong family ties, not just with immediate family but with extended and multi-generational family members, leads to better character development.

Jameela

Jameela describes how, when her older sister was experiencing intense bullying, she would often find comfort with her grandmother after school. She went on to describe how her own children attend coops with aunts and cousins, giving them more time together. This time with family, particularly with siblings, has really developed her children's imaginations, she said. They make up games, act silly together, and it's this kind of bonding time she wants for them, not just "dinner and bedtime" she observes from school going peers. (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 03, 2021)

Jameela contrasts this sense of close connection with family within her homeschooled house to the model where children go to school:

> You're all day at school and then you come home and you spend hours in your—holed up in your room, doing homework. Nobody's even eating dinner together anymore. Or you're doing 40 activities after school and this person is going here and that person is going here and that person's getting this tutoring and at the end of the day you're not spending any quality time with your family. (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 03, 2021)

Before he passed, Jameela describes how her children were able to see their grandfather, her father. And even now they are able to see their grandmother taking care of her mother, their great grandmother. This muti-generational caregiving is important, she feels. There's an intimacy in south-Asian cultures in being fed by the hand of an adult and she describes the joy in having her children being fed by their grandparents.

Home education has also given her family the freedom to be able to spend significant periods of time together in traveling. She and her husband often traveled with their children for several months at a time. This allowed for bonding, but also “all the other benefits that come from travel.” (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 03, 2021)

Mona

Mona also outlines the importance of strong familial ties as a result of homeschooling. She counts this closeness as an essential part of their upbringing. As highlighted earlier, strong familial connection allows her to pass on the tools necessary to face growing islamophobia. It also strengthens her children’s Muslim identity by being able to practice their faith communally.

Sana

Like the participants before her, Sana also expressed a strong desire to home educate her children so that they could spend more time together as a family. Sana volunteers regularly in community service activities and said “volunteering together is so much more important than being in a classroom.” (S. Khan, personal communication, Feb 19, 2021) Praying together also ranked high on her list of priorities. But, like Jameela, she also expressed a desire for her children to be around extended family, particularly their grandparents. On a deeper level, home education gave her and her children the opportunity to heal and mend their relationship.

Me

Familial relationship building was an important motivation for our family to homeschool. We came from the belief that intergenerational living was a huge part of our culture and value system. The idea of removing my children from a village of their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, only to be surrounded by peers of the same age peers, felt institutional, even though it was the norm.

My children had always been close to family, and as they approached their “school years”, I wanted those relationships to evolve into ones in which priceless lessons were learned and shared. I saw the old model of one teacher or teacher-mom to many students or children as archaic. My children would learn from an entire village, full of numerous teachers with lots of lessons to share.

Summary

No doubt religion played a role in the participants’ decision to homeschool. They all expressed a desire to pray and perform religious acts together as a family. But for all, ritual and spiritual practice made up only a part of their discussion and rationale. And even in this, identity development, sense of self, and navigating schooled spaces with subordinate identities, plays a role. For all the families included in this research, there was a sense that they could not fully practice their faith, on their terms, in a school setting. There was a sense that, despite whatever measures schools have taken in the last few decades to increase in culturally responsive pedagogy, by sending their children to school, the resistance would be so great that they wouldn’t be given the opportunity to explore their religious identity freely.

Theme 3: Academic/School Concerns

Also present were curricular concerns. Each of the mothers interviewed talked at length about wanting a form of education outside of the norm. But again, even in this emerging theme, a lack of culturally responsive teaching and racial motivations underscored many of their academic concerns.

Jameela

Jameela described pressure she felt as a mother when her children were 2-3 years old to start teaching them letters and literacy. She also felt pressure to enroll them in competitive STEM or language based preschools. Despite this, she held a strong desire to allow her children to "just play".

During this time she had a sister who had already chosen to homeschool who influenced her and began to plant seeds of disruption, or going against the norm. After doing her own research she began learning that children didn't have to read by a certain age. They could develop at his/her own timeline. While she still utilized play based preschool coop programs like many homeschoolers, Jameela surrounded her children with nature, books, and lots of freedom to choose. She paid attention to the questions they asked and created a learning culture at home that was inquiry based and self-directed. They did crafts, visited children's museums, and read aloud together. It was important for Jameela to take charge in creating this safe place to learn:

> I wanted them to *not* get their spirits shattered by teachers' comparisons to other students by other students. I wanted them to go at their pace. I didn't want them to be rushed or spent so much time on something that they didn't need that much

> time with. Mostly like for me it's like, I just didn't want their spirits to be crushed. (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 25, 2021)

She also describes, though she doesn't use the term, a lack of culturally responsive curriculum. "I don't care if they study Columbus," she says, but she doesn't want them to know more about their own Islamic history. (J. Hasan, personal communication, Feb 25, 2021) But more than this, she reiterates, she wants to be in control of their curriculum. As an engineer she talks about the importance of math and her belief that no one can be bad at math, they're simply not given a good foundation.

Mona

When Mona found out she was having a son, she found herself unsure if she would have the tools needed to raise him well. Raised predominantly by a single mother, and having only one sister, she had no real closeness with male relatives growing up outside of a challenging relationship with her father. Early on she read Leonard Sax's book, Boys Adrift, and this had a deep impact on her decision to homeschool.

Schools were places that were more geared towards how girls learn, she discussed. It emphasized sitting still and sitting in a seat versus being physically active. She wanted an environment where her son would feel comfortable being truly himself. As he has grown, this motivation has only increased. She describes her son as having long hair, someone who enjoys cooking and baking, and is often confused for being a girl.

> I think I had one last point... It's like the whole gendering of what is considered to be boys activities versus girls activities. Like my son, he likes to read different

> types of books and I feel glad that that's been something where there's no influence from other kids where they're like oh he like jenna jewels—this is like females all throughout the book—and I know he has a friend whose mom was like oh, she said that you know he might think this is like a girl's book because the female the female protests and stuff like that and they're females superheroes and whatnot.. Like my son hasn't gotten *any* of that and I want to preserve that in him. He doesn't see things in this way. (M. Scott, personal communication, Feb 16, 2021)

Mona describes wanting a safe space for him to feel free to pursue his personal passions and interests without judgement or bias interfering.

> I hope that they will have the space and the time to really explore their personal interests. That was another thing about homeschooling that is really ideal in my opinion; that each child has their own, you know, path and I'm able to cater to that for them. My hope for them is that, you know, that I don't stifle any of their their dreams or interests as they grow, so that as as they get older their path becomes clearer for them and it's not, um, it's not somebody kind of trying to impose anything on to them and that I'm able to give them experiences that, you know, are not as easy to provide when they're in like a school the environment normally normal typically schooled environment. (M. Scott, personal communication, Feb 16, 2021)

Mona also describes a desire to have a curriculum that wasn’t white washed; one that was more decolonized. She acknowledges that, though she wants to expose her children to a wider world-view, this is proving more challenging than she anticipated.

She likes the fact that she is a part of a homeschool charter which affords her the option of spending money given to her by the state of California to spend on these alternative curriculum courses.

Sana

Sana also expressed concerns she had over schooled norms. Like the others, she felt the school day was too long and didn't allow for enough down time or rest. She wasn't thrilled about many schools' expectations of homework everyday or the lack of physical activity. She also wanted more time for arts, something her younger daughter relishes and something that is important for her healing after having undergone a traumatic brain injury. By homeschooling her children, she hopes that they would benefit from more one on one time, more rest, and more creative pursuits.

Sana says that, unlike the stereotype of religious homeschoolers, she has no issues with some of the "hot button" issues some parents might try to shield their children from like sex education or evolution. She does, however, take issue with the western perspective and lack of global awareness she feels most classrooms offer.

> I wanted my kids to learn less western perspective, history.. I wanted them to learn about what preceded America, because America is relatively new on a historical timeline, and I didn't think they were getting a 365 view of the world. They certainly weren't learning how to be global citizens—it was very isolationist and exclusionary—my children were like the only people of color on their campus.. Maybe there was like two other kids that came from the same household.. So we certainly weren't learning anything outside of Rosa Parks and

> Martin Luther King that's black history, you know. And I don't think they meant to do any harm, but I just think the school board had not come up with a really good curriculum to teach history and global awareness and responsibility.. (S. Khan, personal communication, Feb 19, 2021)

Beyond the limitations of a curriculum lacking in cultural responsiveness, Sana also added that the recent surge of school shootings adds to her growing list of reasons to homeschool. Mental illness is not paid proper attention to and funding for counselors has been cut. Schools just don’t have the funding to adequately meet all the needs of their students' physical and mental health and safety, and this, she says, is concerning.

Me

Like many of the others expressed, I also wanted a more decolonized curriculum for my children. I felt as though much of the content they would learn in traditional schools would be fraught with necessary rethinking and possibly unlearning. I wanted my children to view their studies from multiple perspectives or lenses, rather than through the dominant, Western gaze.

I also wanted to give them what I had never had and desperately needed; more history of self. I wanted them to learn more about their own people, their own heritage, and as a result, stand more confidently in who *they* are, not simply drowning in the knowledge of who they weren't.

Most importantly, I wanted learning to be self-directed. I envisioned a space for their curiosities to run wild and where they would have the freedom to explore and pursue their own interests. I spent years studying the effects of self-directed learning on intrinsic motivation and wanted my children to be inspired to learn from within. I wanted to trust children despite all the school and cultural messaging telling me that they couldn't be trusted, or that adults know best.

Summary

All the participants included academic reasons for choosing homeschooling. Many valued more individual time schedules, more self-directed learning, and more play or physical activity. But for all, the lack of a culturally responsive environment rears its head again. They expressed a desire for a more decolonized curriculum, one that pushed past a majoritarian narrative.

Summary

This research began with the broad task of trying to understand participants' motivations to home educate their children. Through countless hours sifting through interviews, journaling, email exchanges, and transcripts, three main themes emerged which help to answer the research question with more depth.

For the three participants, and myself, the predominant theme was to help their children establish their own identity. "I want my children to feel comfortable in their own skin" was a phrase or an idea I heard repeated throughout all the interviews in some shape or form. Religion always played a role in that participants wanted to develop specific character traits and values they felt could not be achieved in the existing, dominant school culture. Lastly, academic and creative differences were a motivation.

It's worthy of note that my own position as researcher, but also as a member of the community was of benefit throughout the research process. I understood much of the vocabulary without needing explanation or translation, allowing participants to speak in code and speak freely. Phrases like “you know” or “you know how” were often used in addressing me. I was also able to fill in the gaps in the narrative, followed by member checking via email correspondence, which ensured accuracy of understanding. Indeed, “knowledge of that history can have a bearing on our ability to experience its qualities” (Eisner, 2017, p.65).

Chapter V: Implications, Recommendations and Conclusion

Introduction

My personal journey towards home educating my children began, though I didn't know it at the time, long before my children were born. In the years following my formal education, as I navigated life in America as a member of the global majority but domestic minority, I knew I needed more education than what I'd been given in the classroom. School had taught me reading, writing, and arithmetic, but I had experienced little in the way of culturally responsive teaching which could have afforded me the tools needed to construct a stronger sense of self and personal identity. So began my unlearning—a time in which I deconstructed untruths and partial truths I'd been taught in school.

The result of this unlearning or unschooling is that I was left to fill the void with a rich, self-directed culturally responsive curriculum. And as I continued teaching myself and re-learning, I knew that my children would need this type of learning as well, and would likely not receive it in school. So began my home education journey, and as it progressed, I wondered if I was alone, or if there were others like myself. Anecdotally, I saw an increase in the number of homeschooling families within my community. But I didn't know what compelled them to make this decision.

This research took a deeper look at three other home educating, Muslim-American mothers, along with myself, to further explore why they arrived at this decision to part ways with traditionally schooled education. They varied in race, age, and location, but each identified as a Muslim-American. The research question asked was: What are the perceptions and motivations of Muslim-American mothers regarding homeschooling their children in the United States?

In this narrative inquiry, the stories of three participants were collected and shared. Emerging themes were explored and, to the surprise of the researcher, showed deep, common threads running through all the narratives. It is one thing to suffer in silence; to experience a phenomena so acutely and yet so utterly alone. It is quite another to look back and realize just how many others were suffering in silence right next door. As critical race theorists, we are taught that certain identities hold power over others. Indeed, in exploring these narratives, this researcher felt it empowering to extract them and give them voice.

Summary of Findings

The goal of this research was not to find definitive answers or broad, absolute assertions. Had that been the goal, another method of research may have been chosen. Instead, this research simply served to help me better understand what drove these Muslim mothers to opt into home education.

What was discovered was that identity construction was a major, compelling motivation. Regardless of their background, each of these women felt, in order to raise their children with a strong sense of self, they must be removed from schooled culture. Each had experiences with bullying and Islamophobic harrassment. And for many, this mistreatment wasn’t limited to children but pervaded adult spaces as well. There was also an awareness of media bias against Muslims and the need to filter this bias in order to protect their young children. Other themes that emerged were character development and family culture, as well as academic concerns and lack of global perspective.

The study began with participants filling out a form in which basic biographical details were asked. Before conducting my first interviews I reached out to two peers in the doctoral program to review my questions. After giving each a brief overview of my research objectives, I asked them both to review the questions, paying special attention to problematic language that would indicate a bias. Initial interviews were conducted to complete a basic biography of each participant along with a retelling of key childhood details. A follow up interview was then held to explore their reasons and motivations to homeschool more deeply. Emails were exchanged to ensure member checking and to ask additional questions.

Implications for Practice

What defines someone as being American? Is it a label bestowed on those who achieve the legal title of citizen of the United States, or by those who demonstrate the qualities of citizenship? Does it refer to those born within the national boundaries of the US? Can you only be considered an American if you subscribe to the *right* cultural capital? If you know the *right* things, do the *right* things, and speak the *right* way?

By all these accounts, I was American, at least in theory. But in reality, I never truly fit. Inevitably I was asked, "Where are you from?" Despite my conception of myself, from the outside, I was not considered an American.

Redefining a New Normal

Perhaps the more pertinent question to examine is, what does an American *look* like? Because, clearly, despite my best efforts, I never looked the part. Ronald Takaki, an American academic who wrote extensively on multiculturalism, said that most of our classrooms teach "the master narrative of American history—the widely held but inaccurate view that Americans originally came from Europe and that 'American' means white or European in Ancestry" (Takaki, 1998). In other words, we have a collective unconscious bias that being American means one is white.

Shortly after the presidential election in 2016, Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, Toni Morrison, wrote the following in The New Yorker:

> All immigrants to the United States know (and knew) that if they want to become real, authentic Americans they must reduce their fealty to their native country and regard it as secondary, subordinate, in order to emphasize their whiteness. Unlike any nation in Europe, the United States holds whiteness as the unifying force. Here, for many people, the definition of "Americanness" is color. (2016)

According to both Takaki and Morrison, it is ultimately one's whiteness that defines one as being American, and despite all my efforts to be one of the crowd, I never fully fit.

What I didn't realize, however, is how faith plays into one's American identity as well. It took me a long time to realize that being Muslim could also strip one of their whiteness and forever cast all American Muslims, even those of a white persuasion, into foreigner territory.

> "No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or Black, or Western, or Oriental." (Said, 1994)

An emerging theme that persistently crept up was this idea that by sending their children to school, these mothers would be subjecting them to an “otherizing” experience; one in which they would grow up on the outside looking in. Each, in her own way, described the desire to raise her children feeling as though they were *normal*.

This begs the further question; what, then, *is* normal in our classrooms? It is still as Takaki and Morison, and even possibly Said, describe? That to be normal, nay American, is to be White? Regardless of the response to this question, two implications are clear from this body of research; there are families who still feel otherized in traditional classroom settings and the effects of feeling otherized are compelling enough for them to leave these settings. Perhaps a new “normal” is in need of construction; one in which a shared identity is fundamentally built upon difference, not upon same.

Not Enough Windows

Rudine Simms Bishop, the multicultural educator who first used the phrase “windows and mirrors" talks about the importance of both in the life of a child. Windows allow children the opportunity to see and explore differences. In doing so, children learn to make sense of the world around them and their place in it. Windows are important because they allow children who may not have been exposed to difference to do so in a way that is non-judgemental.

Throughout much of the discussion with the participants of this research study, the effects of a lack of culturally responsive pedagogy, i.e. one deplete of “windows”, were outlined. The first of which is a high degree of bullying. Almost all the participants shared stories of Islamophobic bullying. This bullying wasn’t simply committed by peers but by adults themselves. Students, teachers and principals alike made gaffes, though perhaps for many it was with intended ill intent. Not only were these individuals unsafe from their peers, they were unsafe from the adults as well. And as a result, there was no recourse or path for reconciliation. There was no safe haven.

This finding in the research is in congruence with CAIR's research, cited earlier, which explored Islamophobia amongst students in California schools. It found that from the high number of students who were bullied, an alarmingly high percentage felt that there would be no benefit from bringing the abuse to the attention of an adult.

Surprisingly, every participant also mentioned additions they wanted to make to existing curricula or standards. Each discussed a western bias and a limited scope in the curriculum. They spoke of wanting to add a more decolonized, global perspective to their children's education. One even went as far as to say the curriculum still reflects isolationist persuasions.

Perhaps these mothers, whose identities often left them feeling otherized, are more cognizant of the need for a wider perspective. Perhaps, as those who may have felt invisible or left out of the mainstream narrative, they understand the negative side effects of that on themselves, on their children, but also on others as well. Regardless, this research makes clear that the effects of the lack of "windows", or culturally responsive pedagogy, was also compelling enough for them to leave the classroom.

Not Enough Mirrors

Growing up can be a painful time, but for some students, a lack of representation can exacerbate their struggles. I've come to understand, through this research, that many of the experiences I had were similar to other children of immigrants' experiences. But at the time, I felt alone. Not only did I feel disconnected to the other kids, but I saw no representations of myself in the media I consumed either. The impact of feeling invisible cannot be underestimated. I know now, as an educator, that kids *need* to see themselves outside of themself. This is what helps form and shape their identity.

Not having those reflections of myself left me feeling as though I didn't exist; like I had no value. According to Bishop, what the other participants and I feared for our children was the impact of having a lack of mirrors. Not seeing themselves reflected in the media or curriculum they consumed could lead to feelings of isolation or confusion. But what was worse was seeing themselves inadequately represented. Seeing reflections that distorted their identity or sense of self. For the mothers in this study, the potential damage from the absence of good mirrors was significant enough to remove their children from school.

Recommendations

In the push for more culturally responsive pedagogy, it's important to acknowledge that there may still be a number of gaps between intention and practical application. While there may be a shortage of windows and mirrors in the classroom, the solution needs to begin with simply adding more. Policy makers can pass bills on a state level requiring the inclusion of more specific curricular standards. Requirements regarding immigrant history, working class history, women's history, etc, can be delineated through bills. State committees can review and include textbooks which are written by educators who come marginalized backgrounds, allowing for more diversity of "voice". School districts can also impose more diversity requirements with their textbook adoption procedures. And while waiting for needed, sweeping curricular changes, parents and teachers would benefit from curated diverse book lists to supplement, and at times replace, problematic resources.

While more representation is needed of Muslim and immigrant narratives, multicultural education requires more than simply more exposure. Culturally responsive teacher training must also include more depth in how to explore differences on a deeper level and how to shift the hearts and minds of students. Anti-bias and anti-racism programs must be an essential part of teacher training. These programs must be designed to include and embrace what is happening in popular culture and in mainstream media narratives. For the Muslim student population, but for other marginalized communities as well, it's not enough to simply learn more. Attention must also be paid to unlearning false narratives as well.

The push for more culturally responsive teaching must also include a serious look at bullying and/or restorative justice programs. The mental and emotional safety of children, in addition to their physical safety, must be of utmost importance. Restorative justice programs must also work towards achieving cultural appreciation. In addition, more attention must be paid to the issue of adult bullying. Administrators must have checks and balances in place so that children are not only safe from their peers, but from the adults that surround them as well.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research, this study had several limitations. Each, however, really serves as an opportunity for this particular research. Firstly, the number of participants could have been larger. An initial attempt at gathering five total participants (excluding myself) was not met predominantly due to lack of qualifications. (The rise of covid induced homeschooling greatly limited the number of families who would qualify.) The smaller number, however, allowed for greater depth in exploring the narratives included.

There were also limitations in that the candidates were all former students of mine. While the course/s I taught might not have directly impacted the stories they shared, it is *more* likely that a certain type of parent is attracted to my courses, hence creating a more similar profile of a homeschooling Muslim-American mother. In contrast, my positionality created an immediate level of trust with the participants. They were able to jump right into their truth telling with little explanation because there was a sense that I knew what they were talking about. My familiarity with the participants is what created a strong trust between them and myself and made me a stronger narrative inquirer.

Lastly, while every attempt was made to look for as much diversity as possible amongst participants, two of the three participants (and myself) share a similar ethinic background. Future studies may want to take more efforts to choose more participants that are more ethnically diverse. That said, the connections between the participants ethnic background helped shed more light on the immigrant-American experience.

Future Studies and Conclusion

This study is just a beginning. Future studies may want to go deeper in any number of directions including (but not limited to) looking more deeply at first and second generation immigrant home education narratives, LGBTQ homeschooling narratives, as well as the homeschooling narratives of children with disabilities or learning differences. Within the Muslim community, deeper dives can be made into the homeschooling narratives of immigrant families, Black Muslim families, and Latinx families. While pandemic induced homeschooling differs from traditional homeschooling in its motivations, as the rise of Covid-19 induced homeschooling continues to increase, it would be beneficial to further explore how Covid-19 has impacted these marginalized communities specifically during the pandemic. And while more quantitative research, cast with a wider net, can help understand more about the demographic nature of the homeschooling community (such as numbers of Muslim-American homeschoolers as a whole and by race, along with shifts and trends with these numbers over time), this researcher feels that much of the research done to explore the increase in marginalized communities turning to homeschooling should continue to embrace the methodology of narrative inquiry as this gives deeper insights into the complexities of these stories. Perhaps a more mixed methods approach can be beneficial with the addition of an introductory survey to collect more specific data such as age of parents/children from homeschooling families, number of years spent homeschooling, number of years spent in traditional schools before homeschooling, etc.

When I entered my doctoral program many years ago I wanted to study unschooling and self-directed education. I knew that my own journey had led me towards this particular path with my own children and, though it was little researched, I felt that it was an area worthy of further exploration. But the more time I spent focused on studying the field of education, the more I found myself paying attention to what was happening with Muslim students in the United States. My first semester as a doctoral student, three young, Muslim-American kids were gunned down by their neighbor in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

What followed was an explosion of Muslim-American visibilty. And while I continued learning more about unschooling by day, my heart continued to seek out what was happening with my own community by night. Eventually, the focus of my dissertation shifted.

As doctoral students, there is a desire to solve all the world's problems in one's chosen research study. Advisors, mentors, and former students will advise us to keep it simple. In this study, I felt I've done so. I studied what I knew; what was familiar. And while it may not seem to solve a world problem, it opened the door to a problem that felt like the world to me, and perhaps to others as well.

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Appendix A

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON
DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

November 11, 2020

Saira Siddiqui
ssiddiqui@uh.edu

Dear Saira Siddiqui:

On November 5, 2020, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	A Qualitative Study of Muslim Mothers' Perceptions and Motivations to Homeschool
Investigator:	Saira Siddiqui
IRB ID:	STUDY00002609
Funding/ Proposed Funding:	Name: Unfunded
Award ID:	
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Siddiqui Interview Questions.pdf, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.); • Modifications Letter.pdf, Category: Other; • Siddiqui-HRP-503.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol; • Siddiqui-HRP-502a.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Siddiqui Recruitment Form.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Siddiqui Recruitment Email.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;
Review Category:	Expedited
Committee Name:	Designated Review
IRB Coordinator:	Maria Martinez

The IRB approved the study on November 11, 2020; recruitment and procedures detailed within the approved protocol may now be initiated.

As this study was approved under an exempt or expedited process, recently revised regulatory requirements do not require the submission of annual continuing review documentation. However, it is critical that the following submissions are made to the IRB to ensure continued compliance:

Appendix B

Title of research study: A Qualitative Study of Muslim Mothers' Perceptions and Motivations to Homeschool
Investigator: Saira Siddiqui, part of a dissertation being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Cameron White

Key Information:

The following focused information is being presented to assist you in understanding the key elements of this study, as well as the basic reasons why you may or may not wish to consider taking part. This section is only a summary; more detailed information, including how to contact the research team for additional information or questions, follows within the remainder of this document under the "Detailed Information" heading.

What should I know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Taking part in the research is voluntary; whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide, and can ask questions at any time during the study.

We invite you to take part in a research study about Muslim-American mothers' motivations to homeschool their children because you meet the following criteria: You are a Muslim-American mother who is homeschooling their child/children and at least one child is age 6+.

In general, your participation in the research involves 1-2 video interviews along with some clarification via email (total time estimation is approximately 4 hours.

The primary risk to you in taking part is: there are no known risks ***which you can compare to the possible benefit of:*** ***there are no personal benefits.*** You will not receive compensation for participation.

Detailed Information:

The following is more detailed information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

Why is this research being done?

There is currently very little research to explore the reasons why Muslim-Americans are increasingly turning to home education. This study is attempting to discover what motivations Muslim-American mothers have in choosing to home educate their children.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for a total of 4 hours. This will include 2-3 video interviews as well as some email exchanges.

How many people will be studied?

We expect to enroll about __3__ people in this research study.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

- ***You will receive an email asking you to schedule a time for your first video interview. The length will be from 60-90 minutes.***
- ***At your scheduled time I will begin by explaining what will happen as well as some guidelines on your privacy.***
- ***You will be asked if you wish to continue. You can discontinue participation at any time.***
- ***During the interview you will be asked a series of questions related to your, and your child's, experiences with traditional schooling and home education.***
- ***Within one week of that initial interview you might be asked to clarify or further explain some details of your experience. You may also be sent a write up of the interview to check for proper understanding of your story.***
- ***A follow up interview will be scheduled for the following week.***
- ***Again, if further clarification is needed, you may be asked some follow up questions via email.***
- ***If needed, a third interview will be scheduled.***
- ***The research is estimated to be completed by 1 month at the most.***

This research study includes the following component(s) where we plan to video record you as the research subject:

- ☐ I agree to be [audio recorded/video recorded] during the research study.
    - ☐ I agree that the [audio recording/video recording] can be used in publication/presentations.
    - ☐ I do not agree that the [audio recording/video recording] can be used in publication/presentations.
- ☐ I do not agree to be [audio recorded/video recorded] during the research study.

*Participants may not participate in this study without consent to be audio/video recorded.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You can choose not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you. Choosing not to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your alternative to taking part in this research study is not to take part.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

If you decide to leave the research, contact the investigator so that the investigator can remove you from any future commitments.

If you stop being in the research, already collected data that still includes your name or other personal information will not be removed from the study record.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

We do not expect any risks related to the research activities. If you choose to take part and undergo a negative event you feel is related to the study, please contact Saira Siddiqui.

Will I receive anything for being in this study?

No, there will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

There are no known benefits to you from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to others include better understanding the needs of Muslim students in traditional classrooms and taking more efforts to meet those needs.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information private, including research study ***records***, to people who have a need to review this information. Each subject's name will be paired with a code number, which will appear on all written study materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the code number will be kept separate from these materials. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and other representatives of this organization, as well as collaborating institutions and federal agencies that oversee our research.

This study collects private information with identifiers (such as name, birthdate, etc.) Following collection, researchers may choose to remove all identifying information from these data.

Your information that is collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies, even if all of your identifiers are removed.

We may share and/or publish the results of this research. However, unless otherwise detailed in this document, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, you should talk to the research team at ssiddiqui@uh.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also talk to them at (713) 743-9204 or cphs@central.uh.edu if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

Signature of subject	Date
Printed name of subject	
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date
Printed name of person obtaining consent	

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

1. Describe what life was like for you growing up.
2. Tell me about your early school experiences.
3. What kinds of challenges did you face during school?
4. Describe what life was like for your children before you began to homeschool them.
5. If they attended school, what kinds of challenges did they face?
6. What were your biggest concerns for your children?
7. What led to your decision to homeschool your child/children?
8. What did you know about homeschooling or other homeschoolers prior to making this decision?
9. What do you feel your children get from homeschooling that they wouldn't get from a traditional school?