

A Case Study Exploring the Experiences of African American  
Muslim Males in Georgia Public High Schools

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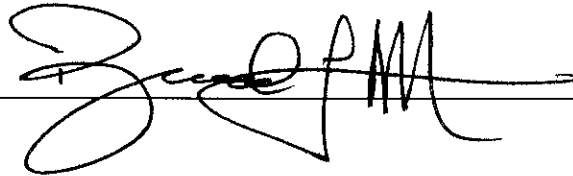
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## ABSTRACT

In this case study, I explored the experiences of African American Muslim males (AAMM) who attended or graduated from public high schools in Georgia. Islam is not new to America; our society has a limited understanding of Islam and African American males in education (Howard, 2014). Nationally, educators in public schools have historically experienced challenges related to educating African American males. Islamophobia is increasing as Islam becomes one of the fastest-growing religions in the world, and racism is a constant (Mohamed, 2016). This data indicates that public educators may experience increasing numbers of African American Muslims. However, in a recent 2020 US Mosque Survey, African American converts appear to have an unexplainable decline (Bagby, 2020). In this research, I designed a case study to explore the intersectionality of race, gender, culture, and religion as seen in the day-to-day experiences of AAMM in public high schools in Georgia. I also used purpose and snowball sampling to select five high school students to participate in this study. I used various coding strategies to analyze data. Findings from this study may develop training for educators to help improve pedagogical practices that are culturally relevant to the growing Muslim population in the United States.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Overview**

Islam is not new to America; however, our society has a limited understanding of Islam and African American males in education (Heimlich, 2010; Howard, 2014). Islam is widely misunderstood and misrepresented across the nation leading to increasing cases of Islamophobia (Heimlich, 2010). This problem is further compounded by the rapid increase of Islam, making it one of the fastest-growing religions globally, with over 1.6 billion followers (Mohamed, 2016). According to a 2007 Pew Research Center study, “9-in-10 (91%) converts to Islam were born in the United States, and almost three-fifths (59%) of converts to Islam are African American” (para. 1). This data indicates that public educators will experience increasing numbers of African American Muslim students in their classrooms in the future. Lastly, American public schools have problems educating non-Muslim African American males (Howard, 2010).

I explored the intersectionality of race, gender, culture, and religion, as seen in the experiences of African American Muslim Males (AAMM) in Georgia public high schools. Delgado and Stephancic (2012) posit those categories such as race, gender, and culture “and still others – can be separate disadvantaging factors” (p. 57). For example, an African American male Muslim experiences three or more disadvantaging factors in Georgia classrooms, such as race, gender, culture, and religion.

According to Mohamed (2016), there are approximately 3.3 million Muslims in the United States. Mohamed (2021) believed that roughly 3.85 million Muslims are in the United States as of 2020. A Pew Research Center study projected that by 2050, Muslims would be as numerous as Christians globally (1:1) (Mohamed, 2016). By the end of this century, Islam will be the largest religion in the world. Cohn (2016) predicted that "in the total U.S. population, non-Hispanic Whites will cease to be the majority group by 2044, according to Census Bureau projections, or by 2055, according to Pew Research Center projections" (para. 9). However, the teacher workforce demographics are not in tune with the projections above. Howard (2010) stated the following:

In short, U.S. schools will continue to become learning spaces where an increasingly homogeneous teaching population (primarily White, female, monolingual, and middle class) will interact with a mostly heterogeneous student population (increasingly students of color who come from culturally and linguistically diverse and low-income backgrounds). (p. 40)

Georgia educators must understand and prepare for upcoming racial, socioeconomic, and religious changes in student populations that will fill their classrooms. Race, gender, culture, and religion will have increasing impacts, especially in creating and maintaining relationships in American classrooms.

Ansari (2016) noted that a representative for the Council on American-Islamic Relations said, "we witnessed a sharp jump in anti-Muslim incidents nationwide last year, with the spike in Islamophobia continuing through 2016 and accelerating after the November 8 election" of President Trump (Islamophobia, para. 2). According to

Mohamed (2021), during the Trump administration, 48% of surveyed American Muslims reported religious discrimination in the previous year.

### **Problem Statement**

American public schools face challenges educating non-Muslim African American males (Howard, 2010). For example, increasing numbers of AAMM enrolled in public schools may be problematic for current K-12 educators. With our increasingly diverse population, U.S. schools educate multiethnic students who bring their cultural backgrounds with them to the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2013). The need to understand Muslim culture and students are increasing there are currently over 3.85 million Muslim immigrants in the United States, and the Muslim population may double by 2050 (Mohamed, 2018; 2021). The American Muslim population is over 1.1% of the U.S. population (Mohamed, 2021). The Muslim population number is increasing, but “the Muslim population often appears invisible and misunderstood in American society” (Callaway, 2010, p. 217). Misunderstandings regarding Islam intersects with the educational experiences of Muslim students. In addition, increased islamophobia impacts many Muslims. Islamophobia is a dislike or distrust of Muslims, which has heightened since 9/11.

Despite the increasing Muslim population growth, school practices often do not meet the needs of African American males (Howard, 2010). Historically, public education systems in the United States have had trouble educating African American males because of race and gender. Nationwide statistics highlight high dropout rates, disproportionate special education placement, lower reading and math proficiency scores, higher suspension and expulsion rates, and lower SAT and ACT scores (Howard, 2014).



As a principal, I see these negative statistics daily. In addition, the rapid growth of Islam, compounded with current issues of race and gender, may further the academic underachievement of AAMM students.

### **Purpose of Study**

To date, no other studies have conducted research through the lenses of the following conceptual frameworks: African American males in education, Critical Race Theory (CRT), CRT in education, anti-CRT movement, deficit thinking, intersectionality, and Islamophobia. I used the above theoretical frameworks and connected interviews to help understand the day-to-day interactions of AAMM in Georgia public high schools. The AAMM narratives in this study provided a greater understanding of their experiences in high school.

The purpose of this study was to explore the life and educational experiences of AAMM students currently enrolled or graduated from identified Georgia public schools to understand the obstacles, if any, related to institutional policies and practices that were both positive and negative during their high school years. I believe the day-to-day experiences, possible obstacles, and institutional policies and practices that AAMM faced while enrolled in a Georgia, public high school are important to observe.

Preservice and current educators may also benefit from reading this study, especially if the university curriculum supports improved pedagogical practices that are culturally relevant for increasingly diverse student populations in U.S. public high schools. Therefore, curriculum redesign must occur at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Currently, most public school educators do not represent the diverse populations they teach or lead (Howard, 2014).

## **Research Questions**

The research questions were designed to answer the following: What were the experiences of African American Muslim Males related to intersectionality (if any) of race, gender, culture, and religion while attending Georgia public high schools?

Research Question 1. What were the experiences of selected AAMM students at identified Georgia public high schools?

Research Question 2. While enrolled at identified Georgia public high schools, what obstacles, if any, did select AAMM students encounter?

Research Question 3. What institutional policies and practices did select AAMM students find positive or negative while attending identified Georgia public high schools?

## **Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the life and educational experiences of AAMM students who are currently enrolled or graduated from identified Georgia public schools to understand the obstacles, if any, related to institutional policies and practices that were both positive and negative during their high school years. I discussed the significance of this study in this section.

If the current teaching workforce demographic remains the same, our existing classrooms may not represent the students we will see in the future (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). When large portions of the teaching workforce need help understanding the students they serve, ignoring diversity because of convenience can occur. According to Howard (2014), research gaps exist, especially with “race, class, and gender intersections in schools, and how they influence the schooling experiences of various populations” (p. 11). Howard (2014) further explained that most current literature focuses primarily on African American males who are poor and living in urban environments. Unfortunately,

many of the same problems African American males face in urban environments mirror problems faced by African American males who live beyond these urban centers (Howard, 2014). This research provided narratives that could eventually support policies, procedures, and strategies, including culturally relevant pedagogy, school interventions, safe places, instructional strategies, and cultural and religious guides for AAMM in Georgia public high schools.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Personal Interest**

In this section, I discussed how my experiences as an African American Muslim educator and graduate student enabled me to develop this study's conceptual and theoretical framework. In addition, I have served in the Florida and Georgia public school systems as a K-12 educator for twenty-five years, including serving as a principal for seventeen years. In both states, I have observed a performance-driven mentality from the faculty of upper-middle-class, predominately White schools and a lackadaisical mentality from faculty in poor schools that were predominately Black. As for the latter, low expectations dominated every facet of instructional and curriculum development. These schools also focused more on discipline and dress than academics. As the assistant principal in Florida, a stop at a high-performing, upper-middle-class, predominately White high school was my wake-up call on how schools in the same city could be so different. I knew economics drove these differences, but at my core, I believed race was a foundation of why schools were governed differently. I learned the explanations for school governance differences when I began my doctoral classes. I then discovered theories and frameworks that comprised most of my literature review. Knowledge of the

deficit thinking model helped me make sense of the prevailing system of school governance that I saw in several schools.

As a principal in three schools in two states, I witnessed a pattern of deficit thinking on every campus. As the principal of MyMS in City 3, I noticed that this school of more than 500 students had no honors classes when I reviewed the course schedule. I then looked at the test scores for the student body, and I realized that over 45% of our students had high achievement scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. That was the first time anyone had done that sort of data analysis, but most of my staff believed that the students could not perform. The faculty also did not mirror the student population, which was predominately African American and poor. However, most of my staff blamed the students for low student academic performance – a practice known as deficit thinking. In response, I immediately created honors tracks and staffed this track based on our student test scores. Teachers said that was the first time they had simultaneously instructed a classroom of excelling students. Before I developed the honors track, teachers believed they delivered instruction to the middle achievement level of the class. The high-achieving and lower-achieving students did not benefit from this strategy, which was not a best practice. One veteran teacher struggled to keep pace with the instructional demands required to push our advanced students. She was shamefully unprepared, as most of her advanced students had been on the campus for two to three years. She taught those students in the 6th and 7th grades during that period but did not understand their potential.

The faculty had normalized deficit thinking toward the student body. They had developed a mental crystal ball and had collectively decided that our students could not

perform but conveniently forgot that the school was ill-designed to maximize instruction for the entire student body. When I started MyMS, it was the smallest middle school in the district, but when I left two years later, MyMS had the fourth-largest student population in the district. I accomplished this increase in enrollment by developing a magnet program and building trust within the community. I also worked diligently to redirect teachers with a deficit thinking worldview.

My next experience with deficit thinking also occurred at MyHS in City 1, Georgia. It was a mirror image of the middle school I had left. Firstly, the school was almost 80 years old and only had one advanced placement (AP) class. The staff also did not require the students to take the AP exam, demonstrating a lack of accountability. The school was the oldest historically Black high school in southwest Georgia. Most of the staff did not reflect the student body's demographics. MyHS was poor economically and predominately Black. Both MyMS and MyHS faculty pitied the students instead of educating them. Minimum standards were the norm, and for twelve straight years, the school had never made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). A review of student test scores again indicated that our students had the potential to do well academically. Finally, I immediately pushed for AP classes in all subject areas to drive higher expectations on campus.

Resistance came primarily from a core group of teachers and school district personnel. I verbalized my intentions to go to the school board to report the roadblocks created by school district leadership. The roadblocks ceased, and during my first year on campus, we developed fifteen AP classes. We missed making AYP my first year but made AYP my second year. It was the first time in thirteen years that MyHS made AYP.

Years later, MyHS became a College Board AP Honors school, one of three in the entire school district. We also were a US News and World Reports Bronze School in Georgia in 2015. This award was earned from data during the 2014 school year, my last year at MyHS. This achievement was impressive for a poor, predominately Black school in south side City 1. I fought to change the deficit thinking culture via teacher transfers and created a new magnet for our school. I entered MyHS with a 98.9% poverty rate and left with a 74.6% poverty rate over seven years as principal. We achieved this by establishing trust in the community, and our magnet retained students in our school zone and attracted students beyond our school zone.

I am currently the principal at MyAS. The MyAS has a student population that is predominantly African American males and poor. The MyAS is the only alternative school in City 1. The transition from a traditional school to an alternative school was not easy. To complicate the change, the First County School District (FCSD) initially attempted to outsource the alternative school to an outside vendor. Later, the FCSD tried to close the alternative school. I realized there was an absolute misunderstanding of alternative school education in our district.

Deficit thinking was rampant among my staff initially. There were no expectations beyond discipline and compliance. There was an out-of-school suspension first, ask questions later mentality designed to keep students off campus. I knew I had to change the alternative school's instructional practices and culture from punitive to restorative.

Curriculum and instruction are my strong points, so I addressed that first. Student instruction improved by hiring outstanding teachers who were educators first and

disciplinarians second. Firstly, teachers were required to get the same district training their peers received in other schools. MyAS teachers were years behind on basic district instructional practices. As our instructional practices strengthened, multiple academic initiatives began at the alternative school, notably developing and implementing a credit recovery program – Apex Learning. MyAS spearheaded this initiative, and every high school in the district has adopted the program. Secondly, I implemented culturally responsive pedagogy on campus by requiring books and programs that allowed our students to see themselves in the curriculum. For example, I purchased class sets of books by Mr. Jason Reynolds. Mr. Reynolds is African American, a #1 New York Times best-seller, and the current National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature. My students met Jason several times in 2021-2022 via Zoom to discuss his works and plans. Mr. Reynolds looks like my student body, and our students related to him immediately. Our African American males enjoyed the question-and-answer portions of the Zoom sessions with Mr. Reynolds.

The MyAS culture needed to change, and I used book studies to support the change. Our faculty studied *Dismantling Contemporary Deficit Thinking* by Ricard Valencia, *The Hopeful Brain* by Dr. Baker and Dr. White-McMahon, and *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools* by Tyrone Howard. In addition, I trained my entire faculty and staff in restorative practices, including my secretaries and custodians. I am also a licensed restorative practice trainer. Finally, my teachers and staff benefited from the book studies and training, which gave greater understanding to our alternative students, especially African American males.

Students transition in and out of the MyAS, so every parent and student must

attend orientation. During our intake interviews, my staff and I hear stories of racism, bigotry, classism, and mistreatment from our new students and their parents. I have asked district leadership multiple times to invest in training related to African American students. I have also provided research studies and books on various topics, but my district has still not provided training. District and national data on African American males are similarly negative. Our district is experiencing challenges educating African American youth, and there is no urgency to change this trend. I also suspect our district does not understand how to reverse this trend.

The work continues, and I prepare for the challenges related to intersectionality at the school level. Deficit thinking dominated the culture of three schools in two different states. I can only imagine how many other schools and districts operate within this framework. For years, I have witnessed a systemic pattern that reflected the history of racism that had led to apathy toward Black and Brown students. Book studies and training have positively changed the culture on my campus. Replicating our focus on African American youth is a possibility district-wide. My school does not have a teacher turnover issue. If teachers leave, they retire or leave the district. Our African American students are doing well here, and our out-of-school suspension rates decline yearly. Our student body also benefitted from our credit recovery efforts. Lastly, our parents and students request to stay at MyAS versus returning to their home schools.

Islam's growth in the United States may compound our country's ever-present racial issues and biases. Currently, American classrooms are dealing with issues related to the intersectional categories of race and gender. Islam's growth adds more intersectional categories of culture and religion into the classroom.



There is a research gap associated with AAMM students. An analysis of AAMM narratives will help understand the intersectionality of race, gender, culture, and religion in day-to-day interactions with peers and schools. I am an AAMM who is raising an AAMM. Therefore, the participants' narratives are important to me as a parent, educator, and change agent.

### **Prior Literature**

I briefly discussed existing literature that developed this study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks in this section. I began this literature review with no theoretical or conceptual framework. As mentioned in the personal statement, I saw patterns but did not have the expertise to define what I witnessed. This lack of knowledge was frustrating as a veteran administrator. It was also an indictment of my educational journey in undergraduate and graduate school before Valdosta State University. Portions of my literature review should, in my opinion, be mandatory courses, especially with pending demographic changes related to race, gender, culture, religion, and socioeconomics in our nation's public schools. Schools are becoming browner and poorer; however, our teacher's racial and socioeconomic demographics will differ from those they serve. As an African American educator serving most of my career in predominantly African American and poor schools, I still could not define what I was experiencing. Educators from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds will face more significant challenges in understanding diversity without specialized training.

Learning the deficit thinking framework increased my awareness of racially biased urban school governance philosophies in two different states. As I matriculated through my coursework, I studied Critical Race Theory (CRT) and this theory's natural

movement into the educational arena (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Once I became familiar with CRT, intersectionality emerged, creating additional layers of racial and gender analysis. These combined theories and frameworks helped me formulate the theoretical framework for my research.

My conceptual framework also establishes how Islam came to America, especially among African Americans. It includes the challenges facing African American males in public education and highlights the increase and possible normalization of Islamophobia in America. The working parts of my theoretical and conceptual frameworks supported the rationale for my research.

### **African American Males in Education**

This section highlights issues faced daily by African American males in public schools. As a group, African American males' plight in American public schools has been dismal. African American male dropout rates are high. African American males are also disproportionately placed into special education programs and have lower reading and mathematics proficiency scores, higher suspension and expulsion rates, underrepresentation in advanced placement classes, lower SAT and ACT scores, and higher retention rates overall (Howard, 2014). Howard (2014) stated that most current literature focuses on African American males who are poor and who live in urban centers. He found that about a third of Black families live in suburban communities and send their children to middle-class schools where they still underperform compared with their White counterparts. Howard posits that this creates a problem with anticipated privileges associated with upward social and economic mobility. Upward social and economic mobility does not seem to thwart the presence of racism and bigotry when it

comes to the schooling experiences of Black males. Location and socioeconomics are not cures for the negative experiences that many African American males face daily in schools.

### **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

I explained the foundations and usage of CRT in this section. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) defined CRT as a movement that is “interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 3). The movement started in the 1970s – some prominent figures in CRT include Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) identified several fundamental principles of CRT: racism in America is as normal as apple pie, and racism is an everyday experience for people of color (p. 7). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) also stated that “White-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes, both psychic and material, for the dominant group” (p. 7). They further contend that racism is a highly developed institution in the United States. Therefore, the application of CRT is appropriate to the field of education. Although CRT does not have a long history in education, the foundations and values remain the same in the educational arena as they began in law, which is the arena in which CRT was born (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2016).

### **Critical Race Theory in Education**

CRT has a relatively short history in education (Taylor et al., 2016). Howard (2014) highlighted that “educational research often has fallen short in examining race, class, and gender intersections in schools and how they influence the schooling experiences of various populations” (p. 11). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) stated that

scholars of CRT in education believe that race analysis is essential in understanding the myriad of issues faced by people of color. CRT in education also retains an activist framework designed to overcome normalized racial barriers and daily issues impacting students of color.

Furthermore, CRT in education challenges the Eurocentric worldview embedded in the pedagogy, curriculums, and practices within American classrooms. As a counter to a Eurocentric worldview, Taylor et al. (2016) stated that CRT in education "offers a liberatory pedagogy that encourages inquiry, dialogue, and participation from a wide variety of stakeholders" (p. 8). Storytelling, narratives, and listening are strategies used to develop and support a liberatory pedagogy. Delgado and Stefancic (2010) believed that scholars of CRT in education also recognize and analyze intersectionality related to people of color's experiences. The issue of race is a problem in American schools (Howard, 2014).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) stated that the "examination of class and gender, taken alone or together, do not account for the extraordinarily high rates of school dropout, suspension, expulsion, and failure among African-American males" (p. 51). Howard (2014) stated that an "analysis of pre-K-12 school performance data across several indices show that African American students perform lower on achievement measures across the board than any other ethnic group" (p. 15). Currently, most African American students are non-Muslim. However, knowing the data on African American males causes one to wonder if the intersectionality of race, gender, culture, and religion (Islam) will further contribute to the dismal statistics African American males face in K-12 education. The narratives in my research from AAMM students may add a new

dimension to research on African American males in K-12 education by adding a layer of varied culture grounded in deep religious convictions. Narratives become more important for educators to understand, especially as Islam grows in the United States, and African Americans constitute the highest percentage of converts.

### **Anti-Critical Race Theory Movement in Education**

In this section, I addressed the anti-CRT movement sponsored by conservative groups and politicians. After this study began, Republicans introduced sweeping legislation throughout Republican-controlled states against teaching CRT in schools. The bills universally claimed the CRT was reverse racism or communism (Kreiss et al., 2021). Before these bills, Republicans successfully ran disinformation about CRT's tenets, rationale, and significance. Republicans pitched CRT as a liberal attack on Georgia classrooms that is anti-white, but there is no evidence that educators are teaching CRT in Georgia public classrooms (Carr, 2022). According to Kreiss et al., 2021, 16 states passed anti-CRT legislation as of March 2022, and many more states are still considering legislation. Recently, Georgia passed legislation banning teaching “divisive concepts” in public school classrooms (Dixon, 2022).

### **Deficit Thinking Model**

Identifying deficit thinking is the initial step to understanding this model. Deficit thinking poses significant problems for students of color, especially African American males. Valencia (2012) stated that deficit thinking is a way of thinking that blames the students (victims) for their failure while harmful elements within the school, such as segregation, racism, inequalities in school funding, sub-par teaching, and sub-par course offerings, go blameless. According to Valencia (2010):

The deficit thinking model, at its core, is an endogenous theory positing that the student who fails in school does so because of his/her internal deficits or deficiencies. Such deficits manifest, adherents allege, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior (p. 7).

Valencia (2010) stated that proponents use genetics, culture, class, and familial socialization as the foundation for a student's failure. The blame, he posits, is on the shoulders of the victims of institutionalized racism, and the teacher or person holding to the deficit thinking model takes on no responsibility. Valencia (2010) suggested that American educators, via conscious or unintentional biases, have created an unsupportive educational system for most African Americans in K-12 public schools. Moreover, most African American males educated so far in the United States have not been Muslims. Therefore, examining intersectionality related to race, gender, culture, and religion is an integral part of this framework.

### **Intersectionality**

In this study, *intersectionality* is defined as the overlap of race, gender, culture, and religion, as seen in the day-to-day experiences of AAMM in public high schools. Islam adds a religious dimension to existing racial and gender problems African American males face in America's K-12 public education. Georgia public educators are not unprepared and may have trouble accommodating such diversity. Therefore, intersectionality deserves attention.

Collins and Bilge (2016) believed there is no classical or catch-all definition of intersectionality, and the definition of intersectionality can range through many aspects of

the human experience. Collins and Bilge (2016) believed that multidimensional axis or categories create intersectionality among people. Many categories beyond race and gender work together and influence one another. Intersectionality is a way to connect and understand individuals' complex categories versus grouping people by a single factor, such as race. Race, gender, culture, and religion are disadvantageous categories faced by the participants in my study.

Georgia public educators will experience increasing numbers of African American Muslim students in the future. This demographic change may demonstrate if educators lack the prerequisite skills to meet the learning needs of African American Muslim males. For example, Howard (2010) stated that teachers “will interact with a mostly heterogeneous student population (increasingly students of color, who come from culturally and linguistically diverse and low-income backgrounds)” (p. 40). African Americans and Muslims do not have monolithic cultures. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), “within groups that are seemingly homogeneous, one finds attitudinal differences” (p. 61).

According to Nelson, Stahl, and Wallace (2015), “A focus on race or class, or gender tends to operate in silos rather than in tandem, and with our theoretical frameworks addressing their intersections, significant gaps emerge in the scholarly literature on identity” (p. 172). Humans are complex beings. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) also stated that “everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances” (p. 11). They also said that “many races are divided along socioeconomic, political, religious, sexual orientation, and national origin lines, each of which generates intersectional individuals” (p. 61). Delgado and Stefancic (2012)

provided examples of double minorities, such as Black women, gay Black men, or Muslim women wearing headscarves (p. 64). For the participants in this study, three or more different oppression-rated categories are present as they are African American, male, culturally Islamic, and Muslim. According to Howard (2014), “intersectionality conceptualized how oppressions are socially constructed and affect individuals differentially across multiple group categories” (p. 30). Analysis of AAMM experiences in Georgia public high schools using the framework of intersectionality is under-researched. With the rise of Islamophobia in our country, it is plausible that intersectionality related to Islam may spill over into the classroom. As I read the interview transcripts early on, it was clear that AAMM peers at their high schools did not understand that AAMM could be Black and Muslim. Several participants experienced bullying due to intersectional categories of religion and culture.

### **Islamophobia**

In this study, I defined *Islamophobia* as prejudice against Muslims or Islam. Currently, we are witnessing an increase in cases of Islamophobia in the United States. Per Kishi (2016), “the number of physical assaults against Muslims in the United States reached 9/11 – era levels last year”. Kishi further stated, “in 2016, there were 127 reported victims of aggravated or simple assault, compared with 91 the year before and 93 in 2001”. According to Kishi (2017), “the FBI collects hate crime data from about 15,000 law enforcement agencies that voluntarily participate, which means the annual statistics likely undercount the number of hate crimes in a given year”. The election of President Trump has also caused an uptick in anti-Muslim incidents, according to Kishi (2016). Muslims are also experiencing and reporting discrimination. Recent surveys by



the Pew Research Center (2017) indicated that 48% of Muslims experienced at least one type of discrimination over the past year and an increase of 43% from 40% in 2007. Also, 18% of Muslims reported anti-Muslim graffiti in their local community in the last 12 months. Madawi (2015) reported that a teacher in Gwinnett County public schools asked a thirteen-year-old female student wearing a hijab if she had a bomb in her book bag. I believe it is natural for the trend of Islamophobia to spill over into Georgia's public education. I believe intersectionality related to Islam will negatively impact African American males who have traditionally had a troubled history in American public schools.

Most African American males who have had negative educational experiences are not Muslim, and the injection of Islamic culture in these experiences is under-researched. Relationship building is significant in public education. Awareness of students' backgrounds is a substantial part of that equation. Therefore, it is essential to briefly explain how Islam came to America related to the African American experience, including how various forms of Islam expanded into the African American community. Most of the participants in this study experienced bigoted remarks about terrorism. In a 2017 national survey, almost half of the surveyed American Muslims stated that they experienced discrimination related to Islam (Bagby, 2020).

### **Islam from Africa to America**

Per Austin (2012), as early as 1501, West African Muslims were captured, enslaved, and forcibly brought to the Americas via the international slave trade. Austin's (2012) and Diouf's (2013) research provided original narratives of enslaved African Muslims, depicting the lives of people stolen from a different continent. Many of these

narratives provided evidence of African Muslims practicing Islam during and after slavery in America. Austin found that Islam was in America before the founding of the United States.

African Americans have experienced many phases of Islam. According to Ohm (2003), the understanding of the religion and distance from Africa has altered and changed the religion of Islam into an ethnic version of Islam for many African Americans. He further stated that the newer forms of Islam practiced by some African Americans do not share traits with the Islamic faith practiced by most Muslims. Ohm provided a well-documented background for a recent phase of so-called Black Islam, founded in 1913 with the Moorish Science Temple. This organization, founded by Noble Drew Ali, was loosely based on the religion and culture of Islam. The Ahmadiyya movement largely influenced this and later movements, such as the Nation of Islam. The Harvard Divinity School (n.d.) stated that “the Ahmadiyya Movement was founded in British India by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1836-1906), an Islamic reformist and mystic who in 1891 claimed that he was a prophet, revivalist (*mujaddid*), and the messiah (*Mahdi*) anticipated by Muslims” (para 1). The Ahmadiyya movement is considered heretical to Sunni Muslims as the Ahmadiyya’s beliefs are foreign to Islam. Noble Drew Ali wrote his version of the Qur’an (Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple) (Curtis, 2005). Curtis (2005) and Ohm (2003) explained the differences between Black Islam (The Nation of Islam), a new form of Islam not practiced nor followed within the global Islamic diaspora.

Although many African Americans participated in the different phases of Islam in America, not all African American Muslims, found Islam by following the paths of the

groups mentioned above (Curtis, 2005; Ohm, 2003). Sectarian differences are important to Muslims globally, and these differences should not be minimized or ignored by educators for convenience. Finally, the 2020 US Mosque Survey found that the number of mosques (masjids) doubled in two decades; however, there has been a decline in predominately African American masjids.

### **Research Methods**

I used a qualitative case study research approach to investigate the experiences of AAMM in Georgia public education to record and analyze narratives. I recruited participants using both purposeful and snowball sampling methods. Graduate AAMM were the initial participants in the study. However, I needed help finding graduate AAMM participants, so I expanded the participant pool to include currently enrolled AAMM students. The participants were African American males currently enrolled (10th – 12th graders) or graduated from a Georgia, public high school. The AAMM attended a Georgia public high school for a year. The AAMM were practicing Muslims who self-identified as Salafi or Sunni Muslims. The participants were between 15 and 21 years old and were born in the United States. Finally, I informed the participants and their parents (if applicable) of the purpose and methods of this study.

Data sources such as Zoom interviews were collected and transcribed. I interviewed participants via Zoom as Covid-19 closed most masjids in Georgia. Categorizing strategies and connecting strategies were used to analyze the collected data.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are factors in the study that a researcher cannot control (Creswell, 2014). One limitation was that Muslim gatekeepers did not believe Muslim students should attend non-Islamic schools. The gatekeepers were leaders in various masjids in

Georgia. All the gatekeepers were proud of my desire to become a doctor. However, their support was minimum and hands-off. I have known and have strong relationships with most of the gatekeepers, but their stance on the matter was clear.

The second limitation was the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the gatekeepers did not approve of the public education portion of the study, they still gave me access to various masjids. The pandemic also forced masjids in Georgia to close, and these closures eliminated my ability to recruit participants face-to-face. Closures eliminated my ability to observe the participants in the masjid. I used multiple social media platforms to recruit participants because of the closures. Purposeful and snowball sampling enabled me to find only two AAMM graduates. I had to modify my Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) proposal to expand my recruitment pool. I added currently enrolled AAMM students (10th -12th grade) to my study.

Another limitation was that most participants attended or graduated from high schools that were predominately African American. The high schools also had predominately African American faculties and were all urban and poor. Only one AAMM participant attended a predominately European American high school.

Finally, many participants knew of me in the Islamic community, including attending the same masjids at some point. Initially, I was worried about reflexivity during the interview process. Reflexivity occurs when an interviewee tells the interviewer what they want to hear (Yin, 2014). As the participants became familiar with me, their answers seemed to be more fluid and less robotic.

### **Summary**

In this study, I developed methods to help understand the experiences of AAMM in Georgia public high schools. Refining the participant recruitment process and research

methods enabled me to compile and analyze AAMM narratives. In addition, two IRB proposals were necessary to move forward and complete this research.

AAAM experiences and interactions with the various conceptual frameworks supported a greater understanding of the participants and the schools they attended. In addition, I highlighted the changing racial and cultural demographics in our country. Georgia public educators will experience increasing numbers of AAMM. The narratives from the AAMM in this study will help educators develop training that could lead to improved pedagogical practices that are culturally relevant to a growing AAMM population in America.

This research could also foster the development of best practices that include AAMM students in a school's culture. Inclusionary strategies such as culturally relevant pedagogy, school interventions, school recognitions, safe places, instructional strategies, and cultural and religious guides will assist. Schools led by me benefited greatly from book studies and training with faculty and staff. Lastly, choosing this topic is personal to me as a father, educator, and change agent.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Anti-Critical Race Movement – A nationwide Republican lead campaign designed to discredit the Critical Race Theory in public K-12 schools.

Bigotry - People who are openly intolerant or prejudiced against Muslims.

Critical Race Theory - A theory and movement interested in studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado and Stephanic, 2012).

Deen – Arabic for religion

Deficit Thinking Model - At its core, it is an endogenous theory positing that the

student who fails in school does so because of his/her internal deficits or deficiencies. Such deficits manifest, adherents allege, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior (Valencia 2010).

Innovations – Newly invented matters in Islam that were not practiced during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) and his Companions.

Intersectionality – The overlap of race, gender, culture, and religion, seen in the day-to-day experiences of AAMM in public high schools.

Islamophobia – Having prejudice against a Muslim or Islam.

Masjid - The Arabic word for mosque.

Memoing – Memoing is writing a researcher does aside from field notes, transcripts, or coding (Maxwell, 2013).

Narratives – The summary of conversations collected from participant interviews.

Otherness - something similar but different from the norm.

Racism – People who are intolerant or prejudiced against Muslims and have the power structure to negatively change or alternate Muslim lives because of their intolerance.

Religious Oppositional Navigation - Various strategies African American Muslim Males (AAMM) use to navigate environments they deem oppositional or counter to their religious or cultural worldview.

## Chapter II

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this conceptual framework, I explored the experiences of African American Muslim Males (AAMM) in Georgia public high schools. The theories, frameworks, and concepts covered in this review included Critical Race Theory (CRT), CRT in education, anti-CRT in education, deficit thinking model, intersectionality, Islamophobia and hate, African American Males in education, and a brief description of Islam. A narrative review was the chosen method for this chapter. I used various educational databases and other sources relative to the topic.

I provided the study's theoretical and conceptual framework in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to explore the life and educational experiences of AAMM students who are currently enrolled or graduated from identified Georgia public schools to understand the obstacles, if any, related to institutional policies and practices that were both positive and negative during their years in public high school. Hearing and analyzing narratives may provide insights that develop training for educators to improve pedagogical practices that support AAMM students. The research narratives may eventually support inclusionary policies and procedures that include AAMM students in a school's culture with strategies to include culturally relevant pedagogy, school interventions, safe places, instructional strategies, and cultural and religious guides.

## **Description and Critique of Scholarly Literature**

### **Critical Race Theory**

I explained the foundations and usage of CRT in this section. I based a large portion of my conceptual framework on CRT. Derrick Bell, Allan Freeman, and Richard Delgado were prominent figures in the Critical Race Theory (CRT) movement, which began in the 1970s. The CRT initially studied race and racism from a legal point of view. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012):

Critical race theory contains an activist dimension. It tries not only to understand our social situation but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but to transform it for the better. (p. 7)

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) pointed out that CRT has several basic principles that emphasize the idea that racism in America is an everyday experience for people of color. The authors argue that racism is woven into every American institution and plays a vital role in cultural hierarchies for the dominant cultural group. According to Howard (2008), "CRT interrogates the positionality and privilege of being White in the U.S. and seeks to challenge ideas such as meritocracy, fairness, and objectivity in a society that has a legacy of racial discrimination and exclusion" (p. 963). Racism is a highly developed system in the United States. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), racism is woven so deeply into the norms of American society that it is challenging to address until manifest forms of discrimination appear.

Racism contributes significantly to the advances of the dominant cultural group that has no incentive to dismantle racist impacts on society unless that would also serve the interests of the dominant cultural group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Blow (2018)



quoted President Lyndon B. Johnson, who said it best: “If you can convince the lowest White man he’s better than the best-colored man, he won’t notice you’re picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he’ll empty his pockets for you” (para. 13). In another example of interest convergence, Bell argued that the 1965 civil rights legislation was not an act of kindness (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012):

It would ill serve the U.S. interest if the world press continued to carry stories of lynchings, Klan violence, and racist sheriffs. It was time for the United States to soften its stance toward domestic minorities. The interests of Whites and blacks, for a brief moment, converged. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 25)

Bell further asserted that racial progress in America would only occur when there was an alignment with the interests of White elites. However, racism is so deeply rooted in American society that it ultimately will not dissipate (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Critical race theorists such as Bell, Delgado, and Stefancic believe that race is a social construct, not a scientific reality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, stated that race “correspond[s] to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (p. 8). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) identified the following tenets of CRT: racism is normal or ordinary - not aberrant, in US society; interest convergence or material determination perpetuates racism; race is a social construction, intersectionality and anti-essentialism; and voice or counter-narrative (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 37).

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) asserted that White supremacy uses race or ethnic groups as vehicles for advancement. They stated that “early in our history, Irish, Jews,

and Italians were considered non-White - that is, on a par with African Americans. Over time, they earned the prerogatives and social standing of Whites” (p. 86). As this change demonstrates, racial categories are malleable and have historically shifted based on the needs of the dominant culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Nevertheless, the word race may only mean African or Black, as other races have been allowed to move freely within the construct of White supremacy, except for Black people. Black people’s positions within the framework of White supremacy have never shifted and have never been malleable.

For example, my African American great-grandmother married my Lumbee Indian and Irish great-grandfather. They were wed in the late 1800s in North Carolina and migrated to Waycross, Georgia. My great-grandparents married decades before the United States Supreme Court ruling in *Loving vs. Virginia* that states could no longer deem interracial marriages illegal. This ruling occurred fifty-two years ago, on June 12, 1967 (*Loving v. Virginia*, 1967). This marriage was approved or justified because he was Native American and Irish, and he was viewed no differently than African Americans at the time. Because of phenotype, the Irish gradually became “White” over time in America (Ignatiev, 2009). Other immigrants, such as Jews, Italians, and so-called model minorities such as Japanese and Indians, have benefited from the malleability of White supremacy. As mentioned above, the groups faced hardships in our country but were gradually accepted/tolerated by White supremacy.

Even today, this malleability of the construct of race is at work within White supremacy. Currently, non-African immigrants, including Latinos/Hispanics, feel a significant political pinch that includes deportation (Lopez & Rohal, 2017). A bigot

asked a Mexican American woman I know to return to Mexico. The Mexican American female offended by this was born and raised in Texas. Her family lived in the United States before Texas' statehood into the union. She told me that she had rarely experienced bigotry before President Trump. In a recent Pew Research Center survey, 58 percent of Hispanic adults have experienced discrimination, and 64 percent of darker-skinned Hispanics experienced racism more frequently than lighter-skinned Hispanics (Gonzalez-Barrera, 2019). Equally troubling, darker skin Hispanics and African Americans say they have experienced racial slurs and jokes (Gonzalez-Barrera, 2019). Darker skin color is negatively viewed and devalued in White supremacy.

### **Voice and Counter-Narratives**

Counter-storytelling from an oppressed group, such as African American males, is a portion of critical race theory. Storytelling regarding African American males is missing from today's research narratives (Howard, 2014). These missing counter-narratives provide firsthand accounts of the oppressed or underrepresented groups that the majority has not muted. Bringing counter-narratives to the forefront of research is extremely valuable because, as Freire et al. (2016) emphasized:

Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it. (p. 45)

The narratives from the AAMM in this study provide greater insight into the relationship between intersectional categories, such as race, gender, culture, and religion, while attending public high schools in Georgia.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) asserted that critics of CRT do not believe the storyteller's backgrounds places them in a better position to understand their issues. Finally, critics posit that if Jews or Asians succeeded in America, how and where do biases exist? The experiences of racial or ethnic groups in comparison to African Americans are vastly different; for example, only African Americans experienced chattel slavery and the Jim Crow era (Harvard Law Today (n.d.). These eras lasted after the Civil Rights legislation was passed in the mid-60s.

To summarize, racism operates in every American institution (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Racism operates to the extent that it is not recognized in American institutions unless observed in its most extreme form. To address racism, it must benefit powerful European American interests. The analysis of CRT supports the understanding of race and racism in America. Within American White supremacy, the construct of race has not been malleable for African Americans (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

### **Critical Race Theory in Education**

I explained the relevance of CRT in education in this section. Although CRT does not have a long history in education, the foundations and values remain the same in the educational arena as they began in law, which is the arena in which CRT was born (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings 2016). CRT in education is logical as the CRT theorist believes racism operates in every American institution. While educational research has often looked at inequalities across educational gaps, existing scholarship lacks consideration for the intersectionality of race, class, gender, culture, and religion

and how students' intersectional experiences vary across demographic populations (Howard, 2014). Howard (2008) argued that “the failure on the part of researchers to critically examine the role that race plays in the pursuit of an equitable education may reveal insights into why previous measures have had limited effectiveness for marginalized student populations” (p. 962). Application of CRT to educational research can help address this scholarship gap, as Howard (2008) argued regarding using the CRT in education:

A conceptual framework with an explicit examination of the ways that race and racism manifest themselves and their juxtaposition with gender in education may offer new analysis into the underachievement of African American males and provide new insight and direction for reversing their school achievement. (p. 966)

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) stated that scholars of CRT in education believe that race analysis is essential in understanding the myriad of issues people face. They contend that CRT in education also retains an activist framework designed to overcome normalized racial barriers and issues impacting students of color daily. CRT in education challenges the Eurocentric worldview embedded in the pedagogy, curriculums, and practices within American classrooms (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As a counter to a Eurocentric worldview, Taylor, E., Gillborn, D., and Ladson-Billings, G. (2016) stated that CRT in education "offers a liberatory pedagogy that encourages inquiry, dialogue, and participation from a wide variety of stakeholders” (p. 8). Storytelling, narratives, and listening are strategies used to develop and support a liberatory pedagogy. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) believed CRT scholars in education also recognize and analyze intersectionality related to the experiences of people of color. The construct of race is an

issue in American schools (John Hopkins University, 2016).

The U.S. has a history of genocide, chattel enslavement, and Jim Crow ending around 1968 (Asmelash & Ries, 2019). Enforcement of many of the newly enacted civil rights laws/protections occurred years later. I was born in 1972 and am the first person in my family to experience full rights as an American citizen. There are historical and systematic racial issues in the U.S., especially towards African American males. In a study of racial biases within schools, Brown (2016) summarized deeply rooted prejudice and racism among students and argued that teachers must have increased training to address the biases that students often do not recognize they hold. Brown's summary demonstrated that racial biases toward African American males began in preschool. The study involving 130 preschool teachers looked for signs of challenging behavior. The teachers consistently looked more at African American students – especially African American boys; while the preschool sample studied included 19% Black children, they accounted for 47% of those who received suspensions. Brown suggested that teachers targeted Pre-K African American males via conscious or unconscious biases.

Furthermore, as Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) discussed, the “examination of class and gender, taken alone or together, do not account for the extraordinarily high rates of school dropout, suspension, expulsion, and failure among African American males” (p. 51). Further, African American males are disproportionally placed in special education and score lower in academic achievement measures than all other ethnic groups (Howard, 2014). Most African American students are non-Muslim (Mohamed, 2018). However, reviewing years of data on African American males causes one to wonder if the intersectionality of race, gender, culture, and religious affiliations further contribute to

African American males' dismal statistics in K-12 education. The narratives from this research on AAMM students may provide insight into African American males in K-12 education by adding a layer of varied culture grounded in deep religious convictions. This research becomes more important for educators to understand, especially as Islam continues to grow in the United States, and African Americans constitute the highest percentage of converts (Mohamed, 2018).

Conscious or unconscious racial biases can result in lower teacher expectations, including deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010). Further, students suffer from the impacts of these biases. For example, African American males, who may already be behind, many may not receive the support they need academically. The issues of racism often have a devastating effect on African American males. Howard (2014) stated it best, racism toward African American males creates chronically high unemployment, and African American males are also over-incarcerated. He further noted that African American males have terrible health conditions and lower life expectancy than other large racial/ethnic groups in the United States. CRT can be a valuable tool for exploring African American males' educational experiences because it can help researchers focus on racial disparities while also amplifying students' voices regarding the impacts policies and practices have on their lives from their perspectives (Howard, 2008).

To summarize, I explained the relevance of CRT in education. The American education system, especially when educating African American males, functions normally with conscious and unconscious biases (Brown, 2016). However, approaching the study of African American males' experiences with a CRT foundation may begin to uncover ways to support these marginalized students in achieving increased success

despite the injustice they may experience within the educational system. Race and racism are the underlying causes impacting African American male students' educational experiences based on data from various studies (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016). African American males experience these biases earlier and continuously as they matriculate through public school (Brown, 2016).

Data from Howard also suggested that American educators struggled to educate African American males. Islam may compound these struggles for African American males. The American classroom does not mirror the students served racially or economically (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gershenson et al., 2016). White principals and teachers did not believe their colleges and universities prepared them for future racial and economic diversity (Johnston & Young, 2019). White administrators and teachers are likely to have less access to and experience other cultures and may experience culture shock with educating non-Whites students (Fitchett et al., 2020).

Most of the U.S. public school workforce is European American; this includes administrators and teachers (Superville, 2019). Eighty percent of U.S. classroom teachers are White females (Fitchett et al., 2020). Therefore, training must begin in college. Revamping college curriculums is essential for supporting an increasingly diverse student body (Johnston & Young, 2019). Johnston and Young's findings mentioned diversity as race and ethnicity, social class, and students with high-needs disabilities. Their findings and recommendations mention nothing supporting increasing religious diversity in U.S. classrooms. American educators in the study above have identified their limitations in teaching and leading diverse student populations.



## **Anti-Critical Race Theory Movement in Education**

In this section, I addressed the anti-CRT movement supported by conservative groups and politicians. As of March 2022, more than sixteen states passed anti-CRT legislation (Kreiss et al., 2021). CRT is a taboo topic in Georgia. The Georgia Board of Education was the first state board in the U.S. that opposed the CRT in public schools. There was little evidence that the schools in Georgia taught CRT. However, the Board passed a resolution against CRT (Valencia, 2012). The Arizona legislature also sponsored a bill to fine teachers \$5000 for making students feel guilty because of their race (Pitzl, 2021). Republican lead states and school boards became gatekeepers to CRT. Republicans pitched the CRT as anti-white and offensive even though there was little evidence of CRT in K-12 public schools (Carr, 2022). Republicans have also pitched CRT as being racially divisive and highlighting CRT's loose connections with Marxist ideology (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). According to Carr (2022):

Conservatives mounted a counteroffensive against what they viewed as an anti-white, anti-American, “woke” liberal agenda. And with that effort came a renewed vilification of CRT, a four-decade-old theory that, contrary to its opponents’ accusations, is rarely, if ever, taught in K-12 public school systems (it typically is taught in graduate-level college and law school courses). That effort quickly snowballed into complaints about what used to be basic history lessons involving race and slavery, which organized groups began conflating with CRT and campaigning for their removal from curriculums. (para. 32)

The gatekeeper masked CRT as offensive and began removing and changing the narratives of history related explicitly to chattel slavery, systemic racism, and bigotry in

the United States. Passing anti-CRT legislation will stifle much-needed pre-service and in-service teacher training regarding biases and intersectionality. Passing anti-CRT legislation also has the potential to miseducate and under-educate K-12 students on American history. Anti-CRT legislation is also the height of hypocrisy as the Republican party pretends to be the protector of less government.

According to Ford et al. (2022), White fragility is the term used to describe the emotional backlash by European Americans against perceived attacks such as CRT. Ford et al. (2022) further stated:

When their racial identity has become salient to them, the White person appraises the situation in reference to their own goals. We propose that the fundamental, superordinate goal to be “good” (i.e., to view themselves – or be viewed by others positively) is most relevant to generating White fragility. (p. 5)

Created distractions and misinformation related to CRT being anti-white began first by editing out common knowledge related to American history was the response. Because of emotion-related optics, the gatekeepers want to hide genocide, chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and systemic racism. Republicans require textbook companies and teachers to call and teach slavery as “black immigration” (Klein, 2021). Instead of using governance to right wrongs associated with systemic racism, the powerful choose to lie and miseducate to save face. Ironically, White fragility has highlighted the lengths European Americans will go to protect white supremacy. The defense of white supremacy demonstrates the need for CRT analysis throughout all American institutions.

European Americans disproportionality hold the gatekeeping positions to enable the whitewashing of U.S. history in multiple states and school districts (Ford et al., 2022).

The disproportionality continues as European Americans occupy most administrative and teaching positions in U.S. K-12 schools. The gatekeepers in K-12 public schools are the principals and teachers, who feel unprepared for various forms of diversity (Johnston & Young, 2019). The lack of educator diversity demonstrates the need for robust pre-service and graduate school responses at the college and university level. Liou and Alvar (2021), furthered the argument that “there is a significant need to pedagogically respond to the emotionalities and effectively prepare educators for equality and excellence in PK-12 schools” (p. 81). Emotionalities are the emotional backlashes associated with White fragility. The anti-CRT movement in many red states is problematic for higher education. Liou & Alvara (2021) stated:

The anti-CRT movement brings unique challenges to college classrooms, especially in faculty’s abilities to establish expectations that are conducive to civil debate, fostering a better understanding of society, and exploring solutions to issues such as race and racism. (p. 78)

Purposefully weakened preservice and graduate programs will be a disaster for future educators and the multi-diverse student populations they serve in American public schools.

Georgia’s Governor Bryan Kemp signed anti-CRT legislation in April 2022, known as the “divisive concepts” bill (Dixon, 2022). The bill bans educators from teaching what the Georgia State Legislature deems divisive such as the United States is fundamentally racist. The bill also requires school districts and schools to adopt and develop a complaint resolution process, and all complaints must be investigated within five days (Habersham, 2022). The bill’s official name is the “Protect Students First Act.”

Critics of the bill state that it is confusing. Lastly, my school district's lawyer must explain the new law to all district administrators at a newly scheduled meeting.

Finally, there are eight portions of this legislation. Portions of the bill make common sense, such as the code related to teaching that one racial group is inherently superior to another. Other portions of the legislation, such as the “United States of America is fundamentally racist,” is problematic and defy all logic because it blatantly ignores over three hundred years of American history (Protect Students First Act, 2022).

### **Intersectionality**

I explained the significance of understanding intersectionality in this section. Intersectionality is a concept associated with CRT. Kimberle Williams Crenshaw first developed this term in her 1989 “*Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critiques of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics.*” Crenshaw used critical analysis to understand the racial inequalities experienced by Black women from a legal framework (Bhopal, 2020). Collins and Bilge (2016) believed there is no classical or catch-all definition of intersectionality. They further believe the usage of the definition of intersectionality can range through many aspects of the human experience. They define *intersectionality* as a “way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences” (p. 1) and emphasize that people and society can be understood best by considering multiple aspects of individuals’ experiences, demographics, and advantages or disadvantages rather than focusing on a single category at a time.

In this study, *intersectionality* was defined as the overlap of race, gender, religion, and culture, as seen in the experiences of AAMM in public high schools. Public

educators should expect increasing numbers of African American Muslim students in the future (Mohamed, 2018). Currently, American educators are having a tough time educating African American males, whether they are Muslims or not, which brings to mind the question of what educators will do when religion intersects with race and gender in the form of African American Muslim males. Howard (2010) stated that teachers “will interact with a mostly heterogeneous student population (increasingly students of color, who come from culturally and linguistically diverse and low-income backgrounds)” (p. 40). African Americans do not have a monolithic culture. The same can be said culturally about Muslims following Islam. However, single-identity approaches are the primary model for analyzing students in public schools, focusing heavily on race/ethnicity or gender (Ghavami et al., 2020). Per Delgado and Stefancic (2012), “within groups that are seemingly homogeneous, one finds attitudinal differences” (p. 61).

According to Nelson, Stahl, and Wallace (2015), “A focus on race or class, or gender tends to operate in silos rather than in tandem, and with our theoretical frameworks addressing their intersections, significant gaps emerge in the scholarly literature on identity” (p. 172). Humans are complex beings; all individuals have multiple identities and perspectives, which may sometimes conflict with one another (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argued that “many races are divided along socioeconomic, political, religious, sexual orientation, and national origin lines, each of which generates intersectional individuals” (p. 61). They further mentioned that “American society prefers to place its citizens into boxes based on physical attributes and culture. No science supports this practice; it is simply a matter of habit and

convenience” (p. 78). Intersectionality creates “double minorities,” such as Black women, gay Black men, or Muslim women wearing headscarves (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). AAMM experiences the world as Muslims and as African Americans. In this study, upwards of four different oppressive related categories were present as they are African American, male, Muslim, and have secular differences. As Howard (2014) said, “intersectionality conceptualized how oppressions are socially constructed and affect individuals differentially across multiple groups categories” (p. 30). Educators must understand African American males' school experiences in a way that recognizes them beyond race. Additional oppressive markers beyond race, such as gender, culture, and religious affiliation, are a daily reality for the participants in this study. Intersectionality related to Islam may bring an additional bias to African American males in public classrooms. The same criticisms of CRT would also apply to intersectionality, as intersectionality is a portion of CRT (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

To summarize, intersectionality is a concept associated with CRT. Issues with race and gender are the underlying causes many African American males face in public education. Intersectionality related to race and gender may negatively impact African American males much higher than intersectionality that may exist in other student demographics (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Educators are doing a poor job with the categories of race and gender of African American males (Howard, 2014). This same disparity may occur with AAMM without training and curriculum changes at the post-secondary and graduate school levels (Johnston & Young, 2019). Research gaps exist regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, culture, and religion associated with African Americans.

## **Deficit Thinking Model**

Deficit thinking poses significant problems for students of color, especially African American males. *Deficit thinking* is a perspective that blames the students (victims) for their failure. At the same time, harmful elements within the school, such as segregation, racism, inequalities in school funding, sub-par teaching, and sub-par course offerings, go blameless (Valencia, 2012). According to Valencia (2010):

The deficit thinking model, at its core, is an endogenous theory positing that the student who fails in school does so because of his/her internal deficits or deficiencies. Such deficits manifest, adherents allege, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior. (p. 7)

Valencia (2010) claimed that genetics, culture, class, and familial socialization are the foundations for a student's failure. The blame, he posits, is on the shoulders of the victims of institutionalized racism, and the teacher or person holding to the deficit thinking model takes on no responsibility. Valencia (2010) identified six traits of deficit thinking:

- Blaming the victim: A person-centered explanation of school failure among individuals as linked to group membership (typically, the combination of racial minority status and economic disadvantages (p. 18).
- Oppression: "The lop-sided power arrangements between deficit thinkers and economically disadvantaged students of color; the model can oppress its victims" (p. 18).

- Pseudoscience: “Researchers approach their work with deeply embedded negative biases toward people of color, pursue such work in methodologically flawed ways, and communicate their findings in proselytizing manners” (p. 18).
- Temporal changes: “Depending on the historical period, low-grade genes, inferior culture, and class, or inadequate familial socialization transmit the alleged deficits” (p. 18).
- Educability: “A prescriptive model based on educability perceptions of low-SES students of color” (p. 18).
- Heterodoxy: “Reflecting the dominant, conventional scholarly and ideological climates at the time” (p. 18).

Valencia posits that American educators, via conscious bias or unintentional biases, have created an unsupportive educational system for most African Americans in K-12 public schools. Deficit thinking is policy-driven, and “consequently, implicit and explicit bias of policymakers can limit learning opportunities for students of color, students with low socio-economic status” (Palmer & Witanapatirana, 2020, p. 28). Most African American males educated so far in the United States have not been Muslims. According to the United States Census Bureau (2017) report, 77.2 million students enrolled in public education in 2016. The Pew Research Center (2017) stated that Blacks make up 15.5% of the U.S. public school population.

Current research provides examples of the effects of deficit thinking (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gershenson et al., 2016). The 2016 John Hopkins University study published in *Economics of Education Review* found that White teachers are 82% of the teaching profession, and many have meager expectations for African American boys



(Gershenson et al., 2016). Gershenson et al. (2016) further stated in a John Hopkins press release that “these low expectations could affect students' performance, particularly disadvantaged ones who lack access to role models who could counteract a teacher’s low expectations.” Gershenson, in the same 2016 John Hopkins press release, stated:

While the evidence of systematic racial bias in teachers’ expectations uncovered in the current study are certainly troubling and provocative, they also raise a host of related, policy-relevant questions that our research team plans to address in the near future. For example, we are currently studying the impact of these biased expectations on students’ long-run outcomes, such as educational attainment, labor market success, and interaction with the criminal justice system. (para. 8)

The study demonstrated that non-African-American teachers had low expectations for African American students. Educational opportunities become limited when teachers and administrators believe students are not ready to learn or cannot learn (Palmer & Witanapatirana, 2020). Still, African American teachers held the opposite view of student success, even with the same students. Gershenson et al. (2016) found that non-African American teachers were five percent more likely to predict that African American males would not graduate from high school versus African American female teachers and African American male teachers. African American male students with a non-African-American teacher in their sophomore subject area made them less likely to enroll in similar classes in the future. The researchers suggested that teachers' biased expectations have long-term effects on student outcomes (Gershenson et al., 2016). According to Cherng and Halpin (2016), minority students have a favorable perception of minority teachers. Their study also demonstrated the need for racial diversity in the

nation's teaching workforce. Cherng and Halpin (2016) stated that "minority teachers are particularly favored by minority students because minority teachers may have the personal experience navigating racial stereotypes about academic achievement and can equip students to combat these stereotypes" (p. 10).

Student expectations have long-term effects on African American males inside and outside the classroom. Brown (2016) revealed that teachers have racial biases toward African American males as early as preschool. The trend may continue for years, as according to "the most recent federal data, about seven percent of public school teachers, and 11 percent of public school principals, are black" (Wills, 2019, para 12). Again, most current African American males in public schools are not Muslims.

Cherng (2017) analyzed data from 10,000 high school sophomores and their teachers to provide further examples of the deficit thinking framework. He found that 18% of math and 13% of English teachers believed their classes were difficult for Black students. He determined that the most considerable gap existed for Black students. Racial biases affect African American males from Pre-K until graduation (Brown, 2016; Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gershenson et al., 2016).

As an African American high school student, I felt the pinch of deficit thinking and microaggressions in the classroom. According to Baker, 2019, "students internalize the spoken and unspoken biases of teachers as microaggressions" (p. 108). During my senior year, my math teacher, a middle-aged White female, stopped me after class and stated the following: "Reggie, you will end up just like the rest of your friends - dealing drugs on the corner, going to prison, and ruining your family's lives." I said Mrs. M, that is the dumbest thing I have ever heard in my life, but for general purposes – who are

these friends you are talking about? The friends Mrs. M pointed out were all college-bound from highly educated families.

Most of my friend's families were educators, and my friend's father was an Assistant Superintendent in the same district. Immediately I realized that Mrs. M did not know or value my peers or me. My parents were both educators, my mom was an elementary teacher, and my father was a high school principal in the same district. Mrs. M looked at us and generalized the worst. We all lived in an affluent African American neighborhood among doctors, lawyers, educators, and entrepreneurs. After this incident, I never spoke to Mrs. M again. She later found out who we were and our backgrounds, and she tried to make it right, but it did not matter to me. I was never a keen math student, but my pride made me study harder versus asking Mrs. M for anything. My friends had more aggressive incidents with Mrs. M. Mrs. M told one of my friends that "he was acting like a street nigger". None of us told our parents. We knew what our parents would do, so we chose not to work with Mrs. M – we checked out of her class mentally. She was not in our corner. My friends and I all attended historically Black colleges and universities primarily because of teachers like Mrs. M. We all graduated and are all in education with two principals and a teacher. Mrs. M thought the worst of us and did not value us until she discovered our lineage.

To summarize, our current educational training programs and institutions are not preparing future educators to meet the growing diversity of students in the public educational system (Johnston & Young, 2019). Deficit thinking toward African American males extends beyond K-12 public education. According to Harper (2010), African American students are experiencing deficit thinking in post-secondary

institutions. To truly address the effects of deficit thinking, as defined by (Valencia, 2010), there must be an intentional effort to educate our future educators on the history of racism and how it continues to plague generation after generation. Deficit thinking is a bias (conscious and unconscious) projected upon students (Valencia, 2010). The effects on African American males are damning. Deficit thinking circumvents accountability by blaming the victims for the biases inherently found in educators. Everything about the individual is a fault; however, the system does not see a need to change to include support (Valencia, 2010).

As an educator for over twenty-five years, I have never received training on deficit thinking. My ill preparation at both the undergraduate and graduate levels is consistent with Johnson and Young's findings, 2019. I have worked in two school districts, but the system of governance remained the same. Both districts were full of excuses for why specific groups of students could not perform.

Finally, CRT is a taboo topic in Georgia. The Georgia Board of Education was the first state board in the U.S. that opposed the CRT in public schools. There was little evidence that the schools in Georgia taught CRT. However, the Board passed a resolution against CRT (Valencia Jones, 2021).

### **Islamophobia and Hate**

Islam is the fastest-growing religion globally, as exemplified by data from a recent Pew Research Center article stating, “by 2050, Muslims will replace Jews as the nation’s second-largest religious group after Christians” (Mohamed, 2018). Further, violence against Muslims in the United States has increased recently (Kishi, 2016). Because of this growth and the increase in crimes committed against this population, it is

increasingly important to understand the relationships between Islamophobia, hate, and the Muslim-American experience.

The 2010 Pew Research Center survey clarified that there is much misunderstanding regarding Islam. What Muslims believe, the tenets, different sects, and the religious foundations are all new to many in America. There are many secular differences within Islam. According to Muhammad (2016), “nearly half of the U.S. adults (47%) say they do not personally know a Muslim”. The Trump campaign and election also caused an uptick in anti-Muslim incidents (Kishi, 2016). These negative views toward Muslims may enter the classroom.

Semati (2010) argued that Islamophobia is an “ideological response that conflates histories, politics, societies, and cultures of the Middle East into a single unified and negative conception of an essentialized Islam” (p. 256). Islamophobia has been highly politicized recently, including banning Muslims from entering the US under the guise that immigrants or refugees are a terror threat. According to Williams (2017), “in the eight months since Trump took office, more Americans have been killed in attacks by White American men with no connection to Islam than by Muslim terrorists or foreigners” (para. 3). Work conducted by Williams (2017) demonstrates that Islamic immigrants or refugees do not pose a significant threat to civility or terrorism in the United States.

Muslims are also experiencing and reporting discrimination. Recent surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center (2017) stated:

In total, nearly half of Muslims (48%) say they have experienced at least one of these types of discrimination over the past year, which is up slightly from 2011

(43%) and 2007 (40%). In addition, nearly one-in-five U.S. Muslims (18%) say they have seen anti-Muslim graffiti in their local community in the last 12 months. (Roughly half of Muslims, para. 3)

According to Parker et al. (2019), by 2050, minorities will constitute most of the population in the United States. However, this demographic change has already occurred in U.S. public schools. Nearly half of all Whites participants in the survey stated that this racial shift from a White majority to a minority-majority American population would weaken the American culture.

Statistically, some of our present teachers may harbor those thoughts and could have additional negative impacts on the students they serve. The Pew Survey demonstrated that nearly half of the White participants viewed the current American culture as having a greater value, and cultures outside of the American culture have a lesser value.

Islamophobia, hate, and intolerance are growing trends in the United States. America is a microcosm of society, so there may be a chance for this trend to spill over into K-12 education.

To summarize, many Muslims in America are experiencing rejection within the construct of White supremacy. Most Americans know little about Islam (Heimlich, 2010). Biases toward Muslims may appear in classrooms as the Islam population grows in America. African Americans are converting to Islam at the highest rates. The race and gender of African American males appear problematic for American educators (Johnston & Young, 2019).

## **African American Males in Education**

This section highlights issues faced daily by African American males in public schools. African Americans are not a monolithic group; diversity is abundant and complex. As a group, African American males' plight in American public schools has been dismal (Howard, 2014; U.S. News & World Report, 2015). Non-African American males are disproportionately placed into special educational programs, have lower reading and mathematics proficiency scores, higher suspension and expulsion rates, underrepresentation in advanced placement classes, lower SAT and ACT scores, and higher retention rates overall (Howard, 2014). Frequently, public educators marginalize and devalue Black students academically and psychologically (Cooper et al., 2022).

Most research focuses on poor African American males living in urban centers (Howard, 2014). Howard (2014) mentioned that "approximately one-third of Black families live in suburban communities and send their children to middle-class schools where they still underperform compared with their White peers" (p. 18). In addition, African American males in urban and suburban schools may feel the same sting related to conscious and unconscious racial biases.

Basford (2010) focused research on specific immigrant populations, such as Somali Muslim high students, finding that mainstream school environments were not conducive to supporting their religious and cultural differences. According to Howard (2014), research gaps exist, especially with "race, class, and gender intersections in schools, and how they influence the schooling experiences of various populations" (p. 11). The participants' narratives in this study may give depth to their experiences with race, gender, culture, religion, and intersectionality while they were high school students.

Welcoming, understanding, and supporting a growing American Muslim population will be valuable in the future.

The injection of the culture of Islam in these experiences is relatively under-researched. Relationship building is significant in public education. Educators' knowledge of their students, including their cultural backgrounds, is a considerable part of building relationships. Researchers such as Khalifa and Gooden (2010) combined several Islamic sects in their studies. The individuals chose to stay in these sects for a reason. Sectarian differences should be vetted but not ignored. Sectarian differences represent intersectionality among the participants.

To summarize, research on the state of African American males in public education is damning (Howard, 2014; U.S. News & World Report, 2015). The overwhelming majority of African American male students are not Muslims. According to recent data, America has a significant issue educating African American males, and most principals and teachers feel unprepared for various forms of diversity (Johnston & Young, 2019). It seems the underlying cause is race and gender. Islam via intersectionality may worsen the plight of African American males in public education. Policy and research must be established in school districts across America to support African American males (Johnston & Young, 2019). Finally, the absence of African American male teachers in the workforce is an emergency. Research suggests that African American teachers generally understand African American males more and lessen the blow of racism and bigotry in public education (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). African American males benefit more from African American teachers and teachers of color academically and emotionally (Cherng & Halpin, 2016).



## **History of Islam**

I provided a brief discussion of Islam in this section. The knowledge related to the diversity of Islam may help future educators prepare for pending demographic shifts in the classroom (Johnston & Young, 2019). Religious and cultural understanding will support AAMM students and provide a better, more inclusive environment.

Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hāshim (The Prophet Muhammad - Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) was born in Mecca on April 22, 571 C.E (Mubārakfūrī, Siraj, Richardson, & Azimabadi, 2002). Mecca was a religious center that surrounded the Kabba, which Muslims believe was built by Abraham and his son Ishmael as the first monotheist shrine built for God (Allah) (Mubārakfūrī et al., 2002). Before becoming a Prophet and Messenger, Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) was a trusted member of his tribe (Quraysh), who was known as “Al Ameen” (the trusted one) throughout Mecca because of his character and trustworthiness (Mubārakfūrī et al., 2002)

While praying in a cave on Mount Hira during Ramadan, the Angel Gabriel (Jibreel) grabbed the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) violently from behind. Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) did not know it. The Angel Gabriel (Jibreel) told the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) to read (Mubārakfūrī et al., 2002). Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) was illiterate and could not read or write, so he refused. The Angel Gabriel held Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) even tighter and told Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) to read again, but the Prophet refused. The final squeeze was so violent that the Prophet thought he would die. The Angel Gabriel again told the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa

Sallam) to recite the following: "Read! In the Name of Your Lord, Who has created (all that exists) has created a man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood). Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, Who has taught (the writing) by the pen, has taught man that which he knew not" (Hilālī & Khan, 1996). This event gave humanity the first revelation and the first verses of the Qur'an.

Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam), who was 40 years old, became a Prophet of Allah at that point and later became the Prophet and Messenger of Allah - the head of the religion of Islam (Mubārakfūrī et al., 2002). Islam was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) over twenty-three years in Mecca and Medina. In 622 A.D., the Prophet left Mecca because of oppression and met the Muslims in Medina. This migration, known as hijra, starts the Islamic calendar (Baz & Al-Abad, 2015). Thirty years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam), Muslim armies defeated the Byzantines and Romans led by the second Caliphate – Umar ibn Al-Khattab (Ṣallābī, 2010). Over the next 100 years, Islam crossed into Asia, Africa, and Europe, growing from a few people to millions of followers (Mubārakfūrī et al., 2002).

Islam means submission to God (Allah) with Tawheed (Baz & Al-Abad, 2015). Allah is Arabic for God. According to Baz and Al-Abad (2015), there are five pillars of Islam in which Muslims believe. The first pillar is the Shahada, or testimony of faith (there is nothing worthy of worship in truth except Allah, and Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) is His Prophet and Messenger. The second pillar requires Muslims to pray the five obligatory prayers daily (minimum). The third pillar requires Muslims to pay the zakat to support needy Muslims. The fourth pillar requires Muslims to fast during the month of

Ramadan. The fifth pillar requires Muslims to perform Hajj in Mecca (Baz & Al-Abad, 2015).

Muslims must also believe in the six declarations of Imam (faith), which is belief in Allah, belief in His angels, belief in His books, belief in His messengers, belief in the Day of Judgement, and belief in the divine decree, the good and bad of it as it is all from Allah (Baz & Al-Abad, 2015). The Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam), Muhammad, taught the believers the five pillars and demonstrated how to apply them to his Companions. The Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) the Sunnah to the Companions. The Sunnah is the ways, actions, speech, and explanations taught to Muslims by the Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) (Baz & Al-Abad, 2015).

Muslims also believe in the six articles of faith (imam) (Baz & Al-Abad, 2015). Baz and Al-Abad (2015) reported that the first pillar of faith is the belief in the Oneness of Allah (His Lordship, the belief in Allah's Oneness concerning His names and attributes, and the belief in the Oneness of His divinity). The second pillar of faith is the belief in the Angeles (names, descriptions, numbers, and jobs/tasks). The third pillar of faith is the belief in the Books (the Qur'an, the Torah/Tawrah, New Testament/Injil, the Zabur sent down to David, and the Suhuf sent down to Abraham). The fourth pillar of faith is the belief in the Messengers (Noah/Nuh, Abraham/Ibrahim, Moses/Musa, Jesus/Isa, and Muhammad). The fifth pillar of faith is the belief in the Last Day (Day of Judgement). The sixth pillar of faith is the belief in the Divine Decree (Belief in the knowledge of Allah, Belief in the Writing of Allah, Belief in the Divine Will of Allah, and the belief in the Creation of Allah and His bringing it into existence).

Islam is the second-largest religion globally after Christianity; however, by 2050, predictions suggest it will be the most prominent religion globally (Lipka, 2016), with an

estimated 1.8 billion followers. There are three major sects in the Islamic community. Muslims following the Sunni (Sunnah) faith are the largest globally, followed by the Shi'a and Sufi sects. It is now essential to briefly explain how Islam came to America related to the African American experience and how various forms of Islam expanded into the African American community.

### **Islam from Africa to America**

In this section, I explained how Islam migrated from Africa to America, primarily to African Americans. Teachers with greater cultural awareness may not look negatively upon AAMM students if they have a greater understanding of the religion. In addition, colleges and universities should prepare future teachers and administrators for pending diversity in American classrooms.

Europeans, especially the Portuguese and Spanish, had a long history with Islam, as Muslims ruled both countries for hundreds of years, ending around 1491 (Van Sertima, 1992). By the time Columbus arrived in the Americas, Europeans had strong memories of African Moorish leadership in Portugal and Spain (Van Sertima, 1992). In Europe, prejudice against Blacks arose due to slavery, despite Europeans' history of recognizing African culture's complex and advanced nature (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As discussed by Van Sertima (1992), "it is not an accident that the year Columbus sailed was the same year the African generals in Granada surrendered to Ferdinand and Isabella" (p. 21).

Islam is not new to the Americas. According to Austin (2012), as early as 1501, West African Muslims were captured, enslaved, and forcibly brought to the Americas via the international slave trade. Research from Austin (2012) and Diouf (2013) provided the

original narratives of African Muslims, depicting the lives of people enslaved a continent away. Many of these narratives provided evidence of African Muslims practicing Islam during and after slavery in America. Austin (2012) argued that Islam was in America before the founding of the United States. Beydoun (2014) reported that 15% to 30% or 600,000 to 1.2 million enslaved Africans in antebellum America were Muslim. These enslaved Africans lived in the western portions of Africa, known to have significant numbers of Muslims (Beydoun, 2014). Forty-six percent of enslaved Africans in the antebellum South were captives from the areas mentioned earlier (Beydoun, 2014). African Muslims practiced the Islamic pillar of fasting during Ramadan before and after the creation of the U.S. (Beydoun, 2014).

African Americans have seen many phases of Islam. According to Ohm (2003), the understanding of the religion and distance from Africa has altered and changed the religion of Islam into an ethnic version of Islam for some African Americans. Ohm further stated that the newer forms of Islam practiced by some African Americans do not share traits with the Islamic faith practiced by most Muslims. He provided a well-documented background for a recent phase of Black Islam, founded in 1913 with the Moorish Science Temple. This organization, founded by Noble Drew Ali, was loosely based on the religion of Islam. The Ahmadiyya movement largely influenced this and later movements such as the Nation of Islam. The Harvard Divinity School (n.d.) stated that “the Ahmadiyya Movement was founded in British India by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1836-1906), an Islamic reformist and mystic who in 1891 claimed that he was a prophet, revivalist (*mujaddid*), and the messiah (*Mahdi*) anticipated by Muslims” (para 1). The Ahmadiyya movement is considered heretical to Sunni Muslims as the Ahmadiyya’s

beliefs are foreign to Islam. Curtis (2005) showed that Noble Drew Ali wrote his version of the Qur'an (Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple). Both Curtis (2005) and Ohm (2003) explained the differences between Black Islam (The Nation of Islam), a new form of Islam not practiced nor followed within the global Islamic diaspora. Although many African Americans participated in the various phases of Islam in America, not all African American Muslims found Islam by following the paths of the groups mentioned above. African American Muslims follow different sects within Islam. Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the United States (Beydoun, 2014).

Information provided within the literature review demonstrates numerous issues facing African American males in public education. The literature review suggests that African American males perform dismally academically and highlights how African American males are disciplined. As Islam grows in the U.S., classrooms may begin to see an increase in AAMM students. Studies in this chapter suggest that gender and race affect non-Muslim African American males in the classroom. With the addition of religion, African American males may face three to four categories of negativity. This study's essential theories are CRT (including intersectionality), CRT in education, the anti-CRT movement, and the deficit thinking model. Finally, there is space and a need to support future educators in understanding intersectionality at the university level, both preservice and graduate.

### **Summary**

As a twenty-five-year educator serving mainly as a principal, I have seen school governance patterns in two states, but I did not know how to frame what I witnessed. This lack of expertise was frustrating as a veteran administrator. Portions of this literature review should, in my opinion, be mandated courses, especially with pending

demographic changes related to race, religion, culture, and socioeconomics in our nation's public schools. Schools are becoming browner and poorer; however, our teacher's racial and socioeconomic demographics will differ from those they serve (Howard, 2014). As a veteran African American educator, I could not define what I witnessed. Instead, imagine the difficulty faced by educators from different racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds as diversity within public schools increases.

Learning the deficit thinking model opened my eyes to similar urban school governance philosophies in those states. As I progressed through graduate school, I learned the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and this theory's natural movement into the educational arena. Once I became familiar with CRT, intersectionality emerged. The anti-CRT movement is problematic for K-12, postsecondary, and graduate students. The anti-CRT movement is also problematic for university faculty members to instruct. These theories demonstrated the importance of analyzing human beings beyond race and gender and emphasized the importance of hearing minority voices. Finally, the combined theories and concepts in this chapter helped create the theoretical framework of this study.

## Chapter III

### METHODS

In this chapter, I provided a detailed overview of the research designs and methods used in this study. I discussed the step-by-step procedures used for participant recruitment, settings, interviewing, transcribing, data collection and analysis, and validity checks. Finally, I outlined the coding strategies and processes.

Maxwell (2013) provided a sound process that enabled me to complete this intrinsic qualitative study. I referred a great deal to Maxwell (2013) and used several researchers collaboratively to complete my study. For example, I used Maxwell (2013) and Saldaña (2016) for support with memos, interviewing, transcription, coding, categorizing strategies, and connecting strategies to analyze data. Using multiple researchers' suggestions strengthened my understanding of the methods needed to complete my study.

The narratives from AAMM in this study are important and provide greater insight into intersectionality, race, and racism. However, there are gaps in the literature related to AAMM, and I designed this study to address those gaps. Using qualitative analysis, I gathered insights necessary to support pre-service curriculum changes at the undergraduate and graduate school levels (Johnston & Young, 2019). In addition, analyzing narratives may provide insight that supports developing training for educators to improve pedagogical practices that are racially or culturally relevant for a growing AAMM population in Georgia.



## **Research Questions**

My research questions had a clear relationship to the goals of this study. My research questions helped me focus the study on my goals and conceptual framework. I developed the research questions over time. I needed to ensure that my research questions were relevant to my research topic. My interview questions aligned with each research question. Three main research questions guided my study, following Seidman's (2013) three-interview series, and each interview focused on different participant experiences:

Research Question 1. What were the experiences of selected AAMM students at identified Georgia public high schools? As Seidman (2013) suggested designing the interview questions to ask each participant "to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time" (p. 21). The participants shared stories of their childhood, parents, peer and teacher interactions, otherness, and strategies they developed to progress through high school.

Research Question 2. While enrolled in identified Georgia high school years, what obstacles, if any, did select AAMM students encounter? Seidman (2013) said, "concentrate on the concrete details of the participant's present lived experiences in the topic area of the study" (p. 21). The interview questions helped me understand AAMM's perceptions of obstacles (if any) that may be policy-directed in the school's organizational structure. Finally, the participants discussed their experiences with academic opportunities and accessibility during the interview related to this research question.

Research Question 3. What institutional policies and practices did select AAMM students find positive or negative while attending identified Georgia public high schools?

The interview related to this research question, per Seidman (2013), “we ask the participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience” (p. 22). Inquiry related to this question helped me understand how AAMM students perceive organizational policies and practices in Georgia public high schools. The meaning of the participants’ experiences corresponds to the school culture theme.

### **Rationale**

Racial and gender issues impact the daily experiences of African American males in U.S. classrooms (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gershenson et al., 2016). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argued via Critical Race Theory that racism is in every American institution, and racism is an everyday experience of people of color. Public education is a microcosm of the American experience. The construct of race is an issue in American schools (Johns Hopkins University, 2016). To compound conscious and unconscious racial and gender problems, White principals and White teachers self-reported being ill-prepared to lead and teach in specific schools (Johnston & Young, 2019). European Americans are the majority of current administrators and teachers in U.S. schools (Superville, 2019). Anti-CRT legislation may eliminate or limit preservice and graduate students’ chances of taking courses necessary to learn about race and intersectionality in Georgia schools.

Valencia (2012) suggested that American educators, via conscious or unintentional biases, have created an unsupportive educational system for most African Americans in K-12 public schools. This unsupportive environment in K-12 public schools manifests via deficit thinking, low academic expectations, high dropout, and high suspension rates for African American males (Brown, 2016; Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gershenson et al., 2016; Harper, 2010). According to Howard (2014), research gaps

exist, especially with “race, class, and gender intersections in schools, and how they influence the schooling experiences of various populations” (p. 11). This research provides narratives that may become the source of data that supports policies and procedures that include AAMM in a school’s culture with strategies to include culturally relevant pedagogy, school interventions, safe places, instructional strategies, and cultural and religious guides. In addition, supportive curriculums, policies, and procedures may benefit educators.

### **Research Methods**

A qualitative approach enabled the participants’ stories of their experiences to be recorded and analyzed for understanding. Qualitative research was selected to understand the uniqueness of a particular setting and how the participants interact and make sense of the setting (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research attempts to understand the meaning of a phenomenon via observations in the field (Merriam, 2002). I gradually reduced the data from my study into concepts, hypotheses, codes, categories, subthemes, themes, and sometimes theories richly descriptive with words and pictures (Merriam, 2002).

### **Intrinsic Case Study**

I used an intrinsic case study approach (Stake, 1995). According to Stake (1995), researchers choose an intrinsic case study because “we are interested in it, not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we need to learn about a particular case” (p. 3). I preselected the case in my intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995). The experiences of current and graduate AAMM students in Georgia public high schools were the case. There is limited data on the experiences of AAMM regarding gender, race, religion, and culture related to their progression through

Georgia public high schools. Therefore, I chose AAMM as the case in my study.

Understanding this unique, complex social phenomenon was examined through case study research (Yin, 2014). I want to contribute to the body of knowledge on AAMM in Georgia public schools. The participants' voices were the best way to understand their experiences in high school.

A case study enabled me to understand how AAMM sees things (Stake, 1995). The primary source of data collection was Zoom interviews designed to obtain AAMM perceptions of their experiences in Georgia public high schools. The interview data was collected using Seidman's (2013) three-interview series. The participants' stories and day-to-day experiences emerged from the interview series. Memos, transcriptions, observations during Zoom interviews, categorizing strategies, and connecting strategies helped to analyze data further. My data analysis resulted in themes and subthemes.

### **Setting**

I initially proposed to conduct interviews in various masjids in Georgia. I initially chose masjids as the setting, as masjids are central to Muslims. Masjid is the Arabic word for mosque. Muslims use masjids to pray in the congregation. An imam leads congregational prayers in masjids, and all prayers are directed (pointed) to the qiblah in Mecca (Britannica, 2019). I have visited several masjids in different U.S. states and countries (Bahamas, Canada, and Cuba). Men and women are separated into specific sections in a masjid and do not pray together (Britannica, 2019). During prayers, men and women pray separately in rows behind the imam. Masjids are clean, quiet, and welcoming and differ in size and decor based on the economics of the congregation.

I emailed imams (the equivalent of pastors) and the masjid administrators in Georgia. The emails contained my phone numbers and email addresses for any questions. I attached a flyer (Appendix A) with information about the study and asked the imam(s) to distribute it to young men who met the inclusion criteria for this study. My contact information was on the flyer to allow the participants to volunteer for the study without revealing their identities to the Islamic community where they worship. I also placed flyers on social media to recruit participants. Unfortunately, Covid-19 significantly affected my study as masjids throughout Georgia closed for several months.

The process and procedures mentioned above did not work for me. I submitted and was approved to make changes to the proposed IRB. The modifications to my IRB proposal took considerable time to be approved (see Appendix B for final IRB Approval letter). I used purposeful and snowball sampling and reduced the age requirements to recruit additional AAMM participants.

The younger participants were current Georgia high school students.

I made reasonable attempts to conduct interviews in masjids that the participants attended or selected. However, due to Covid-19, the masjids in Georgia, including masjids in City A and Greater Atlanta, were closed. The masjid I attended was also closed. Eventually, masjids opened with strict Covid-19 protocols preventing congregating after prayers and eliminating Arabic classes after prayers. I encountered passive reluctance to help me find participants from masjid leadership. Covid-19 kept me out of the masjids, so I conducted participant interviews via Zoom during and after the pandemic. Finally, I recorded every Zoom interview and wrote memos during the interviews.

I informed the participants of the purpose and methods of this study. Written informed consent, parental permission, and child assent documents were issued and read to participants under eighteen. I gave the adult participants a copy of the informed consent information. The participants were allowed to check their transcribed interviews at the beginning of the second interview. None of the participants chose to take the opportunity to review their transcribed interviews. Therefore, when necessary, I asked clarifying questions to the participants from previous interviews.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I am an AAMM who converted to Islam about 17 years ago and currently live in Georgia. I am the principal of an alternative school in the First County School District (FCSD) and have a long history of leading predominately African American public schools. My experiences as a principal led me to conduct this study. Finally, I did not supervise any current or graduate participants in this study.

I was known by the parents or grandparents of the participants in this study. However, the participants only knew of me. So, outside of race, gender, and religion, the participants and I had little in common at the beginning of the study. I approached this study as a collaboration. I was their Muslim brother who wanted to hear the participants' honest voices. My study was a collaboration, as I needed the participants' support to complete my study. Our shared identities brought comfort to the interview process, and I felt the participants enjoyed contributing to my research. Finally, I served as the research instrument in this study.

### **Participant Selection**

In this study, I used purposeful and snowball sampling. According to Maxwell (2013), use purposeful sampling when “particular settings, persons, or activities are

selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals, and that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 97). Purposeful sampling eventually led to snowball sampling. I chose to focus on Salafi and Sunni Muslims because they were homogenous in their religious practices and culture (Maxwell, 2013). Patton (2015) emphasized that purposeful sampling is fine when people share common experiences and worldviews. Purposeful sampling eventually led to snowball sampling. For example, a leader in an Atlanta masjid advised me to call a Muslim brother whom I have known for years. That brother immediately gave me his son’s phone number. His son met the requirements of my study and agreed to be a participant. Using purposeful and snowball sampling, I sought participants with the following characteristics:

- The participants were African American males.
- The participants self-identified as Salafi or Sunni Muslims.
- The participants were current or graduate students of a public Georgia high school.
- The participants attended a public Georgia high school for at least one year.
- The participants were 15 - 21 years old.
- The participants were born in the U.S.

I worked for several months to recruit at least seven participants. However, I only found five participants for my study. All the participants met the requirements of the study. The participants are current students attending a Georgia public high school or graduates from a Georgia, public high school. The participant profiles, as shown in Table

1, include personal background information, age, current occupation, chosen Islamic sect, and the name of the high school they currently attend or attended (graduated).

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Pseudonym	Islamic Sect	Age	Status	High School Attends(ed)
Mr. Medina	Sunni	21	College Student	High School Y/City B
Mr. Mecca	Sunni	20	College Student	High School X/City A
Mr. Tabuk	Sunni	18	High School Student	High School X /City A
Mr. Jeddah	Salafi	15	High School Student	High School X /City A
Mr. Riyadh	Sunni	15	High School Student	High School Z/City A

I contacted the participants or the parents of the minor participants by phone. I then contacted all the participants by phone to discuss the study, the process of the study, and their commitment requirements to the study. The minor participants’ parents, the minors, and the adult participants had the opportunity to answer questions. Finally, I planned the data collection process after the participants agreed to participate in the study.

**Data Collection**

My study’s data collection, including the interviews, was designed to follow a three-interview series (Seidman, 2013). The interview protocol (Appendix C) includes the interview questions. Interview one focused on the life history of the participants related to their experiences in Georgia public high schools. I designed the interview one questions for the participants “to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of



the topic up to the present time” (Seidman, p. 21). During interview two, the questions focused on the details of participants’ experiences affected by race, gender, culture, or intersectionality. The questions, per Seidman (2013), “concentrate on the concrete details of the participant’s present lived experiences in the topic area of the study” (p. 21). Seidman (2013) emphasized that the three-interview series structure be followed with fidelity as each interview offers a foundation for the next. Finally, interview three allowed the participants to reflect on their perceived experiences related to their treatment by students and teachers in Georgia public high schools.

I did not rush the participants during the interviews. Instead, I allowed the participants to answer the questions at their own pace. I wanted the interviews to be comfortable for the participants to increase their willingness to participate. Seidman (2013) stated that “so much research is done on schooling in the United States, yet so little of it is based on studies involving the perspective of the students” (p. 9). AAMM narratives provided perspectives related to their experiences in Georgia public high schools.

**Interviewing.** Before the first interview, written informed consent, parental permission, and child assent documents were issued and read to participants under eighteen. Participants over 18 years old were given a copy and read the audio-tape consent statement found in Appendix D. Zoom interviews were conducted one-on-one with just the participant. I read the written informed consent, parental permission, child assent, and the informed consent information found in Appendix D at the beginning of the first interview.

At the beginning of the first interview, participants chose a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. I scripted the three-series interview sequence and asked open-ended questions during the three-interview series. I designed the interview questions to help me understand the participants' experiences. Each interview lasted sixty minutes to ninety minutes. Seidman (2013) stated that there is nothing magical or absolute about an interview's time frame. Finally, I scheduled the interviews at the participants' convenience.

I used Zoom or Rev to record and transcribe all interviews. Rev transcriptions were good quality, but Zoom transcriptions were low quality. I listened to the interviews several times and changed the transcribed interviews when the transcripts and recordings did not match. Listening several times enabled me to understand and appreciate the participants better. I was solely responsible for data collection. Zoom interviews were the only option for me because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

I organized each interview on my computer specific to the participant. I printed two copies of each transcript and stored them in my home office as a backup. I also used printed transcripts during the data analysis portion of my study, and I cut the transcripts into strips. Finally, I conducted preliminary data analysis during each interview (Maxwell, 2013).

Memo writing enabled me to understand the participants better, especially when data was analyzed (Yin, 2014). Memos are conversations researchers have regarding the data (Clarke, 2005). Throughout the study, I used memoing to record events and experiences I witnessed regarding the participant's behaviors during the Zoom interviews. Memoing provided me with additional data points.

## **Data Analysis**

I used memos, transcription, coding, categorizing strategies, and connecting strategies to analyze data (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016). Memos during the interviews provided additional data points for triangulation purposes. I initially wanted to include field notes but could not do this because of Covid-19 protocols. I analyzed interview transcripts from open-ended responses and memos tied to the interview process. I also observed the body language and mannerisms of the participants during the Zoom interviews. I used three coding cycles to bolster the triangulation process. Finally, I used transcription, memoing, and coding strategies to strengthen data analysis from the beginning to the end of this study.

**First Cycle In Vivo Coding.** I began the coding process by reviewing and analyzing the richly descriptive narratives participants provided during three separate interviews. In addition, I conducted data analysis during the data collection process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In addition, I used In Vivo coding and created codes related to the participants' verbatim responses during the interview series (Onwuegbuzie, Frels, & Hwang, 2016).

A code is an observable pattern that appears within the data more than twice (Saldaña, 2016). Coding is not labeling; coding is linking patterns of data logically together (Saldaña, 2016). The poor quality of the Zoom transcriptions forced me to listen several times to each interview. Correcting the transcripts helped me understand the participants and prepared me for the coding process.

According to Saldaña (2016), In Vivo coding is an excellent method for beginning researchers. Words and short phrases were used and placed in quotation marks. Saldaña (2016) stated, “the child and adolescent voices are often marginalized,

and coding with their actual words enhances and deepens an adult’s understanding of their cultures and worldviews” (p. 106). In Vivo coding helped me capture the voices of the participants.

I immediately began coding after I transcribed each interview. I looked for patterns to construct categories from the transcribed interview data. In vivo coding took time. I also manually coded the interview data as suggested by my chair because I had a small participant sample. I benefited from this suggestion because it helped me to understand the data and connect with the participants. I tried to use MAXQDA but using this software program was problematic.

Additional coding symbols emerged with each interview, and I gradually developed open coding symbols to identify common themes. These codes were recorded and used to look for data patterns. Table 2 highlights some of the open coding symbols I used.

**Table 2**

*Open Coding Symbols*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>
IWNM	Interactions with non-Muslims
WAPHS	Why did you attend public high school
EI	Educational importance
OUI	Overall understanding of Islam
VHSM	Values at home, school, masjid
RSDP	Racial and socioeconomic diversity of peers
RDFS	Racial diversity of the faculty and staff
DRB	Definition of racism and bigotry
ERB	Experiences with racism and bigotry
PPRCCR	Peer perceptions of race, gender, culture, and religion
TPRCCR	Teacher perceptions of race, gender, culture, and religion
AC	Academic challenges
PPM	Peer perceptions of Muslims
PEYI	Peer education on you and Islam
TPM	Teacher perceptions of Muslims
TEYI	Teacher education on you and Islam

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>
DRA	Daily religious accommodations
BCS	Barriers to course selection
SPI	Statements made by peers on Islam
STI	Statements made by teachers on Islam
SDRGCR	Discipline is handled based on race, gender, culture, and religion
TICP	Typical interaction/conversation with a peer
TICT	Typical interaction/conversation with a teacher
ICMI	Inappropriate comments made about Islam (teacher or peer)
CSD	Course schedule development
IAGD	Influences on academic growth and development
OCS	Obstacles to course selection
ID	Identity development
ISPP	Inclusive school policies and procedures

I color-coded each interview to include participant names (Foss & Waters, 2016). I used different colors to identify each interview. For example, a single red stripe was for interview one, a double blue stripe was for interview two, and three green stripes were for interview three. After reading and coding all transcripts, I used the following steps to analyze intrinsic case data (Foss & Waters, 2016):

1. Cut the color-coded text from each separate transcript into strips. I wrote open coding symbols, brief notes, and the participants' pseudonyms in the margins of the strips. I then combined similar open coding symbols on a table. I gradually clustered relevant open code data into thematized groups.
2. Analyze and check the open codes in the thematized groups for relevance and connections.
3. Thirteen significant categories emerged.
4. Each category was reviewed and analyzed for connections across all categories.
5. Themes and subthemes emerged from the significant categories.

6. I repeated the above process (steps 1-5), and major themes with specific subthemes remained.
7. Finally, I eliminated irrelevant data.

After the first coding cycle, I reorganized the newly created codes into categories. The categories were reduced again to the study's concepts (Saldaña, 2016). Next, I organized the codes between the first and second coding cycles using Code Mapping. Saldaña (2016) described code mapping as organizing and assembling the codes developed from the first coding cycle (p. 218). Finally, I used code mapping in my study to determine how the list of codes was categorized, recategorized, and conceptualized (Saldaña, 2016).

Categories in qualitative research were created by dividing code, grouping code, reorganizing, and linking code to consolidate meanings and explanations (Grbich, 2013). I connected the categories, named the categories, and developed a classification scheme (Saldaña, 2016). I repeated these steps during the three interview series. Questions asked during the three interview series focused on the participants' life history, details of the participants' experiences, and the participants' reflections on the meaning of their experiences. I combined elemental (In Vivo coding) and affective (emotion coding) coding methods during my first coding cycle. According to Saldaña (2016), "emotional codes label emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participants or inferred by the researcher about the participant" (p. 125). Ultimately, the participants' responses in their own words developed the In Vivo code (Saldaña, 2016).

**Second Cycle Pattern Coding.** I reorganized the data during the second coding cycle to dig deeper "to find something else, something more, a sum that is greater than its

parts” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 235). Each coding cycle reduced the number of codes from the initial data (Saldaña, 2016). I had thirteen categories before I began the second coding cycle. Then, from the original thirteen categories, major themes began to develop. Data coded during the second and third coding cycles were further categorized based on thematic or conceptual similarity using Focused coding (Saldaña, 2016).

Saldaña (2016) said, “the deliberate linking or weaving of codes and categories within the narrative is heuristic to integrate them semantically and systemically” (p. 242). Therefore, I diligently applied the first and second coding cycles to aid the data analysis. I used a third coding cycle to analyze the data thoroughly because I manually coded the data. As a neophyte to coding, additional analysis was necessary.

Finally, I focused on the conceptual framework in Chapter Two to determine if the open codes supported the ideas in my conceptual framework. In the matrix sample (Table 3), I collected a theme containing several subthemes and the participants' narratives. The theme of otherness aligned with the research questions and the conceptual framework in the literature review. Most themes in my study did not align with my conceptual framework. The themes that emerged during data analysis were otherness, anti-deficit thinking, and school climate. Each theme had several subthemes.

**Table 3**

*Matrix Sample of Chunked Themes, Subcategories, and Commentary*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
Otherness	Islamic Identity	“I got to speak my mind about my cultural heritage, my ethnicity, my racial history.” (Jeddah)
	Religious Accommodations	“I had to come home and make up all the prayers I missed” (Riyadh)
	Islamic Values	“They came from a place where – they came from where discipline was either, you know, very low, or it was at a zero, and pretty much did what they wanted” (Mecca)
	Muslim Peers	“We have a good relationship with each other, we make sure we look at each other, give each other the greetings, salaam Alaykum.” (Tabuk)
	Religious Oppositional Navigation	“Doing good deeds, that’s how I got people to like me for being genuine.” (Medina)

### **Issues of Validity**

Maxwell (2013) defined *validity* as “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 122). To support credibility, I eliminated as many validity threats as possible at the beginning of the research by developing and implementing a sound research design. Creating a sound research design eliminated randomization, as randomization increases the chance of rival hypotheses (Maxwell, 2013). Seidman (2013) emphasized that the three-interview series structure is followed with fidelity as each interview provides a foundation for the next. I interviewed the participants via Zoom within two weeks, which created intensive involvement.



I collected descriptive data via interviews, memos, and observations (during interviews) during the three-interview series. The above coding strategies provided rich data. Respondent validation was offered to each participant to check their transcript after each interview to validate their responses or provide additional feedback. None of the participants asked me to validate their previous responses.

The triangulation of data is significant to qualitative research. In this study, I used several data sources, including interviews and memoing from observations of the participants during Zoom interviews. Triangulation reduces the risks associated with systemic biases and increases the generality of explanations produced for data analysis (Maxwell, 2013). I considered several data points during data analysis. According to Yin (2014),

The use of multiple sources of evidence in a manner encouraging a convergent line of inquiry... is relevant to data collection. A second tactic is to establish a chain of evidence, also relevant during data collection. The third tactic is to have the draft case study report reviewed by key informants (p. 47).

Understanding internal validity related to researcher bias is essential for all case studies. For example, I am an African American Muslim who follows the methodology of the Salafi sect.

As a convert to Islam, I have been an African American male longer than an African American Muslim male. My life experiences could present a validity threat (researcher bias) during my study, and I have experienced bigotry, racism, deficit thinking, and Islamophobia in my lifetime. As Yin (2014) stated, “a case study involves an inference every time an event cannot be directly observed” (p. 47). I avoided

inferences based on his experiences by focusing solely on the participants' interview responses. Therefore, I developed interview questions that minimized my influence during the interview process and eliminated leading questions (Maxwell, 2013). Member checking was allowed and offered to the participants to check their transcribed interviews and interpretations. None of the participants asked to member check. Maxwell (2013) referred to member checking as the process of having participants review the transcripts. Finally, after listening to and reading transcribed interviews, I asked clarifying questions if needed.

Finally, the participants knew that I followed the Salafi sect methodology. The participants may have felt they must tell me what I wanted to hear versus what they were truly experiencing. Yin (2104) called this "reflexivity – the interviewee gives what the interviewer wants to hear" (p. 106). Some of the participant's responses seemed to be robotic or timid initially. However, after the first interview, they became more open and expressive as I earned their trust. I believe asking clarifying questions and becoming familiar with the Zoom interview process also reduced reflexivity.

### **Ethical Issues**

I explained the study to all of the participants in the study. I allowed the participants to ask questions to determine if they wanted to participate in the study. There were no risks if participants chose not to participate in the study. I also implemented the informed consent process to inform the participants. Since the participants are AAMM, whose first language is English, I read the informed consent information found in Appendix D at the beginning of the first interview. I also provided the participants with a copy of the informed consent form. Finally, I highlighted the potential benefits of the study in the informed consent form.

Additionally, for current K-12 educators, the AAMM narratives may foster professional learning opportunities to improve pedagogical practices that are racially or culturally relevant for a growing AAMM population in Georgia. The anti-CRT movement began after the study started. The anti-CRT movement may derail preservice and in-service professional learning opportunities in Georgia public schools.

At the beginning of the first interview, all participants created pseudonyms. Real names of people or places were erased and replaced in the transcripts with aliases. The participants and I agreed to use city names from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The participants chose the following cities: (1.) Jeddah, (2.) Mecca, (3.) Medina, (4.) Riyadh, and (5.) Tabuk. Anonymity related to real names and places was also not recorded in memos or personal notes. Finally, I collected the interview and documentation data from willing participants.

My computer was also password-protected, and I stored my computer at my home. I am the only person who has access to this computer. Three years after successfully defending my dissertation, I will permanently destroy all handwritten notes and all electronic files. In addition, I will erase all Zoom and Rev audio recordings upon completing the transcription process. Compensation was offered and issued to each participant after they completed an entire interview. I gave the minor participants \$10 per completed interview and the adult participants \$25 per completed interview. I made the payments via Cash App. The participants used existing pseudonyms as their Cash App names. Only I know the reason behind these payments. The participants used Cash App before this study.

There were no known risks associated with these research procedures. However, the participants' sensitivity levels, including emotional discomfort related to the Zoom interview process, were unknown. Therefore, I worked to minimize discomfort during the Zoom interview process. Valdosta State University and the IRB process have taken mandated safeguards to mitigate risks to the participants. By volunteering for this research, participants waived any rights they may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from the university's negligence or its researcher. Deception did not occur in the study, and all questions were relatable to the participants' experiences. Finally, I did not maintain contact with any of the participants in this study.

Finally, I successfully passed the required basic IRB courses provided by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program) to avoid additional ethical issues. I also completed the following supplemental courses: Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507) and Research with Persons who are Socially or Economically Disadvantaged (ID: 16539), and Records-Based Research (ID:5).

### **Summary**

African American males statistically are doing poorly in U.S. public schools. American schools are becoming more diverse, but most U.S. educators (teachers and administrators) are European Americans, primarily women. Researchers (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gershenson et al., 2016) believed that race and racism are the foundational causes of many negative experiences African American males face in public schools. Conscious and unconscious bias toward African American males manifests via deficit thinking, low academic expectations, high dropout, and high suspension rates for African American males (Brown, 2016; Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gershenson et al., 2016; Harper, 2010). To compound existing negative impacts related to race and gender, Islam is

rapidly growing in the United States, and most of the converts to the religion are African Americans (Mohamed, 2018). Islam (and Islamophobia) brings the additional category of religion, which may compound existing issues of race and gender currently faced by African American male students.

I designed this intrinsic case study with the guidance of Stake (1995), Maxwell (2013), Merriam (2002), Saldaña (2016), Seidman (2013), and Yin (2014). Various masjids in Georgia were initially chosen as research sites because masjids are traditionally the heart of the Islamic community, which may provide convenience for the participants and reduce reflexivity (Yin, 2014). The Covid-19 pandemic made interviewing participants in masjids impossible, as masjids throughout Georgia (including mine) were closed. I made Zoom interviews available to move the study forward. I used purposeful and snowball sampling to recruit participants from three high schools. Changes to the initial IRB proposal helped increase the recruitment pool by adding currently enrolled AAMM students in their second year of high school. The previously mentioned changes were approved. I used Zoom interviews and memos in the data collection process and analyzed the data using strategies such as coding, categorizing, and connecting.

I ensured the research was ethical, meeting the criteria established at the federal and state levels, including creating the IRB application at Valdosta State University. All participants received the appropriate informed consent forms before the interview process. Adults and minors AAMM participated in this study. The data was securely held and destroyed according to best practices related to the IRB process.

## Chapter IV

### FINDINGS

Race and racism are the underlying causes that impact African American male students' educational experiences based on data from various studies (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gershenson et al., 2016). Educators will increasingly serve a wide diversity of students, including additional intersectional categories related to race, religious affiliations, and culture. African American Muslim Male (AAMM) narratives are essential for greater insight into intersectionality pertaining to race, gender, religion, and culture. I examined AAMM students' experiences regarding institutional policies and practices while attending various Georgia public high schools. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What were the experiences of selected AAMM students at identified Georgia public high schools?
2. While enrolled at identified Georgia public high schools, what obstacles, if any, did select AAMM students encounter?
3. What institutional policies and practices did select AAMM students find positive or negative while attending identified Georgia public high schools?

I gathered data primarily through Zoom interviews, then used purposeful and snowball sampling to identify five current and graduate AAMM from Georgia public high schools between 15 – 21 years old. Most of the participants in this study attended predominantly African American, low socioeconomic, urban high schools. I contacted the minors and

their parents to explain the study, and the adult participants received the same procedure. In addition, I emailed child assent or consent forms to all participants in compliance with Valdosta State University IRB regulations. Finally, rigorous analysis of the interview data provided richly descriptive narratives of the participants' experiences.

### **Narrative Profiles**

#### **Mr. Medina**

I contacted a Salafi Muslim near Atlanta regarding the study using snowball sampling. I met this brother in City A several years ago. I met Mr. Medina through his father, who was excited for his son to participate in this study. The participants chose pseudonyms from cities in Saudi Arabia, and Mr. Medina chose Medina because of its historical importance in Islam. Medina means the city of the Prophet after the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) moved to the town. Mr. Medina is a 21-year-old AAMM college student attending a Georgia university and working part-time as an internet technician. He also had some entrepreneurial interest by starting his own clothing company. Mr. Medina is a brown-skinned, average-sized, athletically built male who wore his hair in short twists.

Mr. Medina is originally from New Jersey and lived there until he was in middle school with his mother. His father and mother divorced when he was young, and his father eventually moved to Georgia. Mr. Medina has two stepbrothers outside his New Jersey home, but Mr. Medina views himself as an only child. His dad has started numerous businesses and is currently an accountant for an Islamic food plant headquartered in Atlanta. His mother is a mortgage underwriter. Mr. Medina's father is Muslim, and his mother is non-Muslim. He has an excellent relationship with each

parent. According to Mr. Medina, both parents bring a different form of parenting to the table. His dad focused on Islamic worship and culture, and his mom focused on worldly things. Mr. Medina enjoyed his early childhood but stated that he began getting in trouble in New Jersey, so he moved to City B in Georgia with his father. Mr. Medina said, his “parents were his biggest role models.”

Initially, Mr. Medina attended a private Islamic school run by the Nation of Islam. He played basketball for the school's team and enjoyed attending there. However, Mr. Medina and his father noticed that the Nation of Islam's beliefs differed from the Islamic teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam). Mr. Medina’s father felt that public schools would be better than the Nation of Islam school. As a result, Mr. Medina began attending a public Georgia middle school. He explained, “Rather than being in an environment that teaches me a falsehood, and one more thing. I won't necessarily say false, but the unconfirmed information, you know. So that was the transition. That's basically how I got to public school.”

Mr. Medina enrolled at High School Y in his ninth-grade year in 2014 and graduated in 2018. High School Y is a Title I school in City B, Georgia. The Second County School District (SCSD) is a large suburban district near Atlanta. Historically, High School Y was a majority-minority school. African Americans represent the majority. In 2017 and 2018, per Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) data, High School Y was a failing school (2017 College and Career Ready Performance Index, 2018 College and Career Ready Performance Index, and 2019 College and Career Ready Performance Index - High School Y). Low test scores and poor graduation rates lowered the school's College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) score. The school's



CCPRI data has declined and is currently ranked low in Georgia, including the SCSD. The school's staff lacked diversity, and most educators were African American. A few European American educators would begin working there but quickly left, according to Mr. Medina. He further stated that only a few remained during his high school years.

Regardless of the school's performance, Mr. Medina believed he was better prepared religiously or, as he stated, "woke in the Deen (Islam)" to meet the challenge of attending a public school. His religious knowledge increased, and he credited this to spending more time with his father and attending the masjid. Although he attended the masjid more, Mr. Medina overestimated his preparation for a public high school.

Mr. Medina saw the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims at his high school. He thought his non-Muslim peers' behavior was negative, stating, "it was crazy sometimes you see no values." Mr. Medina said that early on, he was childish and outnumbered by his non-Muslim peers and soon began to act like them. He stated:

I live for the night in my early years when I look at it. I looked like, well I didn't look like a Muslim. In terms of appearance but you had to actually know me and talk to me to know I was a Muslim but like on a first appearance I don't look like a Muslim. I just followed my desires back then.

Culturally, Mr. Medina functioned as a non-Muslim at school but would immediately code-switch when seeing his father or when he attended the masjid. He would also code-switch when he saw other Muslims on campus. He lived a double life during his first and second years, but an unspecified event changed him and moved him closer to Islam. Mr. Medina did not give details of the event, but it was clear it shook him to the core, and he returned to his religious foundations. He never had any problems regarding ill-treatment

on the High School Y campus because he was a star basketball player who dressed well and was popular. Mr. Medina enjoyed his high school experience, except for the drama among his peers.

Regarding his academics, Mr. Medina was an average student, but he picked up the pace over time. Initially, the school selected his schedule, but he could choose courses after his freshman year. He took dual enrollment and advanced classes and graduated with a 3.4 GPA. Education was important to his entire family, and his parents emphasized this to him. Mr. Medina said:

Like every day, they are in my ear. Have you selected a degree? What are you doing with school? You got to have a degree - both of them (parents) are in my ear all the time – all the time. Like every day, I want to say every day, but I will hear, guaranteed, at least twice a week from both of them.

Mr. Medina and most participants could not define or state the difference between a racist and a bigot. High School Y's stakeholders were predominately African American, from his peers to the administration. Medina did not perceive or witness any issues related to his race, culture, or religion. However, he felt that administrators treated students differently; it seemed to be related to socioeconomics. Mr. Medina did not have problems with his peers or teachers. When asked how his teachers treated him, he said, "I'm treated better than the others". I asked why he was treated better and he said, "just the way that I act, the way that I talked, and the way that I carried myself."

Questions regarding Islam were general, and discussions on Islam were infrequent from peers and teachers. As he matured, he realized that his peers and teachers knew he was different because of his mannerisms and positive behaviors, and Mr. Medina felt he

earned respect for that. He stated, “doing good deeds, that’s how I got people to like me for being genuine. Just doing everyday good deeds and kind of just reflecting upon that on the religion.” Mr. Medina further stated, “we changed some people’s hearts. Some people got a little softer, kind of for the Deen. So, the respect came in, and some people got a little softer.” Most participants used good deeds and manners as a strategy to build coalitions with peers and teachers. I coined this strategy religious oppositional navigation is a response to otherness.

The school accommodated his religious needs, such as fasting during Ramadan or allowing him to make wudu (if asked). He believed accommodations were issued because he was a star basketball player. For example, Mr. Medina stated, “I had a principal, that said I could go to his extra office and lay in down.” His principal gave him this option versus going to the cafeteria during Ramadan. Mr. Medina also stated that “when I started taking my religion more serious” during his 11th and 12th-grade years, his peers and teachers knew him. Mr. Medina also said, “I really had to get my name known and really talk to the principal, and really show them that I’m serious and dedicated.” He found it easier to get religious accommodations during his last two high school years. Athletics may have opened the door to accommodations with his coaches but openly practicing his faith normalized religious accommodations with several educators including his principal.

Mr. Medina felt that his high school and dual enrollment prepared him for college. Mr. Medina was a magnet student and had scripted core classes until his junior year. Eventually, he was able to choose a variety of electives. Some of Mr. Medina’s negative experiences in high school also enabled him to refrain from the college lifestyle,

such as partying. He believed he had experienced the college lifestyle while attending High School Y during his freshman and sophomore years.

### **Mr. Mecca**

Mr. Mecca chose his pseudonym after the city of Mecca because it is where the first revelation of Islam began. The Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) also spent the first ten years after the initial revelation teaching Islam in Mecca. Mr. Mecca is from City A, Georgia, and considers himself a Sunni Muslim. Mr. Mecca is a twenty-year-old, brown-skinned young man whose hair is very fine and curly. Before high school, he considered himself very religious and stated that he is still religious and practices the faith. However, he felt he must strive harder to be around the local Islamic community. Mr. Mecca has an 18-year-old brother and three sisters (13, 15, and 17 years old). He was raised in a two-parent home most of his life, but before high school, his parents divorced. His father moved out of the house during the divorce, and his mother had to enter the workforce. Mr. Mecca's parents homeschooled most of his life before the divorce. The divorce ended homeschooling, and Mr. Mecca attended public school for the first time as a ninth grader.

Mr. Mecca's high school (High School X) is 99% African American and extremely poor. The schools' surrounding neighborhoods are high in poverty and crime. Mr. Mecca lived less than two miles away from High School X. High School X is the second oldest historically African American school in City A and was established during segregation. High School X remains almost entirely African American to this day. This school is a Title I school in the FCSD. Despite the impoverished location, High School X's facilities are immaculate, and the school sits on a hill in the middle of the community

and looks like a small college. High School X traditionally maintains a stable faculty and staff. The principal has led the school for over sixteen years.

Even with numerous issues related to poverty outside of the school, High School X has pushed the student body academically and athletically. Improving the student graduation rate is a major priority. During Mr. Medina's time at High School X, the school had a low of 67.9 and a high of 74 on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) (2017 College and Career Ready Performance Index, 2018 College and Career Ready Performance Index, and 2019 College and Career Ready Performance Index – High School X). The reputation of High School X and the reality of High School X are night and day in the community. Some viewed the school as a "hood school," but most viewed it with pride and respect.

There is pride on the campus and in the community for High School X. Mr. Mecca professed his love for High School X. He said, “even with my early issues, I love and would recommend High School X to everybody.” As a magnet student in High School X’s STEM magnet, Mr. Mecca strived academically most of the time. He attributed his failures to himself but acknowledged the supportive nature of the High School X educators.

Mr. Mecca felt homeschooling prepared him academically for public high school. However, homeschooling did not prepare Mr. Mecca for the culture shock of public school. Mr. Mecca felt lost early on and stated several times that he had never witnessed such negative behaviors or a "lack of home training." He saw these negative behaviors as common behaviors among his peers. Homeschooling shielded him from the non-Islamic ways and traditions of the general public and non-Muslims. Mr. Mecca felt that what he

initially saw at High School X was counter to everything he learned from his parents and the Islamic community. Many Muslim parents send their children to Islamic schools when available. City A and surrounding cities (under Atlanta) have never had any full-time or fully functioning Islamic schools, so homeschooling is the only answer for many Muslim parents. As a result, homeschooling is the route Mr. Mecca's parents chose for him and his siblings. As the oldest sibling, Mr. Mecca had the shortest stint in K-12 public education. His siblings are currently in middle and high school. He expressed his concerns regarding his siblings attending public school and promised to support them more Islamically, to the best of his ability.

Mr. Mecca's parents' divorce changed the lifestyle within the home, and attending public school became the only option. Going from being homeschooled to public school was a significant culture shock for Mr. Mecca. His parents' divorce impacted him emotionally as well. He was very close to his father and mother but had a limited understanding of what caused the divorce until recently. In his words, Mr. Mecca was mad and confused and was on an emotional rollercoaster. He felt disconnected from both parents at the same time until recently. The divorce forced him to abandon and question his faith for a short time. Mr. Mecca was working to restore his relationship with his parents, which has strengthened. Traditionally, ninth grade is a challenging transition period for high school students. Mr. Mecca felt emotionally and socially unprepared to begin his public school career as a ninth grader.

Mr. Mecca said he was timid when he began school at High School X and stayed to himself. He also did not know how to navigate his new surroundings. He believed some peers might have taken his shyness for arrogance until they all got to know one

another. His peers eventually found out that he was Muslim. There were no long-lasting or significant issues with his faith and his peers. However, his peers did not question his religion as much as they questioned his otherness. This study defines *otherness* as something similar but different from the norm. He was frequently asked, "how can you be black and Muslim." Students did not think Mr. Mecca was Black, and his mastery of English and manners added to his peers' questioning of his Blackness. Mr. Mecca's peers often quizzed him about his intersectionality between race and religion. Mr. Mecca said that some of his peers thought his experiences or struggles differed from those of non-Muslim African Americans. Initially, his peers also did not realize that he lived in a rougher portion of High School X's surrounding neighborhood. Mr. Mecca refuted their misunderstanding and eventually spoke up for himself.

Microaggressions with his peers were minor in frequency as he progressed through school. Overall, Mr. Mecca's peers and teachers treated him well at High School X. However, his religious affiliations only came up in specific course units, mainly in social studies classes. Still, Mr. Mecca clarified Islamic and cultural issues with peers and teachers more frequently than microaggressions.

As he progressed through High School X, Mr. Mecca initially found academics easy but rapidly needed to develop study skills during his freshman year. He thought that home school prepared him for ninth grade. However, he soon realized that homeschooling did not prepare him for the study skills and consistent rigor he faced daily in the classroom beyond his freshman year. Mr. Mecca took multiple classes at once, so preparation was vital. He cared for and valued education, especially opposing viewpoints in discussions. Before leaving high school, he took seven Advanced Placement classes,

tested in three of those classes, and achieved a passing score of three on each test. Mr. Mecca felt his education at High School X prepared him for the university level, especially with critical thinking skills. For example, he said the following about one of his male African American teachers, “he pushed us every day to try our hardest. He pushed, he always looked out the for the African male students.” He also said the following about an older, European American female teacher, “She was a wonderful teacher. She always saw more in me when it came to my writing than I did...She was a tough teacher, but, you know, I’m really appreciate that I took her class.” Mr. Mecca mentioned that she was “one of the biggest and influential role models for me.”

Currently, Mr. Mecca is a full-time student and a sophomore at State University (in Georgia), majoring in secondary English education. His experiences at High School X and his desire to help others pushed him to teach. He aims to return to High School X to work as a teacher. He also wants “to get back on his Deen," meaning becoming more active in the religion, especially the academic side of the faith. Moving forward, he plans on attending a local masjid regularly.

### **Mr. Tabuk**

Mr. Tabuk selected his pseudonym after the Arabian city, Tabuk. Mr. Tabuk is an 18-year-old senior who attends High School X in City A, Ga. I knew Mr. Tabuk when he was young, and he is the younger brother of an existing participant. When he was younger, Mr. Tabuk and his family attended several of the same masjids as my family.

Before his parent’s divorce, the entire family was an excellent model for the Islamic community in City A. His father served as the imam of a large masjid in City A, and I was the masjid president during his tenure. This masjid was predominantly Indo-



Pakistani, and most members were Sunni Muslims. Eventually, our families left the masjid and began attending the city's only Salafi masjid. Our reunion did not last long because of the divorce, and the family gradually stopped coming to the masjid I attended. I occasionally saw Mr. Tabuk when he was much younger during Ramadan. During the interview with Mr. Jeddah, I realized Mr. Tabuk attended the same school, and I contacted his brother and eventually his mother. He is a small-sized, brown-skinned young man whose face has not changed much from his early childhood days. In his childhood days, Mr. Tabuk was fluent in Arabic. He could read and write the language with ease while in elementary.

Mr. Tabuk is the third AAMM student from High School X in City A. Upon graduation, Mr. Tabuk desires to be an automotive mechanic and is currently studying for ASC certifications. He did not take any advanced classes while attending High School X. He wants to attend a tech school in Georgia after graduation but plans to enroll at a four-year university at some point.

Mr. Tabuk felt that Covid-19 significantly affected his achievement, especially in math. He had trouble when all FCSD schools closed and went virtual, especially in math. He later failed this math class. Retaking the math class caused a scheduling conflict with his final CTAE automotive pathway class. As a result, Mr. Tabuk could not take advanced placement classes during his senior year. There were no barriers to selecting advanced classes above the general courses he was taking. Mr. Tabuk made sure he passed math during his senior year because he did not want to miss any automotive courses. He also took the required number of Spanish classes to strengthen his chances of attending a four-year university. The majority of Mr. Tabuk's elective classes were

vocational.

Regarding the day-to-day experiences at High School X, Mr. Tabuk immediately described otherness. He described peer conversations that involved the stereotyping of Muslims and misconceptions regarding being Muslim and African American and said:

It was tough, to be blunt. A lot of people grow up ignorant of the world and not understanding that just because you're a different religion doesn't mean that you are a bad person or you don't have morals, or you don't believe in God or anything like that. In my experience, it got to the point where people would say you don't believe in God or you're not Black. You're not African American because you're a Muslim. You're not from here and stuff like that.

Mr. Tabuk's experiences with his peers seemed similar to his older brother's experiences. He attended High School X as a freshman when his brother was a senior. Mr. Tabuk was visibly annoyed about those experiences and was consistent with his responses throughout the interviews regarding his experiences. Race, religious, and cultural misunderstandings were issues he frequently faced. Mr. Tabuk did not understand why his peers could not understand him regardless of this faith, especially since he lived near many of his peers and shared many of the same experiences. He also attended the same middle school as many of his peers. He went on to say:

They basically just excluded the fact that I went to the same middle school and high school that they did that were predominately black. And lived in the same neighborhoods that were predominantly black also and went through some of the same situations that they had growing up.

His peers did not understand those connections, and at times, his narratives resembled bullying, especially when he heard statements about Muslims being terrorists. He rebuked peers in silence, or the rebukes were passive to avoid conflict. Although he started public school in middle school with many of his peers, his race and religion still presented issues. When asked about how he dealt with peer microaggression, Mr. Tabuk responded with the following:

It was a lot of patience. A lot of patience. Like you have to have almost unlimited patience because people will say some stuff that'll like make you really upset. And all you can do is just really just shrug it off. And the fact that they say this stuff and think that it's okay. It says two things. One, either they're not mature enough to understand. Or two, they don't have the same morals as you.

Instead of confrontation, he wanted to demonstrate how Muslims should carry themselves via excellent actions and mannerisms to his peers and the school. He felt that if people observed him, he could counter the negativity surrounding African American males, Muslims and Islam. He believes his character and mannerisms set him apart from his peers, and beyond his Islamic name, teachers knew he was different. He said:

The regular population being the people who stand out for a bad reason instead of a good reason. You know you can choose to stand out for your discipline, or you could choose to stand out for your good manners. And that's how I usually got recognized through my good manners.

Mr. Tabuk's experiences with the faculty and staff of High School X were consistently positive. He appreciated a diverse cafeteria menu that offered non-pork food

options such as salads. While in a "dark place," Mr. Tabuk's teacher provided space for him to make salah (prayer). His school provided no general school-wide religious accommodations. However, Mr. Tabuk, like most participants in this study, did not ask or did not think to ask for religious accommodations. When he did ask, his teacher allowed this accommodation. After completing extracurricular activities such as band, he would leave school and make his salah at home. He believes that students, regardless of race, gender, culture, or religion, are treated equally by the faculty and staff at High School X. He also stated that the school celebrates everyone. There were no general policies or procedures that were non-inclusive or counter to his beliefs. Mr. Tabuk's teachers understood the "bare minimum" of Islam, but some teachers were more knowledgeable about his faith. He felt that he was highly accepted and respected by his teachers. Finally, Mr. Tabuk spoke highly of his principal and admired his commitment to the students and school. Based on three AAMM participant interviews, High School X has done a tremendous job with inclusiveness related to the faculty and staff on campus.

### **Mr. Jeddah**

Mr. Jeddah is a 15-year-old sophomore at High School X in City A, Ga. Mr. Jeddah took his pseudonym in honor of the city of Jeddah. We attend the same masjid, and Mr. Jeddah and his family are Salafi Muslims meaning they follow the Qur'an, the Sunnah of our Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam), with the understanding of the Companions (the Salafi Salali) of the Prophet to the Islamic scholars of today.

Mr. Jeddah's dad is from Michigan, and his mother is an immigrant from Morocco. His father is a military veteran. Neither of his parents graduated from high school; however, his father has a GED. His mother had limited formal schooling in

Morocco. His father is a truck driver, and his mother is a homemaker. Mr. Jeddah also has a younger sister who attends a public middle school in City A. Mr. Jeddah and his sister have a history of being outstanding students and leaders on elementary and middle school campuses. Mr. Jeddah is a short, thinly built child with thick black hair. Mr. Jeddah's complexion is light - inherited from his North African mother. Mr. Jeddah is extremely shy and reserved until he knows you. When he speaks, everything is clear and to the point. Word economy is present, and he gets to the point when answering questions. Mr. Jeddah has excellent manners and is respectful to his peers and the adults in our masjid. I observed Mr. Jeddah for years within our Islamic community. Excellent manners are a sunnah in Islam.

Mr. Jeddah attends High School X in City A and has always attended public schools in City A. The family lives about three miles away from the school. Many of the homes in his neighborhood are nicely maintained, but the community has seen significant violence and crimes in recent years. Several homicides and shootings have occurred. High School X's surrounding community is economically depressed, as mentioned earlier. Mr. Jeddah stays close to home to avoid the issues in the surrounding streets. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, High School X earned an overall CCRPI score of 72.4. The score had low test scores but a high climate score and an 88 percent graduation rate (2019 College and Career Ready Performance Index).

Education was critical to Mr. Jeddah, who was driven and focused on finishing high school. He stated that education was essential and that he felt he needed to be the first to graduate from high school and the first to graduate from college in his family. He spoke about the educational experiences of his parents and his desire to complete high

school. Mr. Jeddah was passionate about the completion of high school, and he explained why graduation from high school is important. He said:

I chose to attend public high school because you know my father - he hasn't completed public high school, and now it's my turn to step up to the plate and be the first in my family to complete public high school. Education is really important for our family. As you know, if I make it through high school, I will be the first African American male in my family to graduate from high school. And if I continue to college, I'll be the first African American male in my family to complete college as well, and you know my dad didn't complete high school. He only has, he only had a GED.

He has always been serious about his education. Mr. Jeddah's zeal for education helped him secure a \$10,000 college scholarship in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. This scholarship can be doubled or tripled matched based on his GPA and the types of classes he takes in high school. Because Mr. Jeddah is in his school's magnet program, the school scripted his classes for most of his core academic classes. He is free to choose his elective classes. Historically, he has seen success, but he admitted he sometimes struggles in specific courses. He acknowledged struggling when his school district went virtual. Not only is secular education important to Mr. Jeddah, but his religious education is equally important. Mr. Jeddah takes weekly Arabic classes and attends Islamic lectures and conferences in-person or via Zoom. His father is also a strong leader and pushes him toward religious knowledge.

Regarding the day-to-day interactions on the High School X campus, Mr. Jeddah enjoys peer interactions and relationships. He described his peer interactions as boys

being boys or as friends. He stated that very few Muslim males are on campus, so most of his peers are non-Muslims. Mr. Jeddah described typical interactions:

I'd say one of the typical conversations I have with peers - Oh, hey, what's up?

How are you doing? Did you remember this last night, or do you guys have a test for that class, or do you have any notes I can borrow from you so that I can copy them down? You want to sit together at lunch or know you want to hang out after school, anything like that. That's usually the typical conversation that I would have with my peers – the guys.

There is a diverse Black, White, and Hispanic male and female faculty on the High School X campus. This diversity added character to the school as everyone worked, socialized, and organized together. Mr. Jeddah is unaware of any negative issues related to his race, culture, or religion at the school. I asked him about experiences with racism or bigotry and he said, “No I haven’t experienced any of that.” He has never experienced bullying and takes pride in his culture, race, and religion. He feels that questions from his peers regarding culture, race, and religion have strengthened bonds amongst his peers, and he has built consistent bonds with them as they have attended multiple schools, from elementary to high school.

### **Mr. Riyadh**

Mr. Riyadh chose this pseudonym in honor of the capital of Saudi Arabia. He is a sophomore on the High School Z campus and the only AAMM attending a predominantly white high school in this study. High School Z is a total magnet school in his school district, requiring students to pass a test to enroll. High School Z is ranked

nationally as the number one or number two high school in Georgia annually. Although the school is predominately European American, the principal is African American and has led the school for over ten years. Mr. Riyadh describes the diversity found on the High School Z campus:

My school, actually - it's a very diverse school. There are many Caucasian students, but then there are also many kids of different races. We have a pretty good amount of African Americans, a large amount of Asian students, and a pretty good amount of Hispanic students. So, really all around the school is pretty diverse in that sense. And then, economic wise, it's also, again, very diverse. You have kids coming from wealthy areas of the town. You have kids coming from middle-class families. You have kids coming from lower-class families. It's really all diverse.

Mr. Riyadh is 15 years old and has three siblings (a sister and two brothers). He is the only Muslim in the household; however, both brothers in elementary have attended a masjid. He is brown-skinned, muscularly built, and has curly long black hair. His parents are both professionals, his mother is an educator, and his father works in the technology department of a large corporation in City A. His mother is of Pakistani descent, and his father is African American. Mr. Riyadh identified as African American and converted to Islam three years ago. Mr. Riyadh attends the largest masjid in City A, and his grandfather is a Sunni Muslim from Pakistan. His parents are not Muslims. When she was younger, his mother was Muslim, but she eventually became Christian after marrying her Christian husband. His parents are both from City A and attended the same Catholic high school at different times. They met years later in their college years



and eventually married. The parents are currently going through a divorce, and Mr. Riyadh splits time between households. While with his mom, his grandfather (his mother's father) spends time with the family, and they frequently attend the masjid together. Mr. Riyadh has a good relationship with both parents and both sets of grandparents. Both households support his faith to the best of their abilities.

High School Z is a total magnet school in City A and had a 99.2% graduation rate in 2019 (2019 College and Career Ready Performance Index – High School Z) and scored 5/5 on its climate rating for the same year. High School Z is vastly different (socioeconomically and racially) from the other schools attended by AAMM in this study. Located in the middle of the city, High School Z is the oldest high school in the First County School District. Mr. Riyadh does not stay near the school and is in a well-kept neighborhood in the suburbs of City A. Mr. Riyadh has always attended public schools in the district.

Education is critical to Mr. Riyadh. His grandparents and parents are highly educated. Mr. Riyadh stated, “college is just what happens after high school.” He stated:

This year is harder than his first year. Mainly because we did a lot of cheating when we went on virtual because of Covid-19. My first year was super easy because the teachers knew that we were too hard to control. But when I started my sophomore year, the rumors I heard on how hard City A – was true. I had to learn how to be a student and learn how to study. My ninth-grade year felt like middle school. The first nine weeks was no joke, but I adjusted, plus my parents would be mad. I made it happen.

Mr. Riyadh describes his day-to-day interactions with Muslims and non-Muslims as "pretty normal." He has friends in every class during his seven-period day, and they talk about things relevant to themselves. For example, he said, "kids are talking about kids' things." The same is for extracurricular activities that he participates in or attends. His peers "don't look at me any different, and I don't look at them any different." Mr. Riyadh has not experienced racism or bigotry related to race, gender, culture, or religion. The few times he heard inappropriate jokes from his peers, he pulled them aside and corrected them with an explanation. Overall, he feels he is accepted and respected by most of his peers and feels his peers support his religious choice. Regarding peer acceptance of a ten-point rating scale (ten being the highest rating), Mr. Riyadh said the following:

I would say really a ten because they're mostly open to people who aren't the same as them. And especially if you have a few interests or even people who you might not have the same interest in, they're at least going to be friendly to you. If y'all do happen to be partners for an assignment or something, they're not going to exclude you from anything. They'll be friendly toward you.

Mr. Riyadh is an A/B student and takes various honors and advanced placement classes. Currently, High School Z favors advanced placement classes versus dual enrollment classes. High School Z students have no dual enrollment opportunities on or off campus. Course progress is the only academic challenge that he faces. For example, he cannot take senior-level classes until he has taken the prerequisites. The school provides a coursebook that includes all the courses offered on campus. Students can decide on electives and advanced placement classes based on their interests. High School

Z hosts a course recruitment fair in the auditorium. Students can shop for classes and speak with teachers who teach the classes during this event.

Mr. Riyadh has not witnessed any non-inclusive policies at the school. He feels that the faculty's treatment of the student body is equal. He spoke of the inclusive policies on campus:

If different people in different religions have certain holidays, they practice where they have to miss school to practice on that holiday, when you come back to school, the school will mark it as an excused absence, which means there's no consequences that you are out of school because clearly, it's a religious holiday.

Although the faculty is not diverse at High School Z, he feels highly accepted and respected by most of his teachers. He believes policies and procedures are handled equally amongst all students regardless of race, culture, gender, or religion. However, he did not rule out the possibility of bigotry or racism among faculty on campus:

I think there's always that one faculty or staff member that might look at us differently and think out of ... They might have that bigot mindset where they feel some type of difference to us. But at the same time, they can express that, but we choose to ignore it. I mean, some teachers, maybe there's a teacher somewhere that thinks people from African American race that are males maybe not as smart as the person beside them. But I've never been faced with something like that, so it's never really been something I've had to worry about.

Like most participants, Mr. Riyadh did not ask for religious accommodations. However, when asked about specifics, the school made accommodations for his religious preferences.

### **Summary**

Chapter IV focused on the narrative and demographic information of the five participants in the study. The narrative information included the participants' background details, personal perceptions, and educational experiences. In chapter V, I will explain the findings and themes from the research data.

## Chapter V

### DISCUSSION OF THEMES

The primary means of data collection were participant interviews via Zoom. I also created memos during those interviews and used the memos as supplemental sources. In addition, I used Zoom transcriptions and the web-based transcription service Rev.com to transcribe the audio Zoom interviews. I listened to and read each interview three times to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions and later destroyed the audio/video Zoom interviews. I used an intrinsic case study approach during the coding process. The experiences of AAMM in Georgia public high schools were the case. I began the coding process by reviewing and analyzing the richly descriptive narratives participants provided during three separate interviews. I then developed open coding symbols to identify common themes (Table 2).

#### **Otherness**

I defined otherness as something similar but different from the norm. The participants understood their uniqueness and felt that their peers and teachers also did. Regarding teacher interactions, the participants' uniqueness benefited them educationally and emotionally. Mr. Medina spoke about his teachers' perceptions of him, "they just knew automatically that I was just different by my actions because I wasn't portraying certain things (acting like his non-Muslim peers)." However, several of the participants' peers viewed them as different. Mr. Mecca experienced otherness from his peers,

“apparently, it didn’t click in their heads that African Americans can be Muslims too.” Mr. Tabuk emphasized, “It got to the point where people would say you don’t believe in God or you’re not Black. You’re not African American because you’re a Muslim.” He continued,

There’s some outlandish statements. Sometimes they said “You don’t believe in God, you’re not going to be with us, you’re going to hell.” All kind of negative stuff. Not really understanding that doesn’t mean...They think that Allah means another God or is a different God.

Mr. Tabuk attended a majority African American school, lived in a surrounding neighborhood, and was still viewed differently by his peers. He was comfortable with his Islamic and racial identity even when his peers were not. Mr. Tabuk thought he had to change the narrative and stereotypes of Muslims in America. The participants saw themselves in two different worlds, first as Muslims and second as African Americans. Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois (Du Bois, 2008) called these experiences double consciousness and defined double consciousness as:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others...One ever feels his two-ness, and American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

(p. 6)

Although Du Bois initially was talking about double consciousness concerning white oppression, the participants’ narratives demonstrated that dual identities could be problematic even among their non-Muslim African American peers. The participants

continuously learned how to navigate both worlds successfully. Most AAMM developed strategies to separate themselves from bigotry and cultural microaggressions from peers. Mr. Jeddah and Mr. Riyadh did not experience any issues with bigotry or racism.

In this study, Mr. Mecca and Mr. Tabuk were the only participants to experience overt bigotry by non-Muslim peers. Mr. Mecca spoke about his experience with bigotry, “it wasn’t because of my race, it was because of my religion; it wasn’t because I was African American, it was because of my religion.” The non-Muslim peers who created these bigoted incidents were all African Americans.

Mr. Mecca and Mr. Tabuk started public school later than the other participants in this study. They were both homeschooled for the majority of their lives. Mr. Mecca began public school in high school and Mr. Tabuk in middle school. Mr. Mecca reported that a benefit of attending public school as an AAMM high school student was that it enabled him to understand the Black experience better. He stated, “when I went to school, I was exposed to issues – the problems African Americans (non-Muslims) go through.”

### **Islamic Knowledge**

Islamic knowledge is an essential requirement in Islam. Seeking beneficial knowledge is highly valued by Muslims. Shaykh Saalih al-Fawzan stated that knowledge is obligatory (al-waajib al’aynee) for all Muslims to learn, and the faith will not be correctly established and maintained without it (AbdurRahman.org, 2018). Overall, the participants were not very knowledgeable regarding Islam. Mr. Jeddah stated, “my overall understanding of Islam; it’s not too terrible or not too great, but I always am learning something new every once in a while, so I’m never not learning.” Collectively

they knew the basics but stressed that they wanted to learn more. Most did not attend or only briefly attended Islamic schools. Most of their Islamic learning came from home and the masjids they attended. Several reported that they were currently in Arabic classes and attended Islamic conferences locally and in Atlanta when available.

All participants stated that they were religious and prided themselves in understanding how to pray, including conducting daily prayers. However, some participants' explanations of Islam were better than others. For example, Mr. Riyadh said, "I do believe in the speech of Allah in the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam), and his sunnah taught by his Companions." Most appeared nervous when initially asked about details of the religion. More in-depth explanations came from the participants when they overcame their nervousness after the first interview.

Even though the participants lacked formal Islamic schooling and experience, they still attempted to educate their peers and teachers. Making a good example and having excellent manners was a common way the participants educated their peers and teachers on campus. The participants understood that good manners and excellent character set them apart from their peers and created opportunities for conversations about Islam. In an authentic hadith narrative by Abu Darda, the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi wa Sallam) stated, "The heaviest thing on the scales is manners" (AbdurRahman.org, 2018).

The participants spread Islamic knowledge to their peers and teachers by answering questions and making corrections during classroom discussions. Several participants stated they would conduct "research" to answer questions they did not know



initially and report back to the peer or teacher who asked the question. Mr. Mecca stated that “anytime they asked me a question. I responded to that question with the best of my knowledge; if I didn’t know the answer, I looked it up myself and came back to them at a later date.” The participants stated that their teachers knew the very basics of Islam, but their social studies teachers were more knowledgeable regarding the faith. Islam was part of the world history curriculum taught in social studies classes. Several participants stated that they had to correct their teachers regarding Islam in the classroom. By answering questions to the best of their ability, the participants gave insights into Islam and themselves. The participants stated that their peers asked the most questions regarding Islam compared to their teachers on campus. Mr. Jeddah highlighted the most common questions asked by his peers, “why do you pray five times a day or what language do Muslims speak or what is their Holy book – those are some of the common questions that I get as a Muslim.” Mr. Tabuk said, “I’d be like passive arguing, and arguing that I know that I’d be able to bring facts to the argument, and evidence to back up those facts up.”

### **Islamic Identity**

There is limited empirical research on the relationship between the racial identity development of African American males and academic achievement (Appling & Robinson, 2021). Increasingly intersectionality is being understood as a theory of identity (Collins & Bilge, 2016), and maintaining an Islamic identity seemed crucial to the participants. For example, Mr. Mecca stated, “I live my everyday life based on my religion.” The participants had a firm understanding of their Islamic identity and how their identities fit within the collective identity of their respective high schools. The

participants also had a firm grasp of their racial identity. Personal identity includes the structures of self, and a portion of self is awareness (Plummer, 1995). Although most participants attended or graduated from urban and predominately African American schools, they were aware that racially and culturally, they were similar at times to their peers. The AAMM also realized that they brought an element of diversity into the school as individuals because of Islam. Finally, the participants understood that their unique belief system was counter to their peers at school.

The school setting further developed the participant's Islamic identity. For example, their interactions with peers, other races, and cultures impacted them greatly. Mr. Jeddah stated, "I got to speak my mind on my cultural heritage, ethnicity, and racial history." These experiences gave participants steadfastness to Islam, and some participants briefly took on the practices (good and bad) of their non-Muslim peers. Negative experiences with peers ceased over time with several participants. For instance, Mr. Mecca spoke about his initial experiences in high school:

I just tried to stay to myself and not really have too many people in my business, and unfortunately, at first, I didn't really want anyone to know that I was Muslim. Now, as time went on – I became prouder of my religion, and eventually, everybody knew that I was Muslim.

Time and maturity healed issues between the participants and their peers. Overall, the participants enjoyed the day-to-day interactions with their non-Muslim peers. Mr. Riyadh said, "just being able to be friends with peers of the same race and other races allowed me to mix in well with everybody." All participants in this study engaged in school-sponsored extracurricular events such as athletics.

## **Religious Oppositional Navigation**

I define *religious oppositional navigation* as various strategies the participants used in this study to navigate environments they deemed oppositional or counter to their religious or cultural worldview. For example, most participants experienced anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim microaggressions from their peers or experienced situations counter to what they learned at home or in the masjid.

The participants used consistent good behaviors and manners to build coalitions on campus with their peers and teachers. Mr. Tabuk developed the above strategies in middle school. He said:

Even in middle school, I remember helping people out just doing stuff out of the kindness in my heart for peers and teachers. And it's come back in a positive way. Like people who really didn't like me, but I still did nice stuff for them. It came back in a positive way when they see me in high school. They treat me better. They treat themselves better too. I think that changed people when someone's constantly doing something nice for you and you're not asking for anything back.

Religious oppositional navigation is a learned response directly related to intersectionality that sprang from the Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is a framework to explore African American Muslim males' educational experiences by focusing on racial disparities and amplifying students' voices (storytelling) regarding the impacts policies and practices have on their lives from their perspectives (Howard, 2008). Delgado and

Stefancic (2012) stated that CRT scholars in education believe that the analysis of race is essential in understanding the myriad of issues faced by people of color.

African Americans do not have a monolithic culture. Kimberle Crenshaw first coined the term ‘intersectionality’ in the early 1990s. *Intersectionality* is a framework that supports understanding how social divisions such as race, gender, sexuality, and religion (including others) work together instead of in silos. Understanding the interactions of multiple social divisions provides insight into how society positions people differently globally, specific to global social equality (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

In this study, *intersectionality* is defined as the overlap of race, gender, religion, and culture, as seen in the experiences of AAMM in public high schools. The participants generally understood race and racism, but most did not understand the difference between a racist and a bigot. The participants knew and understood the importance of religious differences between themselves and their peers at their high schools.

### **Religious Accommodations**

Organized religious accommodations were not typical at any of the participants’ schools. Instead, the high schools allowed and accommodated the participants’ religious obligations when requested. However, most participants never asked for religious accommodations. Accommodations such as a place to pray or an alternative to sitting in the lunchroom during Ramadan were allowed. When the participants asked, they received accommodations at the classroom and administrative levels. For example, Mr. Medina said, “that one of his principals had an extra office, and we could pray and use the office during Ramadan.” When the participants did not ask, issues like missing

prayers occurred. The participants had to go home and make up the prayers instead. When asked why he did not ask for accommodations, Mr. Jeddah responded, “I haven’t gotten the courage to ask, but I feel I should ask about that.” In this study, most participants reflected on the need to advocate for themselves or collectively in the future.

Every high school, per the participants, supported the two Islamic holidays (Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha) and granted excused absences to allow the participants to make up missed assignments. Excused absences because of a religious holiday are a policy in the First County School District (2022). In addition, the participants mentioned food accommodations in the cafeteria – there were multiple non-pork options available daily. Food options seemed to be the only universally recognized accommodation among the participants. Mr. Jeddah said, “if we can’t eat certain foods there always other options to choose from.” However, the AAMM in this study did not ask for those options. Food options are basic accommodations for students in most public high schools in Georgia.

## **Values**

I interviewed the participants about values at home, school, and the masjid. Mr. Mecca, Mr. Medina, and Mr. Tabuk believed the student population had different values and morals from what they saw at home and in the masjid. Mr. Medina said, “it was crazy; sometimes you see no values.” Mr. Mecca, Mr. Medina, and Mr. Tabuk skillfully used religious oppositional navigation to build coalitions with their teachers and peers.

Mr. Riyadh and Mr. Jeddah believed that their peers’ values and morals were not much different from what they witnessed at home and in the masjid. Mr. Jeddah stated that the “manners I’ve seen are pretty good manners so far.” These two participants went

to public school the longest with their non-Muslim peers. Mr. Riyadh also converted later to Islam in comparison to the other participants.

### **Anti-Deficit Thinking**

One of the hallmarks of deficit thinking is that schools have low academic expectations for specific students and blame these students (victims) for school-wide failure. Schools do not evaluate on-campus practices that may be structured to prevent poor students and students of color from learning (Valencia, 2010). Most of the high schools in this study received Title I funding, except for High School Z. High poverty rates in these schools opened the doors to Title I funding. Most of the students attending these schools would be considered at risk. I wanted to examine if the high schools the participants attended functioned in the deficit thinking model. I asked the participants questions related to academic achievement. Based on the participants' narratives specific to AAMMs, the high schools in this study did not operate in a deficit thinking framework. None of the participants felt that high expectations, academic support, or course opportunities were restricted or withheld because of their race, culture, gender, or religion.

### **Academic Achievement**

Most participants took general, honors, dual enrollment, and advanced placement classes at their high schools. The only participant in the study who did not take advanced placement or dual enrollment classes was Mr. Tabuk, who currently wants to become a mechanic. Mr. Tabuk intended to take at least one advanced placement class, but as schools closed because of Covid-19, he struggled with taking math virtually and failed the course. Going virtual caused him to retake the course, and he did not have room to

add an advanced placement class to this schedule. Instead, Mr. Tabuk (a graduating senior) took a vocational track of courses to support his desire to become a mechanic. He will attend a local vocational school in the fall semester of 2022.

Most participants stated that they were average academically on their high school campuses. Most participants noted that ninth grade was the most challenging year, and their grades improved after that year. Mr. Jeddah and Mr. Tabuk struggled with the required virtual school caused by Covid-19 closures. Mr. Riyadh was not impacted academically by the required virtual school during his ninth-grade year. He has maintained an A/B average through his sophomore year. He stated that the academic support provided by his teachers significantly benefited his academic development when he returned to in-person schooling. Except for Mr. Tabuk, all participants took or are currently taking the second part of a foreign language class. None of the participants reported any academic challenges related to their race, gender, culture, or religion. In fact, Mr. Tabuk said, “this thing about it is learning. And I’d hope that this at all high schools, but our teachers give us the equal opportunity to learn even people who have gotten in really, really deep trouble at school.” He continued, “they still have the same help. They just have to be able to use their resources, have the same goals. You can’t get help without helping yourself first.”

Lastly, academic opportunities and high expectations seem normalized for those students who want to excel. For example, per the AAMM narratives, quality instruction appeared to be present regardless of the course or achievement level (general to advanced courses). Mr. Mecca passed seven advanced placement classes before graduating from High School X. Before graduation, Mr. Medina took advanced placement classes on

campus and dual enrollment classes at Georgia Piedmont Technical College. In addition, Mr. Riyadh has taken four advanced placement classes and intends to take three over the next two years.

### **Scheduling**

The participants had equal access to rigorous coursework at their high schools and reported no barriers to course selection outside constructs such as course progression and magnet requirements. The schools developed most participants' schedules during their first year without much input, and the majority spoke of limited course options during their first year. I have scheduled high school students for over twenty years. The overwhelming majority of first-year students' schedules are generally basic academically. Mr. Riyadh had more input in his freshman schedule than the other participants' first year. He attends a magnet high school, and they offer an advanced placement class to incoming first-year students. Schedules were developed based on course progression, desired electives, availability, and passing grades. The participants said their schools began the scheduling process in the spring for the upcoming year for existing students. Schools hosted academic fairs to show upcoming course offerings and distributed course selection handbooks to the participants. Mr. Riyadh described the process in the spring:

They gave us a book, especially for the AP classes. It gives you a description of the class, and then they also give us a calendar. During the homeroom period, the teachers that teach the class and students that have taken the class to speak about the class in the auditorium, so you have a better understanding of the classes.

Elements of what Mr. Riyadh describes are common in all their high schools. Mr. Tabuk's school hosted and called the scheduling process curriculum fairs. The



participants could shop for classes and speak with the teachers who taught the class. Teachers were allowed to recruit students for their classes. As the participants progressed academically, the availability and access to classes became easier. Mr. Medina said the following regarding scheduling and course selection: “it would have to be just the timing of the class offering, but I never really had a problem with getting in certain classes. None of the participants reported any obstacles to the scheduling process. Mr. Mecca summarized it best, “I never really had a problem with getting certain classes.”

I did note that some AAMM schedules, such as Mr. Jeddah's schedule, seem to be very eclectic. For example, when asked why he took a construction course and technology class as electives in the same year, Mr. Jeddah said his high school assigned him classes. He clarified that he did not like the technology classes but did not attempt to request a schedule change.

### **Academic Preparation**

All participants believed their high school prepared them for college or future success on their high school campus. Although Mr. Tabuk will graduate in May 2022, he stated that High School X prepared him for vocational school. Mr. Tabuk said, “I learned everything the automotive courses had to offer at High School X.” During our last interview, Mr. Tabuk prepared for this ASE-certified mechanic test. Upon graduation from State University, his brother, Mr. Mecca, desires to be an English teacher. Mr. Mecca believed his teachers’ work ethic gave him the desire to become a teacher. Mr. Mecca said, “those teachers taught us to be critical thinkers - that was our biggest thing; there was never a cut-and-dry, simple answer with them. It was always critical thinking.” It did not matter if the participants took dual enrollment, advanced placement, or

vocational classes; high expectations seemed present. Mr. Jeddah mentioned that being taught soft skills such as time management, cooperation on group projects, and self-discipline were beneficial to his academic preparation. The current high school participants felt their schools prepared them for pending high school courses and the graduate participants felt their high school prepared them academically for college. Mr. Jeddah, said: “I know one major way my school is preparing us for college experience, they’re allowing us to take the PSAT so we can be ready for the actual SAT test so we can understand what we’re going to be expecting.” Regarding academic support students receive from his teachers, Mr. Riyadh said it comes in the form of, “the time teachers take with each student to make sure you’re where you need to be and if you need any help.”

Finally, as the participants reflected on their schools, they made school improvement suggestions. The majority stated that additional resources were necessary. The participants also felt other resources would increase academic preparation. Several AAMMs said they desired a better library and greater access to the library. Mr. Riyadh and Mr. Tabuk wanted more teacher assistance and peer-to-peer tutoring outside the classroom. Mr. Riyadh stated:

Maybe we just need some time outside of school hours to have one-on-one and maybe not even with a teacher, maybe with a student who’s taken the class before and they know about the class. That would probably be pretty helpful.

### **School Culture**

This theme focuses on the high school environment of the participants. In this study, I defined *school culture* as a safe, student-centered environment that is supportive

socioemotionally and academically. As practitioners experience, a school's culture develops with purpose over time. School leadership and teachers maintain the school's culture. The participants in this study were overwhelmingly positive and successfully navigated their high schools. Collectively, they were optimistic about their schools and felt they had a positive culture. Occasionally, there were some adverse incidents, but overall, the participants enjoyed their high school experience. None of the participants experienced issues related to racism. Matters related to bigotry were shared by several of the participants, although the majority attended predominately African American high schools. I defined *bigotry* in this study as people being openly intolerant or prejudiced against Muslims. African American principals led every high school in this study. Except for High School Z (Mr. Riyadh's school), most high schools had primarily African American educators teaching on campus.

### **Interactions**

This sub-theme will cover the interactions of AAMM with other Muslim peers, school peers, and their teachers. The participants fostered relationships with their peers and academic staff primarily through conversations and good behaviors (manners). Mr. Mecca and Mr. Tabuk, who are brothers, reported both micro aggressions and macroaggressions from peers. Both students started public school in middle school and high school. Neither felt welcomed by their peers initially. Mr. Mecca stated that when he began as a ninth grader, he did not want his peers to know he was Muslim. Interactions with positive peers supported his identity and helped build his confidence. Unfortunately, Mr. Tabuk's issues with peers lasted much longer, perhaps years.

Many of the negative peer interactions he reported could resemble bullying. Time and maturity (of his peers) were the solutions that eliminated negative peer interactions, per Mr. Tabuk. For example, he said, “Over the years, people mature, and people start seeing things differently.” Most of the participants viewed peer perceptions of Muslims as unfavorable. Peers mentioned stereotypes such as terrorists to Mr. Mecca, Mr. Medina, and Mr. Tabuk. For example, Mr. Mecca said, “A lot of people have like a negative connotation of Muslims – terrorists and bombs and stuff like that. You know I had to just change the perspective, so a lot of people were really cool with it so they just respected, they respected me.” Mr. Tabuk also described peer perceptions of Muslims, saying, “And the news portrays us Muslim brothers to be really negative people in the world, but people who really know me, people who really know my religion are like, No, they’re not like that.” The participants sought to change the image of Muslims globally, by representing the best of Islam locally. Overall, most participants thought their peers supported their religion. Mr. Jeddah and Mr. Riyadh believed that their peers were supportive of their religion, race, and culture. Mr. Mecca and Mr. Tabuk had the lowest ratings regarding peer support related to Islam. All the participants were eventually accepted by their peers. Mr. Jeddah said,

My peers, they respect me for our religious heritage and race. They have no problems with who I am. Sometimes they like to learn more about me or they just enjoy having me around because you I’m unique in certain ways, you know specifically race wise, cultural, and religious wise.

The participants reported the day-to-day interactions with their peers as just “normal kid stuff,” meaning their interactions centered around academics, sports, and

teenage fun—nothing too serious most of the time. The participants also described that witnessing their peers’ success in the classroom and on campus influenced their academic growth and development.

The participants described teacher interactions as normal, casual, and positive. None of the participants stated they had problems with teachers regarding race, culture, gender, or religion. All participants reported a 10 out of 10 rating regarding interactions and acceptance by their teachers. Mr. Riyadh explained his rating, “that’s easily a 10! All your teachers, I mean, they want you to be in their class.” Mr. Jeddah said, “a lot of my teachers care quite a bit about me.” Mr. Tabuk stated, “I felt welcomed by my teachers more than I felt with my peers.” When asked about interactions with his teachers, Mr. Medina said, “oh man, I always felt welcomed.”

None of the participants believed that their teachers harbored negative perceptions related to their religion, race, culture, or gender. Instead, participants described that positive teacher interactions significantly influenced their academic growth and development. Mr. Mecca spoke fondly of the positive and professional relationship with a European American male English teacher. Mr. Mecca said, “he helped push me through high school when I was going through difficult times.” Mr. Medina stated, “my journalism teacher, a Caucasian, older male, was Christian, but he encouraged me to research my religion. Through research and love, I embraced my religion. That’s what he encouraged me to do.”

Based on participant narratives, the high schools in this study developed a culture of caring and support for the AAMM students on campus. The participants provided multiple examples of teachers (of various races and genders) embracing them with

kindness and support. Mr. Mecca said, “it was those teachers that made me feel like I was in a safe place.” None of the participants reported any ill-treatment from teachers after discovering they were Muslim. Mr. Riyadh said, “I haven’t been in a bad situation with any of the adults on campus.” The participants felt that the educators at their schools were equally caring and supportive of non-Muslim peers.

Finally, the participants had little interaction with other AAMMs on their campuses. Most only knew one other AAMM on their campus in a different grade level. These grade level differences limited the time AAMM could interact with one another on campus. Although their numbers collectively were small, the participants in the study still attempted to develop strong bonds with one another. Mr. Riyadh said they would be excited to see other Muslims and give the salaams in the hallway. Mr. Riyadh’s school had far more Muslim students than the other participants’ high schools, but most were not AAMM students. He further stated, “I really don’t converse with many Muslims except a ninth grader who is religious and is African American.”

### **Diversity**

Except for High School Z, all schools had a majority African American student population, and those schools received Title I funding. African American principals led all schools. Most of the educators (including administrators) in this study mirrored the AAMM racially. Mr. Medina graduated from High School Y in City B, Georgia, the largest predominately African American public high school in this study.

Mr. Riyadh said, “my school is actually a very diverse school.” He said that most students were European Americans, but there were many racial groups, such as Asian and Indian students. Regarding socioeconomics, Mr. Riyadh stated that the school is

composed of students from wealthy, middle, and lower-class families. He said, “you have kids coming from wealthy areas of town. You have kids coming from middle-class families. You have kids coming from lower class families. It’s really diverse.”

Regarding his teachers, Mr. Mecca said, “Many of the African American teachers went to HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities), and they encouraged us to attend HBCUs too.” Every high school had diversity beyond race and gender.

### **Inclusiveness**

At some point, all participants in the study felt welcomed and included in their school’s culture. The schools celebrated the student body in various ways, such as prep rallies, academic honors, and banquets. In addition, the AAMMs participated in multiple extracurricular activities on and off campus. Many participated in athletics such as baseball, football, and track. When I asked Mr. Mecca about his football experiences, he said “I got to see now it was in some type of a brotherhood and I got to see everyone else’s struggles along with mine, and we all came together.” Overall, the participants felt accepted by their peers and teachers. However, some of the participants did not feel welcomed initially by their peers. As time passed, even Mr. Mecca felt positive about inclusiveness, noting, “School activities, I never felt excluded. I was always welcomed.” All of the participants reported that there were no barriers to inclusion based on culture, race, gender, or religion.

### **School Climate**

A positive school climate benefits students in K-12 public education, especially with academic achievement, mental health, school attendance and graduation, and on-campus behavior (Kearney et al., 2020). The Georgia Department of Education values

and monitors school climate in Georgia public schools via the school climate star rating (GaDOE, n.d.). Student, parent, and teacher surveys, student discipline reports, attendance, and a substance-free learning environment are combined to develop the school climate star rating. In addition, participants described their experiences at school as "normal," meaning just ordinary teenage experiences. For example, Mr. Tabuk described a typical interaction with peers:

I tried to greet them with a typical conversation about schoolwork or what was going on in our school that week. What activities we have, what our home life has been about, what's going on in the news – stuff like that.

Beyond the occasional issues, the participants enjoyed the experiences and climate of their schools.

All participants highly praised their teachers. The teachers provided constant positive support for the participants. The participants felt school-wide discipline was fair and consistent regardless of race, culture, gender, or religious affiliation. The participants also felt that their schools provided a rigorous curriculum and quality instruction accessible to all students.

### **Summary**

Chapter V is an overview of the findings from the participant interviews. Several themes emerged from the study: otherness, anti-deficit thinking, and school culture. The first theme, intersectionality, was divided into five sub-themes. The sub-themes within otherness were: Religious Oppositional Navigation, Islamic knowledge, Islamic identity, religious accommodations, and values. This emergent theme enabled me to relay how a portion of the critical race theory (intersectionality) was related to the participants' experiences at the schools they attended. The second theme, anti-deficit thinking, was



divided into three sub-themes: academic achievement, scheduling, and academic preparation. The anti-deficit theme contained information on how the participants' high schools organized the academic environment for AAMM in this study. The third theme, school culture, was divided into four sub-themes: interactions, diversity, inclusiveness, and school climate. The school culture theme contained information about how the high schools fostered and maintained a nurturing school environment. Chapter VI will include a discussion of the analysis and conclusions of the research.

## Chapter VI

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Chapter VI examines how the themes developed from data analysis. In addition, I discuss the study's limitations and recommendations for future research. Historically, African American males have struggled in U.S. public schools. Abysmal numbers associated with African American males include low graduation rates, high out-of-school suspension, and high expulsion rates have been the norm (Howard, 2014). In addition, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) posit that categories and constructs such as race, gender, and culture "and still others – can be separate disadvantaging factors" to African American males (p. 57). I used purposeful and snowball sampling to recruit AAMM who were currently enrolled or had graduated from a Georgia, public high school. The AAMM participants attended a Georgia public high school for a minimum of a year, were current students or graduates, and identified as Salafi or Sunni Muslims. Finally, the participants were between 15 and 21 years old and were all born in the United States.

The purpose of this study was to explore the life and educational experiences of current and graduate AAMM students from identified Georgia public schools to understand the obstacles, if any, institutional policies and practices that were both positive and negative during their years in high school. In addition, I used multiple theories to undergird this study. Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education, intersectionality, and deficit thinking were the core of my conceptual framework. These

theories defined what I have seen in the last twenty-five years in education in Georgia and Florida. Historic content was also provided in my conceptual framework by including a brief introduction to Islam, how Islam came to America (specific to African Americans), how African American males have traditionally fared in K-12 public education, and the emergence of the anti-CRT movement in Georgia.

Three themes emerged from data analysis: otherness, anti-deficit thinking, and school culture. These themes were relevant to the research questions and existing literature on African American males (Table 4). Finally, this chapter summarizes the themes that align with the research questions, study limitations, and recommendations for future research.

**Table 4**

*Themes of African American Muslim Males Experiences*

Themes	Research Question	Participants				
		Mecca	Medina	Tabuk	Riyadh	Jeddah
Religious Oppositional Navigation	Research Question # 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Anti-Deficit Thinking	Research Question # 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School Culture	Research Question # 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

## **Research Questions: Final Discussion Summary**

The Final Discussion Summary addresses the research questions that guided the study. The data collected from participants' interviews evolved into themes. Finally, I provided key points and perspectives from the themes related to each research question and interpreted the findings.

### **Research Question 1: What were the experiences of selected AAMM students at identified Georgia public high schools? Otherness**

The first research question aligned with the theme of otherness, and I defined otherness as something similar but different from the norm. During the first interview, I asked questions about race, bigotry, culture, and religion to assess relationships with participants' experiences. Most participants did not understand the difference between racism and bigotry. Most participants had trouble determining what defined a racist versus a bigot. All the participants understood how racism looked or felt and could give historical examples of racism in the United States. However, none of the participants in this study experienced racism.

Racism experienced by African American males in public education is a significant portion of my conceptual framework. Researchers (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gershenson et al., 2016) believe race and racism cause many negative experiences African American males face in public schools. Most of the schools in this study had racial demographics similar to the participants, and their schools employed mainly African American teachers but also had European American teachers on staff. Mr. Riyadh's high school (High School Z) was the most racially diverse student body in comparison to the other high schools in the study. His high school had African, Asian,

European, and Hispanic Americans. Most teachers and students at his high school were European Americans.

In my conceptual framework, racism was attributed to European American educators exclusively. The participants' narratives countered this trend, as the participants in this study did not experience racism associated with European American educators. Instead, the participants viewed the European American teachers on their campuses as allies and supporters. Although the participants did not experience racism, they did experience bigotry.

Interestingly, most participants experienced bigotry from their non-Muslim African American peers. The brothers (Mr. Medina and Mr. Tabuk) reported issues with bigotry and their peers questioned their race. Their peers initially could not culturally or racially define the brothers. Their peers also did not understand that African American Muslims were in the United States. The brothers' peers did not understand that they possessed multiple identities. The peer reactions to the brothers were examples of intersectionality. I described these misunderstandings by their peer group as otherness. For example, their peer group could not place the brothers solely in a racial or gender category. All the participants experienced issues related to intersectionality with their peers. The issues related to intersectionality had different levels of intensity and lengths of time.

Mr. Mecca and Mr. Tabuk's negative experiences were more intense and lasted longer than the other participants. Mr. Mecca and Mr. Tabuk experienced bigotry that resembled bullying from their non-Muslim African American peers. The other participants only had minor issues related to intersectionality with their peers. Mr. Jedda

and Mr. Riyadh attended schools with non-Muslims the longest. Mr. Riyadh was a new convert to Islam. Many of Mr. Jedda's and Mr. Riyadh's friends attended and followed them to the same elementary, middle, and high schools. Attending public schools for many years with non-Muslim students helped them develop long-lasting relationships that superseded religious and cultural differences.

Finally, I was not expecting bigotry from participants' non-Muslim African American peers. I assumed that race and gender would not be an issue at predominately African American high schools. Understanding the backgrounds and lived experiences of the AAMM in this study was meaningful. The participants' issues with bigotry associated with otherness demonstrated how complex human interactions can be. The participants' narratives told the story of their daily interactions in high school. The participants developed unique strategies that helped them progress and thrive at their high schools.

**Religious Opposition Navigation.** I defined *religious oppositional navigation* as various strategies AAMM used to navigate environments they deemed oppositional or counter to their religious or cultural worldview. The participants developed and maintained strategies to protect themselves. The daily education and social experiences compiled from the participants' narratives revealed issues or situations with peers who harbored anti-Islamic, anti-Muslim views, counter to the values seen at their homes or masjids.

The participants resented the anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim sentiment they received from their peers. Most participants experienced various degrees of disrespect, mainly through peer verbal microaggressions. However, some of the negative peer

interactions resembled bullying.

Islam and being a Muslim was the trigger, and all negative peer interactions came exclusively from their non-Muslim, African American peers. The negative peer interactions went beyond race and gender, as most of the school's student population was overwhelmingly African American. African American youth harbored bigoted views with their fellow AAMM peers. Additionally, the participants' experiences with their non-Muslim peers mirrored problems associated with intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

All participants used religious oppositional navigation to thrive at their schools. The go-to strategies were using consistent positive behaviors and mannerisms. Instead of being aggressive toward the microaggression they experienced from their peers, the participants used positive behaviors and mannerisms to win over peers and teachers. They built coalitions with peers and staff using this strategy. Mr. Mecca and Mr. Tabuk did suffer considerable stress while they developed the coalitions between peers and teachers. In all cases, teachers were a positive support system to the participants.

The participants used good behavior and manners to navigate hostile environments and situations. In all cases, AAMM learned that consistently using good behavior and mannerisms was favorable emotionally and psychologically. For example, teachers supported AAMM better by providing religious accommodations and safe spaces (when asked). The AAMM also used religious oppositional navigation strategies to ease tension and positively change stereotypes related to Islam and Muslims. As mentioned earlier, excellent behaviors and manners are a Sunnah in Islam.

Religious oppositional navigation was a response to otherness related to intersectionality that sprang from the Critical Race Theory (CRT). The theme of otherness had five sub-themes: religious oppositional navigation, Islamic knowledge, Islamic identity, religious accommodations, and values. Questions in the first Zoom interview were entirely related to the first research question.

**Islamic knowledge and Islamic identity.** Regarding the sub-themes of Islamic knowledge and identity, every participant knew the religious differences between themselves and the stakeholders in their high schools. The participants were all religious and were proud to be Muslim. The participants defined being religious as maintaining five daily prayers (at a minimum), following the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam), and learning and understanding the religion. For example, Mr. Riyadh said “I read a lot of Quran and pray and do all the things that a Muslim should.”

Collectively, the participants knew the basics of the faith and desired to learn more. Most of the participants have never attended an Islamic school. Attending their masjids and participating in Islamic conferences furthered their Islamic education. The participants used the Islamic knowledge they acquired to answer questions about faith. The participants said that their peers asked most of the questions about Islam. Sometimes they had to correct their teacher’s understanding of Islam. The participants attempted to answer their peers’ and teachers’ questions only if they knew the answer and would research questions if unsure.

**Values.** Mr. Mecca, Mr. Medina, and Mr. Tabuk all had negative responses to the values their non-Muslim peers demonstrated on their high school campuses. These



participants had never witnessed extreme behaviors and disrespect before enrolling in public school. Mr. Medina left a Nation of Islam school because of religious differences counter to Islam, so his father chose High School Y in City B. Mr. Mecca and Mr. Tabuk (brothers) were in 6th and 9th grade when they enrolled in public school. The brothers were home-schooled exclusively before attending public school and both mentioned that they were culturally unprepared for what they witnessed daily at school. Using religious oppositional navigation, they adjusted because they were opposing what they saw by remaining steadfast Muslims, although Mr. Medina did mention that he briefly began acting like his peers. Mr. Medina also said that he was overwhelmed by the number of non-Muslims on his high school campus but returned to Islamic principles by his sophomore year.

Mr. Jedda and Mr. Riyadh viewed their non-Muslim peers' values and behaviors as normal to their own. As mentioned earlier, Mr. Jedda and Mr. Riyadh always attended public school and built lifelong friends with the same non-Muslim peer group. Both teens may have eliminated peers with different values or only associated themselves with the same lifelong non-Muslim peer group whose values are like theirs.

**Religious accommodations.** None of the high schools had organized religious accommodations for Muslim students. Therefore, the accommodations granted were informal. Classroom teachers, coaches, and administrators granted these accommodations when asked. When the participants asked educators on campus, accommodations were given, such as a place to pray daily or alternative places to go during Ramadan versus going into the cafeteria. The previously mentioned accommodations are actual religious accommodations that are specific to Muslims.

Praying is central to Islam and one of the five pillars of the faith. Unfortunately, many older participants, such as Mr. Medina, did not ask for religious accommodations during their early years in high school. However, most participants realized they could have advocated more regarding religious accommodations. Mr. Jedda and Mr. Riyadh stated they would advocate for themselves for consistent religious accommodations while in high school.

The participants received excused absences when they missed school related to Islamic holidays (Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha). These approved excuses allowed the participants to make up missed tests and assignments. Religious absences were general accommodations granted to all students in their school districts. For example, the First County School District (FCSD) mentions approving religious absences in the district code of conduct. Finally, the food options in the cafeteria were another general accommodation granted districtwide. All the participants mentioned this accommodation.

I developed the first research question to explore the participants' backgrounds and experiences. Most participants lived in single-parent households due to divorce or pending divorce, except Mr. Jedda, whose parents are married. Mr. Medina lived with his father from middle school to high school graduation. All the participants love and respect both of their parents. The participants in divorced households spoke to both parents frequently. Mr. Mecca said, “when my parents divorced that put me in a very rough – it put me in a very rough place.” Most participants had at least one parent who graduated from college, except Mr. Jedda. Every participant's household valued education.

**Research Question 2: While enrolled at identified Georgia public high schools, what obstacles, if any, did select AAMM encounter? Anti-Deficit Thinking**

Research Question 2 sought to understand the participants' experiences related to perceived challenges and obstacles concerning race, gender, religion, or culture at their high schools. The anti-deficit thinking theme emerged from participant interviews related to this research question. The anti-deficit thinking theme has three subthemes: academic achievement, scheduling, and academic preparation.

The schools attended by the participants had a majority African American student population, except High School Z. African American principals led every high school in this study. Except for High School Z, the remaining high schools had a majority African American teaching population. Regardless of their high school, none of the participants experienced any obstacles related to race, gender, religion, or culture in this study.

The participants in this study overwhelmingly felt that none of the high schools they attended operated in a deficit thinking framework. I also did not explain or teach the theory of deficit thinking to the participants. Instead, the participants' narratives clarified that a deficit thinking framework did not exist. The participants felt high expectations, academic support, and opportunities were accessible and normalized in their high schools. All participants felt that quality instruction was always present regardless of the course achievement level. None of the participants reported barriers to course selection. The participants also said they had equal access to rigorous courses on and off campus. All participants felt that the educators at their high schools cared equally for both Muslim and non-Muslim students.

**Academic achievement.** Most of the participants in this study took advanced placement or dual enrollment classes. However, Mr. Tabuk was the only AAMM who took no advanced placement or dual enrollment classes. Instead, he focused on becoming a mechanic. He passed all his mechanic pathways courses and prepped for the ASC certification test during our third interview. Mr. Tabuk stated that academic issues and Covid-19 eliminated him from taking an advanced placement class his senior year.

Finally, Mr. Mecca took seven advanced placement classes at High School X in City A. Mr. Riyadh's goal is to take six advanced placement classes before graduating from High School Z. The participants reported that they passed or were currently taking a foreign language.

**Scheduling.** The high schools in this study did an excellent job of providing equal and equitable access to high-level courses such as dual enrollment and advanced placement courses. In addition, there was a logical process for enrolling and taking high-level classes. All of the participants knew the process of enrolling in high-level courses, and the school provided academic fairs to educate students on courses and course requirements. Race, gender, religion, nor culture was a barrier regarding scheduling.

The only scheduling barriers were general course progression requirements and successfully passing the course to move forward. Regarding academics, the process was equitable (based on course progression), easy to understand, and accessible to all students. Expectations were high, and course and career options were vast. Passing grades was the key to staying on track academically. Passing classes opened scheduled slots. The participants could then pick their desired electives pathway and high-level courses such as advanced placement and dual enrollment.

**Academic preparation.** All participants stated that their high school prepared them for college or is preparing them for college. Mr. Mecca and Mr. Medina are current university students in Georgia. Mr. Tabuk graduated in 2022 and is attending a vocational school in Georgia, and the remaining participants stated they would attend a four-year post-secondary institution upon graduation. The participants reported that they were or are currently average or above average academically at their high schools.

**Research Question 3: What institutional policies and practices did select AAMM students find positive or negative while attending identified Georgia public high schools? School Culture**

Interview question related to Research Question 3 sought to examine how participants interpreted the meaning of various policies and practices at their high schools. The various policies and practices could be both positive and negative. School culture emerged as a theme from the participant's narratives related to Research Question 3. Four sub-themes emerged from the school culture theme: interactions, diversity, inclusiveness, and school climate.

**Interactions.** The participants fostered meaningful, positive relationships with their peers. For example, the brothers (Mr. Mecca and Mr. Tabuk) initially did not like their peers, but eventually, both brothers experienced positive peer interactions. Most participants viewed their peers as supportive of their religion, even though many initially had negative perceptions of Muslims. All participants viewed their interactions with their peers as "normal" or "kid stuff," meaning it was just day-to-day teenage conversations and interactions, ranging from academics to sports. Most participants did report that initially, their peer values and behaviors were vastly different from what they had seen

before high school in a negative way. All participants used religious oppositional navigation strategies to interact better with peers.

All participants viewed their interactions with their teachers as being positive and beneficial. Mr. Mecca and Mr. Tabuk viewed their teachers as buffers to the negative interactions they initially experienced with their peers. None of the participants experienced problems or issues with their teachers related to race, culture, gender, or religion. They did not feel their teachers harbored negative perceptions of race, culture, gender, or religion. Instead, participant narratives constantly mentioned their teachers' acts of kindness and support (academic or socio-emotional). Positive teacher interactions helped the participants academically and emotionally. All participants use religious oppositional navigation strategies to successfully develop and maintain relationships with their teachers.

**Inclusiveness.** The participants felt that their high schools have a culture of care and support. The participants also felt that school-wide policies and practices were fair and equitable to all students. For example, the participants did not witness any mistreatment or negativity related to race, culture, gender, or religion. Instead, the participants felt their school's culture was inclusive to all students. All participants were involved in various extracurricular activities such as sports or band.

**School climate.** Collectively the participants did not feel that there were any policies or practices developed or implemented because of their race, gender, religion, or culture. Instead, the participants overwhelmingly enjoyed their day-to-day experiences at their high schools. All participants viewed their overall experiences in their high schools as positive. For example, the participants enjoyed their respective school's culture,

academics, peers, and educators. In addition, all participants viewed their experiences in high school as “normal” – just regular teenage school experiences based on the participants’ narratives.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this study was to explore the life and educational experiences of African American Muslim Male (AAMM) students currently enrolled or graduated from identified Georgia public schools and to understand the obstacles, if any, related to institutional policies and practices that were both positive and negative during their high school years. I designed the study to better understand how race, gender, culture, and religion impacted the lives of AAMM while they attended public high school. I used the following conceptual frameworks to anchor this study: Critical Race Theory (CRT), CRT in education, the anti-CRT movement, intersectionality, deficit thinking, and Islamophobia. In addition, I provided historical content on Islam, mainly related to African Americans. I also highlighted data on African American males in education. I reviewed the various conceptual frameworks and historical content to provide a holistic picture of AAMM and non-Muslim African Americans' plight in public education. Finally, the following themes emerged from my data analysis: otherness, anti-deficit thinking, and school culture. Each theme had several subthemes.

#### **Research Question 1 Implications: What were the experiences of selected AAMM students at identified Georgia public high schools?**

I developed the first question to explore the participants' life histories and experiences. Data from the first research question aligned with the theme of otherness. This theme was directly related to intersectionality and had five subthemes. The

participants navigated oppressive situations and comments from peers by using good mannerisms and behaviors. The participants benefited from religious oppositional navigation in the following ways: first, they learned that they could remain steadfast Muslims and stay away from non-Islamic culture; second, they learned that behaviors and mannerisms made them different from most of their peers; they learned that teachers valued consistent, respectful behaviors and mannerisms; they also learned that being consistent with good behaviors and mannerisms would eventually win over peers that opposed them religiously or culturally; and finally, they learned that consistent good behavior and mannerisms built school coalitions among teachers and peers. Religious oppositional navigation is a learned response directly related to intersectionality that sprang from CRT.

Intersectionality emerged as a reality from the participants' narratives and data analysis. Intersectionality was a significant surprise for me because the negative issues faced by most of the participants were from their non-Muslim African American peers. The older participants' narratives repeatedly stated that their peers had issues and misunderstandings related to race and religion. Racism did not emerge from the participant narratives but bigotry did, especially with the older participants. Otherness best describes how the older participants felt when interacting with their peers. The older participants viewed initial peer interactions as negative. The older participants also were homeschooled or had attended a private religious school before enrolling in public high schools. They initially struggled with peer interactions and their schools' culture. Public high school was strange for the participants initially; they had not experienced the values and norms their non-Islamic peers demonstrated daily. The participants eventually



learned the social and cultural norms of their non-Muslim peers and schools. The bigotry related to Islam gradually decreased because the older participants developed several strategies related to religious oppositional navigation. The participants were also involved in various school extracurricular activities. These extracurricular activities engaged interactions between the participants and their peers more frequently.

Where Islam was the catalyst for bigotry, as time passed, the participants and their non-Muslim peers were better acquainted, and Islam became a lesser factor in their relationships. The older AAMM peers initially lacked social and cultural queues specific to their schools, including being around non-Muslim African American students. AAMM on all the high school campuses was a hyper minority. The participant's non-Muslim peers struggled to engage the few AAMMs they met and relied on stereotypes to define these AAMM students on their campuses. However, the stereotypes AAMMs faced demonstrated how pervasive Islamophobia and Islamic propaganda has become. The stereotyping shocked me. Current anti-CRT legislation in Georgia may be needed to guarantee that teachers represent historical events such as 9/11 or the Gulf War in a manner that does not vilify Islam or Muslims. Such historical events may increase Islamophobia in public schools if taught with bias.

The younger/current participants in my study always attended public schools, and their peer experiences differed significantly from the other participants. Notably, the younger AAMM had established long-term relationships with their non-Muslim peers. As a result, their peers were accustomed to them and shared the same school feeder patterns, so they attended several schools together. I also believe the younger participants did not initially have a firm understanding of Islam, so they acted more like

their non-Muslim peers. The younger participants did not see a value difference between themselves and their non-Muslim peers. The younger participants attended conferences and took classes such as Arabic to increase their Islamic knowledge. I am interested to know if they will have or see differences with their non-Muslim peers related to culture and religion as their Islamic knowledge grows.

Finally, I believe schools should encourage extracurricular activities for minorities, such as AAMMs, on their campuses. Schools should frequently engage all students in socio-emotional learning and activities that support understanding others. Teaching curricula on Islam and Muslims without bias is essential.

**Research Question 2 Implications: While enrolled at identified Georgia public high schools, what obstacles, if any, did select AAMM students encounter?**

I designed this research question to explore participants' experiences related to perceived challenges and obstacles concerning race, gender, religion, and culture at their high schools. The anti-deficit theme emerged from participant interviews and data analysis. The anti-deficit thinking theme had three subthemes. From the narratives, I do not believe that any of the schools in this study operated in a deficit thinking framework. The schools ran counter to this framework, and high-end classes were plentiful and accessible. All participants could explain the process related to course selection. The schools' cultures were built on quality education. I enjoyed the participants' narratives, mainly because most of the schools in the study were urban, poor, and predominately African American. There is a negative perception of urban, poor, and predominately African American schools, especially regarding offering a quality educational experiences. According to the narratives, High School Y in City B and High School X in

City A countered those negative perceptions by offering Advanced Placement and dual enrollment classes. The CCRPI has moved schools from deficit thinking because the CCRPI incentivizes schools to offer high-end courses such as advanced placement and dual enrollment. The schools in this study have created easy-to-navigate pathways for students to take high-end classes. These pathways benefit the schools and the students significantly.

Public schools in Georgia should not operate in the deficit thinking framework. High-end courses, including those in CTAE, should be offered, but the most significant challenge is accountability for providing the necessary resources to pass high-end classes. For example, all schools should have trained Advanced Placement readers on campus.

**Research Question 3 Implications: What institutional policies and practices did select AAMM students find positive or negative while attending identified Georgia public high schools?**

I designed this research question to examine how participants interpreted the meaning of various policies and practices at their high schools. School culture emerged from participant interviews and data analysis. School culture had four sub-themes. Establishing a positive school culture and relatable school personnel were other important findings. Educators in the participants' schools provided a great sense of well-being. They supported the AAMM participants in multiple ways, including religiously, emotionally, and through mentorship, and they provided the participants with quality instruction. Teachers and administrators were more than accommodating to the participants. All participants had favorable views, interactions, and relationships with their teachers and school administrators. I believe the schools' cultures of care and

support of the participants was an essential factor in their successful navigation of high school.

Even when participants faced bigotry, their teachers provided stability and support regardless of race, gender, culture, or religion. The participants had favorable interactions with African American and European American teachers. None of these teachers were Muslim. It was admirable to hear these positive interactions with educators from the participants. The European teachers mentioned in the study had long commitments to the predominately African American schools where they taught. Again, these long commitments were counter to current research. The participants' high schools developed a culture of care. Schools must develop a positive culture that is inclusive to all students.

Finally, I designed this case study to examine the impact of race, gender, culture, and religion on AAMM students in Georgia high schools. The AAMM participants were the case. The participants were Salafi or Sunni Muslims only. Focusing on a specific type of Muslim did not require me to do extensive research on the sectarian differences in Islam. Typically, research on Muslim students does not account for or see the relevance of sectarian differences. Typically research on Muslims does not include native African American Muslims.

My research also included a predominately European American school – High School Z. Most research on African American students typically focuses on urban schools and settings. Unfortunately, I found additional AAMM students at High School Z who were freshmen after the study was completed. Not incorporating freshmen in my study was unfortunate because High School Z's faculty is predominately European

American. It would have been interesting to contrast additional AAMM narratives from High School Z and the existing narratives from High School X and Y.

Lastly, I am an AAMM. I think I have greater insight into what it means to be an African American male and a Muslim compared to many other non-Muslim researchers. I am also a veteran administrator who has led urban and predominately African American schools in two states. As a practitioner, I strongly understand the K-12 curriculum and instruction and school management.

### **Limitations**

This section identifies the limitations of this study and how my findings align with the conceptual framework. A limitation of this study was the availability of research participants. I called, emailed, and used various forms of social media to find participants. Confidential conversations with several masjid leaders made it clear that they were happy with the research. However, the masjid leaders were unsupportive in helping me find participants.

Masjid leadership in the Atlanta area was steadfast in their beliefs that Muslims should not attend public or non-Muslim schools. The significant issues mentioned by various masjid leaders were the mixing of genders and the fear of Muslims developing non-Islamic ways. Finally, many Islamic leaders mentioned above taught or led in-person or online Muslim schools in or around Atlanta.

Covid-19 was another limitation. The pandemic limited access to most masjids in Georgia for a long time. Masjids elected to close even during Ramadan, including my masjid. When masjids reopened, strict social distancing procedures were in place. These procedures limited the number of people who could pray in the congregation at masjids.

Although many masjid leaders were unsupportive with direct involvement in helping find participants, none of the leaders stated that I could not attend and actively recruit participants before the Covid-19 closures. Masjid leaders advised me to call brothers at other masjids. These calls provided a participant in this study.

Covid-19 also caused significant delays in the overall research, including the need to make significant revisions to the initial IRB proposal and research methods. Covid-19 enabled me to use Zoom during participant interviews. Using Zoom was a valuable tool in this study. However, Zoom interviews did not allow me to observe participants in an authentic setting, such as a masjid. Instead, I could only watch and take field notes during the Zoom interviews. Observations in the masjid, such as attentiveness in various religious classes, mannerisms with Muslims in the masjid, and general observations before and after prayers, could not be seen. Observing the participants in the masjid could have provided field observations and could have helped with recruitment efforts.

Most participants attended predominately African American schools, except Mr. Riyadh, who attended a predominantly European American school. A majority of African American educators led these African American schools. An African American principal led every school in this study. Regarding faculty demographics, teachers tend to work in schools that mirror their racial/ethnic demographics (Fitchett et al., 2020). However, I could not establish a participant size that would determine if AAMMs attending schools led by predominately European American educators positively or negatively impacted AAMM experiences in high school.

Finally, most of the participants knew of me. I also knew all the participants' parents or grandparents. I was also somewhat close to one parent. I felt that this could

have led to reflexivity regarding the questions. The participants seemed nervous when answering questions about Islam. However, as the participants became more familiar with me, the answers to questions related to Islam were more thoughtful and fluid.

### **Conceptual Framework Alignment**

The findings of the study differed from my conceptual framework several times. Most notable were the differences regarding racism, bigotry, deficit thinking, and school culture. Regarding racism, as stated previously, the participants did not experience racism during this study. Brown (2016) believed African American males experienced racism continuously as they progressed through school. The participants' narratives stated differently, even with Mr. Riyadh, who attended a high school with predominately European American teachers. However, an African American principal led his school. All participants, regardless of their respective high schools, took a class from one or more European American teachers. Cherng and Halpin (2016) believed that minority students had favorable perceptions of minority teachers. In this study, the participants had favorable perceptions of all their teachers, regardless of their teachers' race, gender, or religion. Conscious and unconscious biases related to race, gender, culture, and religion did not impact the participants.

Although the participants did not experience racism from their teachers, they did experience bigotry from their non-Muslim peers. The participants experienced otherness related to their culture and religion. Otherness is related to intersectionality. For example, most of the participants' peers viewed Islam and being Muslim as a disadvantageous category (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) stated that races divide along many fronts that generate intersectional individuals. In the case of

the participants, their African American peers applied cultural and religious divisions. The participants peers thought African Americans were a monolithic culture, and the AAMM participants operated outside of their monolithic worldview of what African Americans are.

Several prior studies suggested that K-12 public schools operate in a deficit thinking model and do not support African American males (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gershenson et al., 2016; Harper, 2010). The participants believed their schools supported them academically and emotionally, based on their personal experiences. The participants thrived academically in high school. The participants' high schools operated in the anti-deficit model (Harper, 2010). The academic opportunities offered in the participants' high schools enabled them to prosper. Palmer and Witanapatirana (2020) believed that teachers and administrators limited educational opportunities if they believed the students on their campus could not learn. Vast, accessible, and equitable described the high schools' academic opportunities for the participants. Contrasting with the suggestions of Howard (2014), who found that educators had problems educating African American males, the educators in the high schools did not have problems educating the AAMM participants.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study aimed to explore the life and educational experiences of current and graduate AAMM students from identified Georgia public schools to understand the obstacles, if any, institutional policies and practices that were both positive and negative during their years in high school. Future study recommendations include expanding recruitment requirements, different high school settings led by predominately European



American educators, longitudinal studies with AAMM students, and the effects of the anti-CRT movement on K-12 education.

I recommend that additional studies recruit more AAMM students from predominately European-led schools. These schools should also have a majority non-African American population and middle to high socioeconomics. Towards the end of this study, I found several other AAMM students at High School Z. The AAMM at High School Z were all freshmen and outside the IRB requirements of this study. High School Z was this study's most racially diverse school for students and teachers.

I suggest adding freshmen students to future studies. The voice of freshmen AAMM is valid, mainly because freshmen students traditionally take general-level classes. Research on freshman AAMM recruitment initiatives for higher-level courses and their overall experiences as first-year students would be beneficial. I suggest a longitudinal study on AAMM from elementary to high school graduation. The research could follow the educational experiences and observe institutional policies and procedures at various public school levels. Research data would provide school districts with information on intersectionality, deficit thinking, inclusiveness, and school climate.

Next, I suggest conducting a study regarding the anti-CRT movements' effects on K-12 students and teachers, preservice teaching students, and graduate students in Georgia. K-12 students and teachers may be potentially affected by censorship and the whitewashing of history. For example, banning books and whitewashing history are currently occurring throughout the US, including in Georgia (Thomas, 2022). Further, before entering the classroom, preservice teachers may not be able to take courses related to race and intersectionality in undergraduate school. When these teachers enter the

workforce, the districts they work for will likely willingly or unwillingly discourage in-service training on race, diversity, and intersectional issues.

Graduate students who are majority European American may not be able to take courses related to race, diversity, and intersectionality. As mentioned earlier in the study, European American teachers and administrators self-reported being ill-prepared to educate students of color (Johnston & Young, 2019). The anti-CRT movement will be problematic for Georgia students.

Lastly, the effects of the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) usage of the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) should be studied to see if it has equalized advanced course opportunities and accessibility to African American students. In addition, CCRPI has incentivized advanced courses such as advanced placement and dual enrollment courses that enable schools to earn CCRPI points. Accelerated enrollment (Dual enrollment, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate courses) and pathway completion are indicators in CCRPI. Schools earn points when seniors take two or more AP exams. Almost every AAMM participant took, or is currently taking, dual enrollment or advanced placement courses. I have seen high schools in Georgia ramp up advanced placement and dual enrollment offerings to gain additional points on CCRPI calculations. Finally, none of the participants took any international baccalaureate courses.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the life and educational experiences of current and graduate AAMM students from identified Georgia public schools to understand the obstacles, if any, institutional policies and practices that were both

positive and negative during their years in high school. I built the study's conceptual framework on the following theories: CRT, CRT in education, intersectionality, and deficit thinking. Historical content, including my administrative experience (23 years), supported the study's conceptual foundation. Regarding historical content, the following portions of the study provided contemporary details important to this study: African American males in education, Islam (brief history), Islam in America (specific to African Americans), Islamophobia, and the anti-CRT movement.

I used purposeful and snowball sampling to recruit five AAMM participants who were 15 – 21 years old. The participants are current students or graduates of public high schools in Georgia. Most participants attended predominately African American high schools in urban areas in City A and City B. African American principals led every high school in this study. Chapter III provides greater detail on the methods involved in this study.

I designed three research questions that guided inquiry into the experiences of the AAMM in this study (Maxwell, 2013). I then created and implemented a three-interview series (Seidman, 2013). I designed the interview to address and analyze specific research questions. The research questions supported my understanding of the following participant experiences: life history and daily experiences, detailed educational experiences, and a reflection on high school experiences.

I used Zoom to interview the participants three times. I then used memos, transcription, coding, and categorizing strategies to analyze data (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016). Three major themes emerged from the participant narrative data: otherness, anti-deficit thinking, and school culture — each of the major themes and

several sub-themes. Chapter V provides greater detail on this section of the study.

An analysis of the otherness subthemes highlighted how AAMM built coalitions with their non-Muslim peers and teachers on their high school campuses. Most participants used religious oppositional navigation strategies to counter negative peer situations by remaining positive and demonstrating excellent manners. These strategies eventually won over peers and teachers.

Otherness had five sub-themes: religious oppositional navigation, Islamic knowledge, Islamic identity, religious accommodations, and values. The participants used both Islamic knowledge and Islamic identity to remain steadfast in their religion. All the participants were firm on their Islamic identity and considered themselves religious. Islamic knowledge also helped the AAMM educate and correct their peers' and teachers' misconceptions regarding Islam.

Otherness was an issue faced by most of the participants in this study. Non-Muslim peers who were predominantly African American could not understand that African Americans could also be Muslim. Otherness is related to intersectionality. Peers became religious and cultural bigots. The frequency, intensity, and length of bigoted microaggression varied among the AAMM in this study. The younger, currently enrolled high school participants did not report any bigotry related to their religion or culture. None of the participants experienced any form of racism.

Lastly, most participants in this study believed that their peers had significantly different moral and cultural values. For example, the older AAMM in the study had negative views regarding their non-Muslim peer's value systems. The younger AAMM believed that their non-Muslim peers had values similar to their value system. Finally,

every high school provided informal religious accommodations to the participants. Religious accommodations mandatory to Muslims, such as prayer spaces and alternative locations, were provided when asked.

Anti-deficit thinking was the second major theme that emerged from the narratives; anti-deficit thinking is the opposite of deficit thinking. This theme has three sub-themes: academic achievement, scheduling, and academic preparation. The participant's schools, per the narrative, were student-centered and maintained multiple educational opportunities regardless of the school's zip code and student body demographics. Based on the participant's narratives, none of the schools in this study operated in a deficit thinking framework.

Academic achievement was a priority to the AAMM in this study and the schools the participants attended. In addition, there were opportunities to take high-level courses in advanced placement, dual enrollment, and CTAE (Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education). Every AAMM participant took advantage of these academic opportunities. Lastly, all participants believed their high school prepared them for college or pending courses at their high schools. The participants also felt that their teachers pushed them to excel inside and outside the classroom.

Course progression dictated scheduling at the participant's high schools. Per the participants, there were no barriers beyond passing prerequisite courses and the progression of courses. All participants could explain the scheduling process that was specific to their schools. In addition, the school hosted curriculums highlighting the courses offered on the participants' campuses.

School culture was the last major theme that emerged from the participant narratives. The school culture theme had four sub-themes: interactions (peer and teacher), diversity, inclusiveness, and school climate. School culture is essential in public schools (Kearney et al., 2020). The participants enjoyed their day-to-day experiences at their high schools.

Although most participants experienced some form of negative peer interaction, their collective peer interaction ratings were very positive. The participants thought that their peers were also supportive of their faith. Negative peer interactions were experienced more frequently with the older AAMM in the study. The older participants enrolled in public schools after receiving years of private or home-school education. The younger participants attended public school since elementary. The younger participants had developed long-lasting relationships with their non-Muslim peers. Many of their non-Muslim peers followed them to several schools in the FCSD, including their current high school.

All participants had highly positive interactions with their teachers. Their teachers functioned as educators, mentors, coaches, and safe spaces. When peer interactions were negative or stressful, the participants felt they could rely on their teachers for stability. The participants used good behavior and mannerisms (a religious oppositional navigation strategy) to foster and maintain relationships with their teachers.

Lastly, all participants enjoyed or enjoyed their school's climate. The participants felt included and welcomed in their school's overall culture. Although most schools in this study were not racially diverse, there still was diversity (intersectionality). The participants found and maintained relationships with non-Muslim peers with different

religious backgrounds and cultural worldviews. Their non-Muslim peers also had various interests, but relationships worked and developed. All participants described their interactions and relationships with peers and teachers as normal. Finally, all of the participants in this study thrived at their school academically and emotionally from multiple elements developed in their school's culture.

Chapter VI offers greater detail on the summary of the study. Overall, this study offers insights into the intersectionality of religious minority students, whose numbers may increase in the future. Understanding people beyond race and gender is necessary for all educators. Politics in the form of anti-CRT legislation may derail training on cultural relevancy in the classroom by eliminating pre and post-training and by banning culturally relevant books. The study also highlights the benefits of why public schools must not operate in a deficit thinking framework. Zip codes should not determine the educational opportunities and services students receive. Instead, a strong curriculum and quality instruction should be accessible to all publicly educated students. Finally, maintaining a positive school culture that is inclusive and welcoming can benefit all students.

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APPENDIX A:

Recruitment Flyer

A CASE STUDY EXPLORING THE  
EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN  
AMERICAN MUSLIM MALES IN  
GEORGIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

You are invited to participate in a study that illuminates stories and lived experiences of African American Muslim Males who currently attend or have graduated from a public high school in Georgia by Brother Reginald Griffin (Abu Ibrahim Moosa from Masjid Abdullah Bin Mas'ud in Columbus, Ga.). I am a doctoral candidate from Valdosta State University. I believe your stories are incredibly important, as the research literature regarding African American Muslim Male students is limited.

To participate you must be a 1.) African American male, 2.) identify as Sunni or Salafi Muslim, 3.) participants must be a current student or graduate from a public Georgia high school, 4.) who attended a public Georgia high school for a year, 5.) who are 15 - 21 years old, 6.) born in the U.S

\*\*\*ALL INTERVIEWS ARE STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL\*\*\*

[rjgriffin@valdosta.edu](mailto:rjgriffin@valdosta.edu)

APPENDIX B:

VSU Institutional Review Board Approval



for additional important information for researchers.

**Comments:**

*Elizabeth Ann Olphie*

*11.08.2021*

**Thank you for submitting an IRB**

**application.**

Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator  
[irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu) or 229-253-2947.

Date

**Please direct questions to**

EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL REPORT

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS:**

If your protocol received expedited approval, it was reviewed by a two-member team, or, in extraordinary circumstances, the Chair or the Vice-Chair of the IRB. Although the expeditors may approve protocols, they are required by federal regulation to report expedited approvals at the next IRB meeting. At that time, other IRB members may express any concerns and may occasionally request minor modifications to the protocol. In rare instances, the IRB may request that research activities involving participants be halted until such modifications are implemented. Should this situation arise, you will receive an explanatory communiqué from the IRB.

Protocol approvals are generally valid for three years. In rare instances, when a protocol is determined to place participants at more than minimal risk, the IRB may shorten the approval period so that protocols are reviewed more frequently, allowing the IRB to reassess the potential risks and benefits to participants. The expiration date of your protocol approval is noted on the approval form. You will be contacted no less than one month before this expiration date and will be asked to either submit a final report if the research is concluded or to apply for a continuation of approval. It is your responsibility to submit a continuation request in sufficient time for IRB review before the expiration date. If you do not secure a protocol approval extension prior to the expiration date, you must stop all activities involving participants (including interaction, intervention, data collection, and data analysis) until approval is reinstated.

Please be reminded that you are required to seek approval of the IRB before amending or altering the scope of the project or the research protocol or implementing changes in the approved consent process/forms. You are also required to report to the IRB, through the Office of Sponsored Programs & Research Administration, any unanticipated problems or adverse events that become apparent during the course or as a result of the research and the actions you have taken.

Please refer to the IRB website (<https://www.valdosta.edu/academics/graduate-school/research/office-of-sponsored-programs-research-administration/institutional-review-board-irb-for-the-protection-of-human-research-participants.php>) for additional information about Valdosta State University's human protection program and your responsibilities as a researcher.

APPENDIX C:

Interview Protocol

Interview One Questions (60 minutes)

**Research Question 1. What were the experiences of selected AAMM students at identified Georgia public high schools?**

Focus – Life History

1. Tell me about yourself to include your name, age, and where you are from.
2. Tell me about your family.
  - a. What are your parent's occupations, and where are they from?
  - b. How is your relationship with your parents?
  - c. What is your family structure? (married, divorced, widowed)
3. What school(s) did you attend in high school, and when did you graduate?
4. Describe what you are doing occupationally and educationally now.
5. Tell me about your day-to-day experiences as an AAMM in high school.
6. Describe your interactions with other Muslims while in high school.
7. Tell me about your interactions with non-Muslims while in school.
8. What made you attend a public high school?
9. How did you do academically in high school?
10. Describe the classes you took, and did you have any advanced classes?
11. How do your Muslim peers view you when you attended a public high school?
12. How important is education to you and your family?
13. Describe your overall understanding of Islam?
14. How religious would you describe yourself, and why?
15. What are the differences between what you learn at the masjid and what you learn at school?
16. How different are the values you saw daily at school versus what you see at home or the masjid?
17. Name three things you enjoyed about your high school.
18. Name three things you did not like and would change about your high school.
19. Describe the diversity and socioeconomics of your school's student body.
20. Describe the diversity of your school's faculty and staff?
21. Tell me about some things that have happened at your school that made you really happy or good about yourself.

Interview Two Questions (60-90 minutes)

**Research Question 2. While enrolled at identified Georgia public high schools, what obstacles, if any, did select AAMM students encounter?**

Focus – Details of Experiences

1. What is your definition of race?
2. What is your definition of a racist, and what is your definition of a bigot?
3. Did you experience racism or bigotry while enrolled in high school?
  - a. If so, how did that experience feel?
  - b. How did you handle this from a religious or cultural perspective?
  - c. What lesson(s) did you learn from the event(s)?
4. How do you think your peers thought about your race, gender, culture, and religion?
5. How do you think your teachers perceive your race, gender, culture, and religion?
6. Were there any academic challenges you faced as an AAMM student? How did you overcome them?
7. What were your peer's perceptions of Muslims?
8. How did you educate your peers about you and Islam?
9. What were your teacher's perceptions of Muslims?
10. How did you educate your teachers about you and Islam?
11. How did your teachers or school accommodate your daily religious requirements?
12. Were there any barriers regarding course selection in high school?
13. What were some statements made by your peers regarding Islam?
14. What were some statements made by your teachers regarding Islam?
15. Describe classroom and school-wide discipline regarding how it is handled regarding race, gender, culture, and religion?
16. Describe a typical interaction/conversation with a peer.
17. Describe a typical interaction/conversation with a teacher.
18. What do you think school personnel and society most misunderstand about African American males?
19. Has a peer or teacher said anything inappropriate regarding your race, gender, or religion?
  - a. How did you handle that situation?
20. Tell me something about your race, gender, culture, and religion that I did not ask you.

Interview Three Questions (60-90 minutes)

**Research Question 3. What institutional policies and practices did select AAMM students find positive or negative while attending identified Georgia public high schools?**

Focus – Reflections on the Meaning

1. How was your course schedule developed in high school, and did you get to choose your classes?
2. Describe specific experiences in high school, which have had the most influence on your academic growth and development.
3. Describe a specific incident, if any, where you experienced obstacles regarding course selection.
4. Describe your classes, were they general, vocational, honors, advanced placement, or dual enrollment?
5. What, if any, specific experiences in high school helped the development of your identity as a member of your racial, cultural, or religious group?
6. Describe policies or practices your school created that were culturally, racially, or religiously inclusive.
7. Describe your school's inclusiveness towards the student body.
8. Were there any school policies or procedures that conflicted with your race, gender, religion or culture?
9. Describe how your teachers knew you are a Muslim?
10. What do your teachers know about Islam?
11. Have you ever had to correct your teachers about Islam?
12. On a scale of 1-10, how well are you accepted by your peers and explain your rating.
13. On a scale of 1-10, how well are you accepted by your teachers and explain your rating.
14. How did you foster relationships with your peers?
15. How did you foster relationships with your teachers and staff?
16. How did you interact during school events with peers?
17. Describe how welcomed you felt regarding interactions with both your peers and teachers?
18. How supportive were the peers of your religion?
19. How supportive were your peers with your race and culture?
20. How did your school support you with your race and culture?
21. How did your school support you with your religion?
22. What are some issues that you would like to change with your peers and teachers?
23. What are some issues that you would like to change at your school?
24. What can your school have done to improve academic outcomes for you?
25. You are in college, did your school prepare you for that experience?

APPENDIX D:

Informed Consent Letters

### **Informed Consent Statement - Interview**

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a research study entitled “A Case Study Exploring the Experiences of African American Muslim Males in Georgia Public High Schools.” This research project is being conducted by Reginald Griffin, a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at Valdosta State University. The purpose of this research is to explore the life and educational experiences of African American Muslim Male (AAMM) students who attended identified Georgia public schools to better understand the obstacles, if any, of institutional policies and practices that were both positive or negative during their years in Georgia public high schools. You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about the experiences of African American Muslims Males while they attended Georgia public high schools. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Participation should take approximately 180 minutes/3 hours during three separate 60-minute Zoom interviews. The interviews will be audio and/or video recorded in order to accurately capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview will serve as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older. The researcher will pay \$25 per interview to the participants in this study. There is no compensation for any persons who elect not to participate in the study.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Reginald Griffin at [rjgriffin@valdosta.edu](mailto:rjgriffin@valdosta.edu). This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

**COVID-19 precautions, such as conducting interviews via Zoom, social distancing (if applicable), and wearing masks (if applicable), will be utilized during the interview process.**

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## VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

### Parent/Guardian Permission for Child's/Ward's Participation in Research

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You are being asked to allow your child (or ward) to participate in a research study entitled "Exploring the Experiences of African American Muslim Males in Georgia Public High Schools." This research study is being conducted by Reginald Griffin, a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at Valdosta State University. The purpose of this research is to explore the life and educational experiences of African American Muslim Male

(AAMM) students currently enrolled in identified Georgia public schools to better understand the obstacles, if any, of institutional policies and practices that were both positive and/or negative during their high school years. Your child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary. From this point on in this form, the term "child" is used for either a child or ward.

As described in more detail below, we will ask your child to participate in three separate 60-minute Zoom interviews. Allowing your child to participate in this study may support necessary preservice curriculum changes at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Participation may also be used to develop training for educators to help improve pedagogical practices that are racially and/or culturally relevant for a growing AAMM population in Georgia public high schools. Because there are minimal risks, and you may not wish to allow your child to participate, it is important for you to know that you or your child may discontinue participation at any time during this study.

This form includes detailed information to help you decide whether to allow your child to participate in this research. Please read it carefully and ask any questions you have before agreeing to allow your child to participate. Please be sure to retain a copy of this form for your records.

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**Procedures:** Your child's participation will involve participating in up to three separate 60-minute interviews to respond to questions related to his experiences in public high school, details of those experiences in public high school, and reflections on how he perceives he was treated in public high school. The total time involvement is approximately three hours over several days. If you agree to participate, the researcher will also collect field notes during the Zoom interviews and/or artifacts that support how your child perceives his experiences in public high school. You or your child may discontinue participation at any time during this study regardless of the reason.



All direct interaction with your child will occur via Zoom before and after regularly scheduled prayer times in your city. This study involves research. There are no alternatives to the experimental procedures in this study. The only alternative is for you to choose not to allow your child to participate.

**Possible Risks or Discomfort:** This is a minimal risk research study. That means that the risks of participating are no more likely or serious than those you encounter in everyday activities. Although there are no known risks to your child associated with the research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study. However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks. By agreeing to allow your child to participate in this study, you are not waiving any rights that you or your child may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from the negligence of the University or its researchers.

**Potential Benefits:** Although your child may/will not benefit directly from this research, your child's participation will help the researcher gain further understanding related to the necessity of any preservice curriculum changes at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and it may be used to develop training for educators to help improve pedagogical practices that are racially and/or culturally relevant for a growing AAMM population in Georgia public schools. Your child's participation in this study may help fill a void in research related to AAMM in public high schools in Georgia.

**Costs and Compensation:** The researcher will pay \$10 per interview to the parents of minors in this study. There is no compensation for any persons who elect not to participate in the study.

**Assurance of Confidentiality:** Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your child's information confidential to the extent allowed by law. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your child's confidential information.

Your child will be assigned a code number as a way to identify and keep track of data. The numbers assigned to your child will not be associated with his name or any other identifying information. This is to ensure that individuals remain unidentifiable. Your child's birth date will be recorded as a way to calculate your child's chronological age in order to interpret the results of this study. All information obtained from the interviews will be kept in the researcher's office, secured by lock and key. Only those individuals that YOU choose to share the results with will have access to the results. Data from this study will be reported in combination with the interview obtained from other participants. None of the participants will be identified in this study by name or birth date.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to allow your child to participate in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you agree now to allow your child to participate and you change your mind later, you are free to withdraw your child from the study at that time. By not allowing your child

to participate in this study or by withdrawing him from the study before the research is complete, you are not giving up any rights that you or your child have or any services to which you or your child are otherwise entitled from Valdosta State University. If you decide to withdraw your child from the study after data collection is complete, your child's information will be deleted from the database and will not be included in the research results. During all interviews, your child may skip any questions that he does not want to answer. Neither the Muscogee County School District nor the school, your child, attends is conducting the research or sponsoring the project. Neither the parents nor your child will suffer adverse consequences from the school, the district, or the organization (such as college) if they do not wish to participate.

**Information Contacts:** Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Reginald Griffin at [rjgriffin@valdosta.edu](mailto:rjgriffin@valdosta.edu). This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

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APPENDIX E:

CITI Program Certificate

## COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

### COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2 COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS\*

\* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See the list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** REGINALD GRIFFIN (ID: 8617814)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Valdosta State University (ID: 475)
- **Institution Email:** rjgriffin@valdosta.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Educational Leadership
- **Phone:** 850.264.3240
  
- **Curriculum Group:** Human Research
- **Course Learner Group:** IRB Basic
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Description:** This course is suitable for Investigators and staff conducting SOCIAL / HUMANISTIC / BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH with human subjects. The VA module must be completed if you plan to work with subjects at a VA facility.
  
- **Record ID:** 34526759
- **Completion Date:** 04-Jan-2020
- **Expiration Date:** 03-Jan-2023
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score\*:** 89

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	12-Dec-2019	4/5 (80%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	15-Dec-2019	5/5 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	15-Dec-2019	4/5 (80%)
Basic Institutional Review Board (IRB) Regulations and Review Process (ID: 2)	15-Dec-2019	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	15-Dec-2019	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	01-Jan-2020	4/5 (80%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	04-Jan-2020	4/5 (80%)
Valdosta State University (ID: 746)	04-Jan-2020	No Quiz

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?ke6f847af-ae4a-450d-b4ea-6f6e275e8f59-34526759](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?ke6f847af-ae4a-450d-b4ea-6f6e275e8f59-34526759)

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)

Email: [support@citiprogram.org](mailto:support@citiprogram.org) Phone: 888-529-5929

Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

## COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

### COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2 COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT\*\*

\*\* NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See the list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** REGINALD GRIFFIN (ID: 8617814)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Valdosta State University (ID: 475)
- **Institution Email:** rjgriffin@valdosta.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Educational Leadership
- **Phone:** 850.264.3240
  
- **Curriculum Group:** Human Research
- **Course Learner Group:** IRB Basic
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Description:** This course is suitable for Investigators and staff conducting SOCIAL / HUMANISTIC / BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH with human subjects. The VA module must be completed if you plan to work with subjects at a VA facility.
  
- **Record ID:** 34526759
- **Report Date:** 03-Feb-2020
- **Current Score\*\*:** 87

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
Basic Institutional Review Board (IRB) Regulations and Review Process (ID: 2)	15-Dec-2019	5/5 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	15-Dec-2019	5/5 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	15-Dec-2019	4/5 (80%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	15-Dec-2019	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	01-Jan-2020	4/5 (80%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	04-Jan-2020	4/5 (80%)
Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507)	22-Jan-2020	4/5 (80%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	12-Dec-2019	4/5 (80%)
Research with Persons who are Socially or Economically Disadvantaged (ID: 16539)	29-Jan-2020	4/5 (80%)
Valdosta State University (ID: 746)	04-Jan-2020	No Quiz

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?ke6f847af-ae4a-450d-b4ea-6f6e275e8f59-34526759](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?ke6f847af-ae4a-450d-b4ea-6f6e275e8f59-34526759)

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)

Email: [support@citiprogram.org](mailto:support@citiprogram.org) Phone: 888-529-5929

Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>