The Experiences of Muslim Teachers Working in Public Schools in Canada

By

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Abstract
This research paper focuses on the study of the experiences of Muslim teachers working in public schools in Canada. This qualitative research paper uses a literature review and semi-structured interviews to study the relationship between the religious identity of Muslim teachers and their teaching profession. For this project, interviews were conducted with two Muslim teachers working at schools in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). Findings show that although Muslim teachers’ religious practice of prayer does not interfere with their teaching time, teaching while fasting during Ramadan may be experienced differently by different teachers. Despite the fact that participating Muslim teachers report that religious identity has very little impact on their working profession, they nevertheless report that they experience workplace discriminations as a result of their religious identity.

Key words: Muslim teacher, religious identity, Islamophobia, religious discrimination
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TERMINOLOGY

Burqa – a long gown like clothing that some Muslim women wear to cover their body

Hijab – the religious clothing that is used to cover the hair and neck for Muslim women

Islam – the religion practiced by Muslims

Islamophobia - “a hatred or fear of Islam or Muslims, especially as a political force”

(N Islamophobia, 2012)

Niqab – a cloth that covers the face for religious purpose. Muslim women wear this to prevent men from seeing their face

Quran – the Islamic religious book

Ramadan – fasting practiced by Muslims is called Ramadan. During fasting time Muslims do not eat food or drink from sunrise till sunset. Ramadan comes ones a year and continues for about thirty days.
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study

The Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1985).

Canada and the United States of America are multicultural countries that invite freedom of individual’s ethnic and religious practices. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act for instance explains the acceptance of and welcoming toward different race and religious practices in Canada. Despite the effort of western societies to depict themselves as multicultural societies, Muslim people in the West, more specifically the U.S. and Canada, continue to experience negative stereotypes (Lumb, 2014; Moore, 2006; Falah, 2005). Western stereotypes of Muslims portray them as violent, dangerous and non-trustworthy (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007). These stereotypes disadvantage Muslim teachers that are working in public schools in the West (Ahmed, 2014; Brooks, 2009; Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007; Ghuman, 1994; Pajak and Blasé, 1989). In her research, Brooks (2009) found that Muslim teachers employed at the elementary and high-school levels experience unfairness and discrimination at their professional working environment through inequality in job positions, income and respect from co-workers and administrators in relation to non-Muslim teachers. As a result, racism and stereotypes toward Muslims lead many Muslim teachers to experience isolation, insecurity and emotional stress working in western public school (Pajak and Blasé, 1989). Consequently, many Muslim teachers feel the need to hide their religious identity at their workplace in fear of criticism (Brooks, 2009);
some Muslim teachers also leave public schools to work at small religious private schools, where they earn less income, to overcome experiencing discriminations in the workplace (2009).

1.1 Research Purpose

The purpose of my research is to investigate how Muslim teachers’ religious identity impacts their professional identity. Brooks (2009) found that Muslim teachers frequently feel the need to hide their religious identity at their workplace in fear of experiencing isolation and occupational instability. As a Muslim woman who is studying to become a teacher in the near future, my goal is to investigate how Muslim teachers experience mainstream cultures of schooling in their identities as Muslim teachers.

1.2 Research Questions (Main)

What is the relationship between religious identity and professional identity for a small sample of Muslim elementary and/or secondary teachers that are working in public schools in Canada?

Subsidiary Questions:

- How does religious identity impact these teachers’ professional identities and practices?
- What specific challenges do these teachers experience working in public schools and how do they respond to these challenges?

1.3 Reflexive Positioning Statement

As a Muslim woman who wears the hijab, the religious head cover for Muslim women, I did volunteer work at a Toronto public school as a teacher’s assistant. There I never had to deal with discrimination or negative stereotypes based on my religious identity. Perhaps this is
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because I was not the only Muslim woman with the hijab in that school and therefore I was able to relate to other teachers that dressed like me, in hijab. Hence, I am concerned with how my experience would differ in being at a public school that has no Muslim teachers for me to relate to. In my determination to become a teacher, my goal is to identify ways, through research, to successfully fit into teaching environments where I may be isolated for being one of the very few Muslim teachers, if not the only Muslim teacher, in the school and identify strategies to succeed in my teaching profession while affirming my religious identity.

1.4 Preview of the whole

To respond to the research question I have conducted a qualitative research study using semi-structured interviews to speak with two Muslim teachers that have been teaching for at least three years about their experiences teaching public schools in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. In chapter 2 I review the literature to investigate the diversity among student and teacher bodies in classrooms of western public schools. I explore topics around western media and Islamophobia to identify how Muslims are perceived in the West. I also explore how the prevalence of Islamophobia impacts Muslim students in public schools. Finally, I look at literatures involving discussions about the experiences of Muslim teachers working in the public school system. In chapter 3 I elaborate on the research design. In chapter 4 I report and discuss my research findings and their significance in relation to the literature review, and in chapter 5 I discuss the implications for my own practice as a beginning teacher.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review the literature to investigate issues that explore how teachers of elementary and/or secondary public schools deal with the tension they experience at their workplace between their conflicting religious identity and their professional identity. I begin with looking at statistics to identify the lack of diversity among teachers. I then present literature that demonstrates possible negative consequences of the lack of multiracial teachers in public schools. I then look at literature that discusses how Muslim people are represented in the West. I explore literature about Islamophobia and its impact on Muslim students attending western public schools. I then look at the rules and regulations for raising discussions about religion within western public schools as a strategy to familiarize children about diverse religious faiths. Finally, I develop my research to investigate literature that demonstrates the challenges Muslim teachers experience working in public schools and literatures that discusses the benefits of employing Muslim teachers in western public schools.

2.1 Multiculturalism In Question

Even if the West, such as Canada and the U.S., present themselves as multicultural societies in immigrating people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, their practice in effect raises discussions. The online Oxford English Dictionary (2014) defines the term multicultural as “of or relating to, a society consisting of a number of cultural groups […] in which the distinctive cultural identity of each group is maintained.” Although Canada and the U.S. are “multicultural, multiracial and multireligious” societies, classrooms of these western public schools lack diversity among teachers (Hossain, 2014, p. 23). In this section I present
statistics of bodies of visible minorities among students and teachers in western public schools. I also present literatures which explain the importance of employing multiracial teachers in western public schools as children are negatively influenced for the lack of diversity among teachers.

2.1.1 An Overview of the Diversity in Western Public Schools

Classrooms of western public schools involve diverse students of all races from around the world (Hossain, 2014; Lumb, 2014; Escayg, 2010; Niyozov, 2010). For instance, according to the Toronto District School Board’s (TDSB) 2006 Census data, TDSB schools constitute about 35% of white students and 69% of racialized students from diverse backgrounds (Yau, O’Reilly, Rosolen, Archer, 2011). Thus, Escayg (2010) illustrates that “racialized students continue to constitute the majority of the student population” in relation to mainstream westerners (p. 1). However, diversity among teachers working in public schools has yet to progress. Research shows that in 2001, only 5.4% of teachers in Canada were from visible minority groups and in 2006, 6.9% of teachers were from visible minority groups (Ryan, Pollock, Antonelli, 2009). Research also shows that the majority of graduating teachers in Canada continues to be white people (Escayg, 2010). Escayg (2010) and Lumb (2014) argues that Canadian schools need more diverse teacher bodies as students in these classrooms are becoming more and more diverse.

2.1.2 Consequences of the Lack of Diversity among Teachers

Children practice social norms and understand characteristics of society through educational institutions. Even though racialized students form the majority of the student
population in western schools, there is a “visible lack of teachers from diverse backgrounds” in the teaching profession (Escayg, 2010, p. 1). Children are likely to gain a sense of social resistance toward diversity when there is a pattern in schools among teachers where the majority is frequently mainstream white teachers (Escayg, 2010). This is because observing this pattern leads children to receive the message that society maintains segregation among mainstream privileged westerners and marginal racialized minorities. As a result, this may work as re-enforcement of the systematic domination of mainstream white westerners over racialized people in western societies. Hossain (2014) explains that children perceive positive and negative attitudes toward social value at early age. Thus, observing non-diversity among teachers at schools can lead young children to perceive western society as a community with racial discrimination and inequality in the economic realm when fewer teachers with diverse ethnicities are employed. Escayg (2010) explains that this can cause children of visible minorities to gain a sense of lack of agency as these children may perceive themselves as devalued for their race as a lack of inability to share a common racial background with their teachers. Consequently, continuing to include majority of white mainstream teachers in educational institutions may teach students to adapt to the ideology of social inequality, at school and in their community. However, in including multiracial teachers in the school system assist children to recognize the evidence of inclusion of diversity in educational institutions and in result encouraged to practice the acceptance of diverse ethnic and religious groups (Escayg, 2010).

There is much research about the need for educational diversity in institutional curriculum to engage the learning of different ethnicities, cultural backgrounds and religious practices (Guo, 2011; Niyozov, 2010; James, 1995; Ghuman, 1994). Similarly, Escayg (2010) identifies that it is important to employ teachers from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds in
schools to teach children about the practice of social diversity. Living in a multicultural society with social members from different ethnicities, it is important to make the same blend into educational institutions among teachers. Ghuman (1994) interviewed students in Britain in asked them, “Do you think there should be more Asian teachers?” A Muslim Asian girl in secondary school responded, “[T]here ought to be more Asian teachers in white schools and vice versa—so you can mix.” She explained that White and Asian teachers “should mix” because “if you stick Asians together and whites together nothing would ever change” (p. 184); her use of “should mix” explains her awareness that this has yet to happen. This statement explains the student’s view of the need to employ more diverse teachers in public schools to improve social diversity. Escayg (2010) explains that the lack of diversity among teachers results students to not receive “the learning opportunities to benefit from the diversity that can be reflected in the teaching staff,” which may endanger students to gain negative attitude toward social diversity (p. 2). The lack of opportunity to learn about diversity in schools can result students to gain a sense of segregation among racial groups and a lack of acceptance of diversity among social members. Lumb (2014) argues that racism in the school “undermines the self-worth and spirit of an individual” (p. 3). This is because students feel excluded in educational institutions as they often lack resemblance with teachers in terms of racial backgrounds (Escayg, 2010). Therefore, it is important to include teachers from diverse racial backgrounds to educate children about the practice of multiculturalism in western societies. Learning through teachers from diverse backgrounds, or even observing the presence of diverse teachers in schools, help students to learn to respect differences among social members for their religious and ethnic backgrounds (Hossain, 2014; James, 1995).
2.2 Muslims and the West

Western societies have gained a misleading negative understanding toward the social and religious norms of Muslim people (Lumb, 2014; Falah, 2005). Their knowledge about Islam is produced primarily through media and negative social events such as the event of September 11, 2001. In this section I explain how the West produces pessimistic understanding about Muslims and how that understanding leads westerners to perceive Islamic norms and Muslim people negatively. In this literature review, I portray the impact westerners’ negative views create toward Muslims residing in the West. In looking at literatures about media’s negative representations of Muslims and Islamophobia, my goal is to identify how Muslim teachers are impacted in working at western public schools.

2.2.1 Media’s Representations of Muslims

Byng (2010) in his article, Symbolically Muslim: Media, Hijab, and the West, explains that media is a way of constructing social ideology. He illustrates, “[T]he media is one type of elite discourse that constructs meaning and understanding for the public” (p. 114). Hence, media’s interpretation becomes knowledge for the public. He also explains, “Analyses of the media have found that [i]t use[s] discourse to construct knowledge, interpretations, and social representations that support dominance and inequality by making them appear to be natural common sense” (p. 114). In reinterpreting theories of Muslim societies and their practices, western media depicts negative incidents of Muslim communities which lead to a pessimistic understanding of the norms of Muslim communities. Negative stereotypes toward Muslims, such as terrorists, fanatical, and violent, are frequently depicted in newspapers, television, and film (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007).
To implicate Muslim societies, western media apply images of Muslim women in which they are represented as oppressed, exploited and victimized by the norms of Islam and Muslim societies (Lumb, 2014; Byng, 2010; Falah, 2005). Western newspapers portray Muslim women who wear the hijab, the religious headscarf, as women that are “silenced” and “oppressed” by Islam (Falah, 2005, p. 316). However, Ahmed (2005) demonstrates that Muslim women do not wear the hijab as an “obligation,” instead they wear it by “choice” (p. 153). Falah (2005) illustrates, western media often represents Muslim women as passive victims. He explains that “captions and texts” of western newspapers suggest that Muslim women are victimized “by their own people” (p. 305). This is because the images of Muslim women in the western media represent these women as violently abused. Consequently, Muslim women and men experience different types of racism. Muslim women are associated with the stereotypes that portray them as “submissive or voiceless” (Lumb, 2014, p. 3), while Muslim men are perceived as aggressive, violent or potential terrorists (Lumb, 2014; Byng, 2010). Thus, Lumb (2014) explains that “bearded Muslim men are at a greater disadvantage when seeking employment as a teacher than any other minority group[s]” in the West (p. 117); this is because a bearded man symbolizes the identity of a Muslim. Media’s representations of Muslims become the source for westerners to develop understanding about Muslims. In result, westerners draw comparisons of Muslims residing in the West to the media’s representations of Muslims (Byng, 2010).

2.2.2 Islamophobia

Islamophobia is an ongoing discussion in the West which involves a pessimistic view toward Muslim people and Islam. Research indicates that this pessimistic view causes Muslim people that are residing in the west to experience racism, discrimination, and social and
economic inequalities (Lumb, 2014; Byng, 2010; Brooks, 2009). The online Oxford dictionary defines Islamophobia as “a hatred or fear of Islam or Muslims, especially as a political force” (Islamophobia, 2014). Lumb (2014) discusses Islamophobia as a western institutionalized force to continue racism and discriminations toward Muslims and their religious practices.

Research shows that Muslims constitute about 2.6 million people in the U.S. (Hossain, 2014) and is rapidly increasing as a result of immigrant and birth (Moore, 2006; Niyozov & Pluim, 2009). Muslim communities’ involvement in the political and economic realm in the West is increasing; Muslims are increasing their contributions to American science, engineering, medicine, culture, and business (Moore, 2006; Hossain, 2014). Although there is a large number of Muslim populations residing and contributing to the western societies, many Americans continue to remain ignorant toward Islam and “conflate Islam with terrorism” (Moore, 2006, p. 281). In doing so, they are ignorant toward positive Islamic values (Niyozov & Pluim, 2009), and toward the fact that “majority of Muslims reject terrorism and violence” (Moore, 2006, p. 281).

The unfortunate event of September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the United States has left the nature of Islam in question (Ahmed, 2014; Byng, 2010; Moore, 2006). Hossain (2014) illustrates that Islam has become even more “misunderstood” after this event (p. 22). People of western societies have gained a need to fear Muslim people for their religious identity (Lumb, 2014, Byng, 2010; France, Meredith, Sandu, 2007; Hussain, 2005). Consequently, there has been resistance and hatred toward Muslim people as a result of inaccuracy and negative perceptions toward Islam and Muslims (Hossain, 2014).
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2.3 Prevalence of Islamophobia in Public Schools

Westerners’ pessimistic view toward Muslims leads Muslim children residing in the West to experience racism in educational institutions. In this section I present research that discusses how Islamophobia impacts Muslim students in western public schools. I also demonstrate existing research about non-Muslim teachers’ attitude toward Muslim students.

2.3.1 Islamophobia and the Experience of Muslim Students in Public School

There is very little research about Muslim students encountering Islamophobia in public schools. The little research that is available on this topic suggests that Muslim students experience harassment, stereotypes and discrimination from teachers, school administrators, and classmates (Aroian, 2012; Jandali, 2012). As a result of western discussion of Islamophobia, mainstream children of western societies gain a negative view toward Muslims which can lead to discriminatory attitudes toward their Muslim peers in school (Aroian, 2012; Jandali, 2012). Consequently, Muslim students can experience racism and discrimination from their classmates.

Aroian (2012) explains situations where non-Muslim mainstream teachers play “pranks” and demonstrate racist and stereotyped behaviours toward Muslim students which cause these students to feel humiliated in the classroom (p. 209). Javed (2011) suggests that school environments which “facilitate positive teacher-student interactions […] promote effective development” in students’ learning (p. 37). However, teachers’ negative attitude toward Muslim students can create a negative impact on the teacher-student relation which may harm Muslim students’ learning at school (Aroian, 2012; Javed, 2011).

In researching, I have not found literature about the frequency of occurrence of Islamophobia in public schools. Perhaps this is because what Jandali (2012) suggests,
“[B]ullying and harassment may go unreported by [Muslim] students out of fear of making bad situations worse” (21). Research suggests that experiencing bullying creates a negative influence on children’s mental and emotional state of health, as well as on their academic performances at school (Buxton, Potter, Bostic, 2013). Drawing on Buxton, Potter and Bostic’s research, Muslim students’ inability to express their experience of bullying from classmates and teachers may cause negative impact on their mental health condition and their academic achievements at school.

2.3.2 Mainstream Teachers’ Approach toward Muslim Students in School

Scholars indicate that when it comes to research about Muslim Students’ education, teachers’ voices remain marginalized (Niyozov, 2010; Niyozov & Pluim, 2009). The little research available shows both conditions in which non-Muslim teachers demonstrate their negative and positive attitudes toward Muslim students.

Niyozov and Pluim (2009) illustrate that some non-Muslim teachers approach Muslim students negatively in that these teachers are ignorant toward Muslim students’ experience of racism. When a Muslim student reports to her teacher about being “teas[ed] by her peers” through racist comments in the school, the teacher states, “Never mind, it is not serious. It’ll soon pass” (p. 645). This study found that teachers that show negative attitude toward Muslim students can also be unfair and discouraging toward Muslim students’ education in implying that they are “dumb” (p. 654). Some teachers articulated biased comments such as, “Muslim families do not value education” in the sense that schooling is necessary “to lead to better economic opportunities” (p. 653).
In contrast, this research also found that other non-Muslim teachers demonstrated non-biased attitudes toward their Muslim students in suggesting that they have “the same expectations of all their students, regardless of ethnicity” (p. 654). In fact these teachers have placed aspiring comments toward Muslim students in explaining that some Muslim students have “good study habits” and that they “were far more diligent about their schoolwork than any of the other students in the school” (p.654). As a result, those teachers that were non-biased toward their Muslim students more commonly demonstrated their effort to assist Muslim students in resolving problems these students face, for their religious identity, in schools and in the community (Niyozov & Pluim, 2009).

2.4 Teaching Children about Diversity in Religious Practices

In this section I review the rules and regulations of western society that approves teaching religious topics in public schools. I present literature that demonstrates strategies to teach about basic Islamic norms in classroom lessons to familiarize mainstream children of western public schools about Muslim people. I also present research that demonstrates some westerners’ concern of children’s over-acceptance of social diversity.

2.4.1 Discussion about Religion in Public Schools

Research indicates that both America and Canada have approved laws toward teaching religion in public schools. Ramarajan and Runell (2007) indicate the views of the U.S. Supreme Court Justice which illustrates, “It is legal for public schools to teach children about religion” (p. 89). Similarly, Khan (1999) demonstrates that Canadian courts “accepted and followed” the
guidelines provided by American jurisprudence and prepared by the American Association of School Administrators which demonstrates, among other examples,

The school may sponsor the *study* of religion, but may not sponsor the *practice* of religion […]. The school may *expose* students to all religious views, but may not *impose* any particular view […]. The school should *study* what all people believe, but should not *teach* a student what to believe (p. 440-441).

However, Ramarajan and Runell (2007) suggest various reasons preventing many public schools from teaching students about religion:

- Perhaps because of the complicated history and contentious debate about religion in American public schools, schools and educators shy away from discussing religion, and by extension, steer clear of any discussion on Islam. Many schools have overly stringent policies in an unnecessary effort to avoid legal difficulties. Likewise, educators often avoid any discussion of religion in the classroom for fear of being sanctioned by school administration or having to confront outraged parents and guardians (p. 89).

They found that many educators lack knowledge about Islam and therefore are not accurately informed about various religions, such as Islam, which can lead them to feel lack of confidence in addressing topics about religions in the classroom (Ramarajan and Runell, 2007). As a result, even if social laws provide the freedom to teach religion, and discuss topics related to Islam, public schools often do not raise discussions about religion. Consequently, mainstream children of western societies are likely to lack the development of knowledge about Islam other than understanding the misrepresented information portrayed through media.

### 2.4.2 Strategies for Teaching about Islamic Norms in the Classroom

To prevent pessimistic views and negative attitude toward Islam and Muslim people, public schools need to involve discussion about religious diversity. Lumb (2014) explains that
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non-Muslim teachers “have to explore their own beliefs in regards to Islamophobia before they can effectively teach” classrooms involving Muslim students (p. 27). This is because these teachers’ pessimistic view toward Muslims can lead them to approach Muslim students with negative attitudes (Aroian, 2012; Javed, 2011).

Ramarajan and Runell (2007) discuss the goals of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding’s Religion and Diversity Education program in the U.S. which is a “non-sectarian, non-profit organization,” and which offers “training and curricula for K-12 educators regarding issues of religious diversity in the classroom” (p. 90); furthermore, its goal is to educate teachers to teach religious diversity in public schools to prevent children from gaining racist attitudes. In including religious diversity, more specifically discussion about Islam for the purpose of this study, in school, children are likely to better understand the Islamic practices which may prevent them from gaining a negative view toward Muslim people. Ramarajan and Runell explain that in including Muslim characteristics and traditions into the curriculum, children can learn to normalize the religious practices of Muslim people. The following is an example of the Tanenbaum Center’s classroom lesson structure on nutrition to incorporate the learning of religious diversity:

[C]hildren learn that some people have to do more than choose foods that are healthy. Some people are allergic to nuts or are on special diets because they might have diabetes or epilepsy. Some people make choices because they believe strongly about something—such as being vegan. Others cannot eat certain foods because of their religious beliefs. At the end of the lesson, the students are presented with a food challenge. They have to plan a meal that Olympic athletes from different parts of the world can enjoy. The meal must be healthy, something everyone can share and provide for all of the athletes’ different dietary restrictions: Amar, a swimmer from India, is Hindu, does not eat any meat and hates bananas; Sarah, a sprinter from England is allergic to nuts, is
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Jewish and eats only Kosher food; Ayo, a gymnast from Nigeria is Muslim and does not eat meat that is not Halal (p. 92).

In this process of including Muslim characteristics into the curriculum, students learn about Muslim people’s norms and practices which lead them to normalize the characteristics of Muslims rather than feel estranged toward their religious practices (Ramarajan and Runell, 2007). This sense of familiarity can assist them to gain positive attitude toward Muslims and the religious norms of Islam.

Hossain (2014) offers strategies to prevent reinforcement of negative views toward Islam; since the majority of the people in U.S. practices Christianity, Hossain suggests incorporating comparisons between Islam and Christianity in classrooms as there are many similarities. In familiarizing mainstream children of western societies about Muslim people and their religious practices, they grow up feeling less threatened by Muslims (France, Meredith, Sandu, 2007).

2.4.3 Westerners’ Fear of Children’s Accepting Attitude toward Diversity

Stoler (1995) demonstrates, “Children [are] [...] heirs [...] to the race,” explaining that children can redefine racism and produce a new meaning for racism (p. 144). This produces a social threat that children from diverse backgrounds can impact the systematic racism and social domination of white people in the West. Some western leaders worry that “too much study of other cultures” and other religions may discourage mainstream children of western societies to embrace “a common heritage” and “diminish their commitment to traditional western ideals and values” (Douglass & Dunn, 2003, p. 55). Instead, these leaders prefer children focusing on the study of European and North American traditions (Douglass & Dunn, 2003).
Research shows that within the last 25 years, the Muslim population in the U.S. grew by 108% between 1991 and 2001, totalling up to 2.5 million; and Muslims in Canada grew by 128%, increasing from 253,000 in 1991 to 842,200 in 2007 (Niyozov, 2010). With a large number of Muslim populations residing and immigrating into the U.S. and Canada, Muslim students in public schools are also increasing (Niyozov, 2010). Therefore, critics argue that it has become critical to familiarize mainstream western children about Muslim people’s religious norms and values as they are becoming part of a large population in schools and in the community (Hossain, 2014, Moore 2006). Familiarizing mainstream children about Islam may help to influence the pessimistic attitude toward Muslims and their Muslim classmates at school. This as a result can improve Muslim students’ experience of encountering racist and discriminatory comments at their school.

2.5 Muslim Teachers of Western Public Schools

Westerners’ negative ideologies about Muslims cause Muslim teachers residing in the West to experience challenges in their profession. In this section, I investigate the challenges Muslim teachers experience working in public schools. I also explore literature that discusses possible positive impacts Muslim teachers can create in students’ learning as a result of their different religious background than mainstream white teachers.

2.5.1 The Challenges of Being a Muslim Teacher in the West

Residing and working in the West, Muslim teachers experience conflicts at their workplace for their religious identity. Brooks (2009) discusses that teachers in the United States are “expected to be ethical and trustworthy” (p. 1); she explains that these are “values that often
conflict with western stereotypes of Muslims” (p. 1). As teachers spend most time with students, next to parents and peers, teachers are expected to have major influences on students (Niyozov & Pluim, 2009). However, parents of western societies have difficulty trusting the influences of Muslim teachers on their children as knowledge gained about Muslims is negative and non-trustworthy (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007). Since Muslim women are perceived as voiceless and oppressed in the West, they are assumed to be in need of being saved from their own communities (Byng, 2010; Falah, G.W. (2005); thus, Muslim women do not exemplify ideal role models for children. Muslim men are perceived as aggressive and violent by the West and therefore are considered dangerous (Lumb, 2014). These pessimistic ideologies about Muslims lead parents of western children to feel discouraged and worried about Muslim teachers teaching their children. This is because these parents relate their pessimistic understanding of Muslim people to the Muslim teachers in public schools. As a result, these parents fear their children being negatively influenced by teachers that are Muslims.

Ahmed (2014) explains that it became more challenging to be a Muslim in Canadian society after the event of September 11, 2001. He discusses his experience as a student teacher; he explains that he received “the silent treatment” and “negative comments about Islam in general” from other teachers at a Canadian school in Saskatchewan (p. 3).

Research show that Muslim teachers in Elementary and high-school, in North America, gain a sense of lack of agency in making visible their religious identity in fear of experiencing socially constructed stereotypes at their workplace (Brooks, 2009). Thus, many Muslim teachers hide their religious identity as long as possible. Natalie (Brooks, 2014) and Amy (Brooks, 2009) are American female teachers, who converted to Islam, discuss their experiences as Muslim teachers working at public schools in U.S. They explain that they felt scared to reveal their
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religion as Muslim women to their students, students’ parents, and to their co-workers. As it was easy for them to get away with seeming like non-Muslims, because they were white Americans, they did not reveal their religion for a long time at their teaching environment. In fear of being judged by their co-workers, administrators and parents of their student, they felt more secured in hiding their religious identity. Both these women explain that when they revealed their religious identity, they resulted in feeling isolated from their co-workers and administrators (Brooks, 2014; Brooks, 2009).

Ahmed’s, Natalie’s and Amy’s situations demonstrate the difficulties Muslim teachers experience working in Canadian and American public schools. Research shows that many Muslim teachers leave public schools in order to work at Islamic private schools where they make less earning than teachers in public schools (Brooks, 2009). Even if there is less income in Islamic private schools, some Muslim teachers choose this option to avoid feeling subordinated and to avoid feeling fear of criticism in revealing their religious identity while working at western public schools. Natalie discusses that her experience in teaching a private Islamic school in the U.S. was “different” than her experience at the public schools (Brooks, 2014, p. 43); this is because she felt she was able to embrace her religious identity and felt comfortable in being able to relate to her colleagues.

As a result of feeling isolated, insecure and fear judgement at the workplace, Muslim teachers become unhappy with their profession. Pajak and Blasé (1989) explain that teachers’ emotional conditions impact their teaching skills. Teachers who were able to connect their personal life, whether that involved family or religion, to their professional life were reported as happy and satisfied teachers; they gained better success in their profession in terms of communicating with students with “a sense of enjoyment, fun, and self-confidence” (p. 298);
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these teachers worked well together with colleagues, and principals perceived them as “having more confidence in the abilities and judgments” (p. 298). Pajak and Blasé acknowledges that teachers that were emotionally unhappy were less successful in their profession in being “less tolerant toward students” and having “limited” interaction with colleagues (p. 295). This demonstrates that Muslim teachers’ unhappiness results them to lack self-confidence, become less successful in their profession and have limited interaction with co-workers (Brooks, 2009). Consequently, being unhappy, feeling isolated and a sense of inability to relate their personal religious beliefs to their profession has a negative impact on Muslim teachers’ teaching skills.

2.5.2 Advantages of Employing Muslim Teachers in Western Public Schools

Western media’s negative representations of Muslims and the discussion of Islamophobia lead Muslims to experience racism and discrimination in the West. Research shows that racism toward Muslims leads Muslims that are residing in the west to experience social and economic inequalities (Lumb, 2014). This leads parents of Muslim children to feel concerned about their children’s academic achievements and future economic establishments in the West. Escayg (2010) explains that students of visible monitory are able to learn better in feeling a sense of acceptance in western schools for being able to relate to teachers that share similar ethnic backgrounds. Similarly, Muslim teachers can assist the learning of Muslim students in gaining students to feel accepted in western public schools because these students are able to relate to teachers that share similar religious practice. Escayg (2010) explains that it would be unwise to suggest that a teacher from the similar ethnic background of that of a student is a better teacher for that student, compared to other teachers with different ethnicity, “without substantial empirical evidence” (p. 3). Muslim teachers are not necessarily better at teaching Muslim
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students, but having few Muslim teachers within a school, among other teachers from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, can assist Muslim students, as well as their parents, to see as evidence that Muslim teachers are provided with opportunities of teaching profession, therefore opportunities in other professions of the economic realm. This also works as an inspiration for Muslim students to feel motivated toward learning with confidence for their success in western societies.

Many Muslim students feel unwelcomed in public schools for their “daily prayer requirements, dress codes, and dietary restrictions” which lead them to gain a sense of “otherness” that they frequently experience in western societies (Brooks, 2009, p.19). In being able to find resemblance with Muslim teachers, Muslim students can overcome their feeling of “Otherness” or like an outcast within their schools. Niyozov and Pluim (2009) explain that racism toward Muslims leaves Muslim students with a low self-esteem and creates a negative impact on their identities. However, the presence of Muslim teachers in schools assists Muslim students to gain a sense of belonging in public schools (Lumb, 2014). In feeling accepted these students learn to take pride in their own cultural heritage and religious faith, which is explained to be significant as this pride in students “is believed to build self-image” (James, 1995, p. 32). This “self-image” implies a sense of value, or self-worth in young learners which in result, builds confidence in students and gains them encouragement toward learning for success.

Muslim teachers in public schools can become role models for not only Muslim students but also for students from other racial and religious backgrounds. Ghuman’s (1994) article offers two arguments to justify the employment of ethnic minority teachers: they can become role models for the children and “they can make positive contributions to the cultural life of schools” (p. 178). Lumb (2014) demonstrates the experience of Nadia, a Muslim teacher candidate who
wears the hijab; Nadia felt that although her white associate teacher may have seemed racist, Nadia’s presence in the classroom helped students of diverse ethnic backgrounds to gain a strong sense of inclusivity in the classroom as they felt a sense of resemblance with the student teacher of visible minority. Lumb also discusses Amna, another Muslim student candidate who also wears the hijab explains that as a result of sharing a similar ethnic background with students, she “was able to relate to her students and understand their stories in a way that her white associate teacher could not” (p. 105). The experiences of these Muslim teacher candidates explain that the presence of Muslim teachers can assist students from diverse background to gain a sense of belonging in able to relate to teachers in the school. Including Muslim teachers in schools can also assist educational institutions to demonstrate the practice of multiculturalism and inclusivity within public schools in the West.

2.6 Conclusion

In this literature review I investigated research on the population of visible minorities among students and teachers in western public schools. I looked at research about incorporating education about Islamic in these public schools. I also researched about the cause for the misleading negative views of western societies toward Muslims. Although there is a lot of discussion in western societies about Muslims, there appears to be little research about the voices of Muslims on the subject. Though I have found literature about mainstream teachers’ approach toward Muslim students’ experience of Islamophobia in the school, I have not come across literature that show how Muslim teachers experience or approach Muslim students’ experience of Islamophobia. In looking for research on Muslim teachers’ experiences in western schools, I learned that it is not that there are no Muslim teachers teaching in public schools, but very little research is available about their experiences of their teaching profession. In researching about the
experiences of Muslim teachers working in elementary or secondary public schools in the West, this qualitative research study investigates how these teachers cope with their profession in schools in balancing between their religious and professional identities.
Chapter 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the research methodology that I used to study the relationship between religious identity and professional identity for a sample of Muslim elementary or secondary teachers. I begin by reviewing the general approach, procedures and data collection instruments before elaborating more specifically on participants sampling and recruitments. I explain data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations relevant to my study. I identify a range of methodological limitations as well as discuss the strengths of the methodology. Finally, I conclude the chapter by discussing the key methodological decisions and my rational for these decisions given the research purpose and its questions.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This study uses a qualitative research approach to interview teachers about their experience as Muslim teachers working in either public elementary or secondary schools. Qualitative research is an inquiry process that “highlights and explains the daily life experiences” and aims to “further give them meaning” (Khan, 2014a, p. 300). Qualitative research allows researchers to deeply explore life experiences to “discover the complexities of the situation through a holistic framework” (p. 301). A qualitative approach involving one-to-one interviews with Muslim teachers is an appropriate approach given that I am interested in learning about (not measuring or evaluating) their identities, experiences, and practices. These interviews assisted me in learning how Muslim teachers’ religious identity informs their professional identity.
I interviewed two Muslim teachers to learn about their experiences working in the public school contexts. With the permission of these teacher participants, I audio-recorded these interviews.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument of data collection used in this study is the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews “are generally organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee” (DiCicco-Bloom, Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to learn about “individuals’ lived and told experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 71). In asking teachers questions about their experiences working in public schools, I had the opportunity to hear about how their religious identity impacts their professional identity, and to engage this relationship in the context of their reported experiences with students, colleagues and administrators. Creswell (2013) explains that in interviews, dialogue between the researcher and the participant can raise new topics and questions for the research that the researcher had initially unforeseen. These new topics can assist the researcher to further develop the study.

3.3 Participants

In this section I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment, and I review a range of possible avenues for teacher recruitment. I have also included a section wherein I introduce each of the participants.
3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

For this study, it was necessary to find Muslim elementary or secondary teachers who could provide information about their experiences working in public schools. Teachers were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Participants self-identified as Muslim

   This study focuses on the experiences of Muslim teachers and therefore it was necessary that teachers be practising Islam.

2. Participants had experience teaching elementary or secondary grades in public schools

   I plan to be a public school teacher in the near future and therefore I have been interested in learning specifically about teachers teaching in the public board system to understand what my experience may be like as a public school teacher. I interviewed teachers working in public school contexts, as opposed to private Islamic schools, because I wanted to study the experiences of Muslim teachers working in western environments with mixed demographic students and colleagues. However, when a teacher participant had experienced working at the private school system, I took it as an opportunity to learn about their experiences in comparison to both the public and the private school domain of teaching.

3. Participants had a minimum of 3 years teaching experience at the elementary or the secondary level in a public school.

   I wanted my participants to have at least a 3 year teaching experience because I wanted to be able to draw on at least several years’ worth of experiences.
3.3.2 Recruitment Procedures

For this study I have relied on convenience sampling procedure. Creswell (2013) defines convenience sampling strategy as the strategy that "saves time, [...] and effort, but at the expense of information credibility" (p. 158). I relied on this strategy because I had limited access to resources in finding teacher participants to interview. Therefore, I have relied on my existing contacts and networks to find suitable candidates to interview for this research study.

To recruit teacher participants I contacted principals and my associate teachers that have been my mentors during my practicum placements for the Master of Teaching program. I provided them with an overview of my research study and included the participant criteria for teachers for the purpose of this research and asked these organizations and individuals to distribute my information to teachers they believe may fulfill the criteria. For potential ethical issues, I provided my information rather than ask these organizations and individuals to provide me with the names and contact information of teachers they think would be suitable. This helped to ensure that teachers were volunteering to participate in my research study rather than feeling pressure or obligation to participate.

3.3.3 Participant Biographies

The two Muslim male teachers interviewed for this research are currently working at public schools in the Toronto District Education Board (TDSB). To protect their identity, I use the pseudonyms Hamid and Ali to refer to them in my writing. Also to protect their privacy, I do not use institution names in which these teachers work at.

Hamid
At the time of the research, Hamid had been teaching in public schools in Canada, at various school boards, for about 27 years. He had taught at the elementary and secondary levels of schools; grades kindergarten to grade 12. At the time of the research he was teaching at the TDSB School in a grade 4 & 5 classroom. Hamid was born in Trinidad and raised and educated in Canada.

Ali

Ali had previously taught at a private Islamic school from grades Kindergarten to grade 10 for six years. Later, in 2005, he joined the TDSB School to teach secondary grades 9-12, and had taught at two different secondary public schools since then. He had also worked in the position of a guidance counsellor at a secondary school at a TDSB School, and at the time of the research he was the head guidance counsellor in his school. Ali was born in Toronto, Ontario and attended TDSB schools for his elementary and secondary education.

Although both these teachers had taught only in Canada, Ali attended teachers’ college in the United Kingdom and worked in U.K. schools during his placement practices. While at the time of the research Hamid was teaching in an elementary school, and Ali in a high school, this enabled me to collect data about the experiences of both elementary and secondary public school teachers. As a result of their experiences of working at public schools for over ten years, both teachers had a lot to discuss about their teaching profession.

3.4 Data Analysis

For the data analysis procedure of this qualitative study I coded each transcript individually and identified categories of data and themes within those categories using the
research question as an interpretive tool. I also read the categories and themes beside one another and synthesized themes where appropriate.

In reviewing the existing literature on this topic, I examined how the existing literature aligns (and not) with the teacher participants’ experiences and views. I also reviewed the variances among the two participants. Research indicates that one of the characteristics of the qualitative analysis procedure involves identifying “common themes and areas of divergence across participants” (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, Davidson, 2002, p. 728). With this in mind, I compared and contrasted the two interview transcripts to synthesize the core elements of the experiences described by these participants.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

In this section I discuss several significant aspects in considering ethical review procedures. Khan (2014b) explained that ethical issues are important to consider in qualitative research as such research “often intrudes in participants’ lives” (p. 230). He also adds that it is “the moral obligation of the […] researcher to be ethical even when research participants are unaware of or unconcerned about [ethical issues]” (p. 231).

The ethical procedures I review for this study involves the following:

1. confidentiality and consent
2. right to withdraw
3. risks of participation
4. member checks
5. data storage
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For this study, all participants were assigned a pseudonym and they were notified of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of the research study. I think it is important to prevent the exploitation of the interviewee as they are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study to assist in the development of this research. Research illustrates that interviewee participants should not be exploited in the research process for the gain of the researcher (DiCicco-Bloom, Crabtree, 2006). With this in mind, participants’ identities remained confidential and any identifying markers related to their schools or students were excluded for this study. Participants also had the opportunity to review the transcripts and to clarify or retract any statements before I conducted data analysis. All data, such as audio recordings, written transcripts, etc., were stored on my password protected laptop and iPad and will be destroyed after five years. These data is only accessible to me and my research supervisor.

While there are no known risks associated with participation in this study, it is possible that a particular question may trigger an emotional response from a participant, thus, making them feel vulnerable in discussing the research question in hand. I have minimized this risk by allowing my participants to review the interview questions prior to the interview, and by re-assuring them throughout the interview and in the consent letter that they have the right to refrain from answering any question that they do not feel comfortable with, as well as re-stating their right to withdraw from participation.

Participants were asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A) giving their consent to be interviewed as well as audio recorded. This consent letter provided an overview of the study, addressed ethical implications, and specified expectations of participation, such as the expected participation involved a 45 – 60 minute semi-structured interview.
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The limitations of this research study included three main drawbacks. The first was that this research was conducted with only two Muslim teachers rather than an extensive number of interviews. Therefore, further research is necessary to identify if this trend of Muslim teachers’ experience is common in the majority of Muslim teachers’ experience. The second limitation was that as this research permitted me to use only a single research method, rather than various forms of research methods, minimal information was gathered. These two limitations prevented the rise of in depth information about this topic.

The third limitation was that the accuracy of the discussions and the answers of these participants remained unsubstantiated. It is possible that they feel uncomfortable in being fully honest about their experiences and their feelings toward their working environment; or they may have biased attitude toward their workplace and therefore may choose to express unnecessary criticism. Nevertheless, there was no particular way to verify complete accuracy of the information as this research did not permit me to conduct case study research in their schools.

Despite the limitations discussed, there were methodological strengths to this research study. Unlike surveys that provide limited information, one-to-one interview procedure assisted me to hear participants’ lived experiences in depth and their thoughts on this study as teachers. This also allowed me to arise to new questions that were significant to the study but was initially unplanned.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the research methodology. I reviewed the research approach and procedures and the semi-structured interview form of data collection I use for the
study. I discussed how I planned to find and select interview participants for this study. I also
discussed the form of data analysis I intended to use. I reviewed the ethical procedures I felt are
necessary to consider in interviewing research participants. Finally, I discussed the
methodological limitations and strengths of this research. Next, in chapter 4 I report the research
findings.
Chapter 4 – Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report and discuss the research findings that are derived from the two interviews I have conducted with two Muslim male teachers working in Toronto public schools. In order to protect the identity of the two teacher participants interviewed for this study I do not use their real names; instead I use the pseudonyms Hamid and Ali to refer to them in my writing.

Through the data collected from the interviews, I inquire about the overall research study, what is the relation between Muslim teachers’ religious identity and their professional identity working at public schools in Canada. In analysing my research findings I have found that both teachers share similar views and experiences in some cases, and different views in other cases, in discussing the relation between their religious identity and their professional identity.

In presenting and discussing the research findings eight themes were identified. They are 1) Both teacher participants express their concern about the lack of mixture between religious faiths and school, 2) While teacher participants reported that their religious identities did not impact their professional relations with their students, the Islamic practice of fasting within school space was perceived differently by the two teachers, 3) Even if public schools reject religious discriminations, participating teachers experience religious discrimination in schools, 4) Teacher participants believed that many Muslim students avoid reporting their experience of religious discrimination due to a fear of retaliation and its impact on their academic and emotional well-being, 5) Both teacher participants believed that diversity among teachers is necessary but is lacking in public schools, 6) Participating teachers believed that public schools make religious accommodations for school staff and students to carry out their religious values,
7) Participants were comfortable revealing their religious identity at their workplace and predominantly felt supported by their non-Muslim colleagues. 8) Participants reported that they experienced more religious discriminations in their workplace since 9/11, 9) Teacher participant discussed that he had a better experience working at an Islamic private school in comparison to his experiences working in public schools. In this chapter, I discuss these themes, with subthemes where applicable. I discuss the findings in light of the literature I reviewed in chapter 2, when it is relevant. I also relate the significance of these findings to my research questions.

4.1 Both teacher participants express their concern about the lack of mixture between religious faiths and school

In this section I discuss teacher participants’ common concern about the lack of mixture between religion and public school. I also discuss Hamid’s concern about students leaving public schools as a result of this. In discussing teachers’ concerns, four subthemes were identified: 1) Teacher participants express their concern that in separating religion and school, public schools overlook the fact that students’ identity cannot be separated or erased, 2) Teacher participant discussed that the lack of mixture between his religious identity and his teaching profession at public school led him to gain a better experience working at an Islamic private school, 3) Teacher participants discussed strategies for public schools to incorporate religion and 4) Teacher participants believed that public schools lose students to private schools as a result of the lack of mixture between religion and schooling.
4.1.1 Teacher participants express their concern that in separating religion and school, public schools overlook the fact that students’ identity cannot be separated or erased.

Although both America and Canada have approved laws toward teaching religion in public schools, schools do not commonly teach students about religions. Khan (1999) demonstrates that according to the Canadian courts, “The school should study what all people believe, but should not teach a student what to believe” (p. 441).

Even if laws permit teaching about religion in schools, both teacher participants interviewed reported that in their experience, public schools separate religious identity and academic schooling for students. Hamid explained that religion and schools need to be mixed better for students to be able to connect to their religious identity. He stated, “They take religion out of school totally.” Similarly, Ali expressed his concern, “I think faith is an important part of a student and I think it’s missing the academic component of schools.” He explained that this is because schools do not provide a safe space for students to discuss their religious identity. Thus, his impression was that students often feel a lack of connection between their religious identity and the school environment. However, as religion is part of one’s identity, separating religion means having to separate a part of one’s identity from themselves. Ali illustrated that students “can’t separate religion from identity,” nor “what their […] beliefs are and what their practices are.” He discussed that this impossibility of separation between religion and identity is visible in students because when students cannot find connection to the religious part of identity at school, they “seek for other ways to address the identity piece.” He discussed examples such as “kids help phone.” He explained that “There is also Muslim youth
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helpline called messiha.net. They are serving North America.” Here he demonstrated that students find other resources such as ‘help lines’ to address their religious identity as a result of their feeling of a lack of connection between their religious identity and school.

4.1.2 One teacher participant discussed that the lack of mixture between his religious identity and his teaching profession at public school led him to gain a better experience working at an Islamic private school

Ali has worked at both Islamic private schools and public schools in Canada. In comparing his experiences of teaching at the private and the public domain, he discussed the experiences to be very different. He explained that in being able to relate his religious identity to his students and colleagues, he liked working at the Islamic private school more than public schools. He demonstrated, “I loved working in the Islamic School a little more than in the public system, due to the opportunity to engage in conversations around faith and identity.” He explained that while working in the Islamic private school, he felt free to discuss topics around Islam with his students in the classroom. He demonstrated, since “religion was infused in the curriculum, I was able to freely discuss the Islamic perspective on any issue that students would bring up”; however, in comparison he explained, “I do not discuss Islam with students” at public schools. This is because he felt that at public schools, teachers should separate their personal faiths and beliefs from their profession. Thus, he stated, “You don’t share your private life in the school.” The lack of inability to share his beliefs in the public school system led him to prefer working at Islamic private schools. Whereas, the sense of freedom to discuss his religious faith with his students at the Islamic schools led him to like the private school environment better than working at public school.
Ali also discussed that, in comparison to public schools, he had better relations with his students, colleagues and students' parents in the Islamic school. He explained that this is “mainly because of the spiritual and religious connection we shared.” This explained that in sharing the same religious identity with students, colleagues and students’ parents led him to have better relations with them. In comparison, he explained that he did not have as good of a relation with his colleagues at public schools as a lack of his inability to express his faith and beliefs with them. His words were, “I don't feel a strong connection with some staff members.”

As a result, Ali’s experiences demonstrated that being able to express their religious beliefs in the school environment and share religious resemblance with colleagues leads Muslim teachers to gain a better experience at their profession. Research shows that many Muslim teachers leave public schools in order to work at Islamic private schools (Brooks, 2009). This is because, as Ali discussed, Muslim teachers gain a better sense of connection with colleagues at the private schools as all the staff and colleagues share the same religious values. Therefore, Muslim teachers are happier working at Islamic private schools in being able to freely share and connect with their religion part of their identity at their work environment.

Although Ali discussed his working experiences at the Islamic private school as better than his experiences working at public schools, after working for six years, he left his teaching job at the private school and later joined the public school system. He explained that this is because income is very low at Islamic schools. For which he states, “I could not afford to work at the Islamic school.” He explained that as he had a growing family it became difficult to continue working at the Islamic school with a low income. His words are, “[T]he pay was significantly lower at the Islamic school, and with a growing family, I just couldn't afford it! So, I joined the public system.” Research also indicates that teachers at Islamic private schools make less earning
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than teachers in public schools (Brooks, 2009). Ali explained that “Islamic schools do not charge
high fees as other private schools, which is why they cannot pay teachers as much as one would
anticipate.” Despite the fact that Muslim teachers may prefer working at Islamic private schools
as they may be happier there, however, as a result of low income, many Muslim teachers, such as
Ali, decides to leave Islamic private schools to work at public schools.

4.1.3 Teacher participants discussed strategies for public schools to incorporate religion

Hamid demonstrated that public schools lack the mixture of religion and
schooling. He explained that he tried to incorporate religion in his class through some
form of discussion. Since his current classroom had only five non-Muslims out of twenty
seven students, he tried to discuss Islam in the classroom. He illustrated, “[I]nstead of
taking it out of school totally and don’t talk about it we try to bring it in a little bit.” He
clarified that only Islam is usually discussed because of the large population of Muslim
students in his classroom; students of other religions infrequently raise the topic of
discussion about their religion; therefore class discussions about other religions is
infrequent. He stated, “[I]t’s so highly populated with Muslims, now there is nobody else.
It’s either Muslims, Hindu or Christian, Buddhist, just a few.” In discussing Islam in his
classroom, Hamid recognized that there should be a balance between discussing Islam
and other religion; otherwise it becomes unfair to the minority students in the classroom.
Therefore, when Muslim students try to discuss Islam repeatedly, he tells his students,

I can’t stand in front of the room talking about Islam if I don’t talk
about Christianity and everything else; then it’s not fair right? I
don’t mind talking about religion in the school as long as I’m able
to talk about all of them, not just my own.
In rejecting to discuss only Islam in his classroom, Hamid demonstrated a positive attitude toward inclusion. Deciding to discuss other religions, even if there are only five students in his classroom that are not Muslims, he portrays the need for students’ learning about all their peers’ religious faiths. He discussed that students need to know all religions, not just their own. In learning about others’ religious faiths and values, students learn to respect others’ religion. Thus, he explained, “I think kids should know the other religions […] I think it should be brought up just so children know [or] they’ll just grow up ignorant.”

Despite the effort to include religion into school through classroom discussions with his students, Hamid discussed that schools need to bring in religion more in order for students to gain a stronger connection toward their religious identity. He stated his concern, “[I]t’s too bad we can’t mix it better,” demonstrating that school environment needs to bring in religion more for students to notice than just one teacher, such as himself, discussing it in his classroom. He suggested that religious studies can be incorporated into social studies lessons. He stated, “[I]n school when we do social studies, I think this should be a religious study also.” Therefore, incorporating religion into social studies may be an effective way to bring in religion more into the school system.

4.1.4 Teacher participants believed that public schools lose students to private school as a result of the lack of mixture between religion and schooling

The lack of public schools’ ability to relate religion to school leads Ali to draw comparison between public and Islamic private schools. Ali discussed his experience
working at an Islamic private school in which he felt, unlike public schools, students were able to draw connections between their religious identity and their educational environment. He explained that students at the Islamic school discussed religion at school. He stated, students discussed “how Islam shapes their identity as Muslim Canadians.” By this he explained that students felt more connected to their religious identity in having discussions about their religious faiths and practices. However, public schools do not usually have discussions about religion, for which he stated, “I do not discuss Islam with students [in the public school].”

Because he believed that the lack of religion in public schools leads students to experience difficulty in finding relation between their religious identity and their school, Hamid observed that some Muslim students leave public schools. He stated, “It’s sad that we lose so many kids this way. It’s too bad we can’t mix faith and education better.”

Their discussion about their concern of the lack of religion in public schools demonstrated that both these teachers felt the need for public schools to include more religion, whether that is through general classroom discussions or in subject areas, into the school environments to assist students in relating their religious identities to their daily schooling. They believed that in finding connections between their school and their religious identity, students are less likely to leave public schools to attend private religious school.

4.2 While teacher participants reported that their religious identities did not impact their professional relations with their students, the Islamic practice of fasting within school space was perceived differently by the two teachers
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To inquire about the research question, how Muslim teachers’ religious identity influences their professional identity, I examine the relations between Muslim teachers’ religious practices and their teaching practices. I also analyse these teachers’ relation with their students as a result of their religious identity. Thus, in this section I discuss how religious practices, such as prayer and fasting, influence Muslim teachers’ teaching practice. The two subthemes identified in discussing these areas are 1) Participating teachers did not believe that their religious identity influenced their relationships with students and 2) While Ali believed that religious practices have no relation with teaching performances, Hamid felt that the Islamic practice of fasting made it difficult to teach.

4.2.1 Participating teachers did not believe that their religious identity influenced their relationships with students

Both teacher participants expressed similar views in discussing that religion does not have any impact on student-teacher relations. Hamid discussed that some Muslim students feel that Hamid will favour the Muslim students as a result of sharing the same religious identity with the teacher. He explained, Muslim students think “I’ll give them a little extra whatever. Five minutes more of recess or get a drink.” However, Hamid rejected being unfair to his students. He clarified to his students, “I say no to her, I say no to you. It’s the same thing,” explaining that sharing religion with the teacher does not get students advantages. His attitude of treating all his students equally demonstrates that he aims to create good relations with all his students, rather than just those that share the same religious identity as his. Hence, he stated, “I’m here for everybody.”
Furthermore, Hamid explained that he tried to meet individual students’ needs in the classroom. He stated, “I kinda view each child differently.” In focusing on each child individually, he recognized that each student learns differently; he stated, “[T]eaching this child and this child is two different things” because “everybody learns different ways.” Therefore he explained, “You can’t just stick to one way.” By this he explained that teachers cannot teach all their students through one approach. Instead it is necessary to identify each student’s learning needs to teach individual students. Thus, he explained that he puts the effort to get to know all his students. He said, “I try to get to know everybody.” From his perspective, his devotional attitude toward his students demonstrated that teachers’ religious identity did not influence the relationships he had with their relations with students. In trying to meet his students’ needs, Hamid did not feel that his religion interfered with his role as a teacher.

Ali also demonstrated similar views with Hamid in discussing that Muslim teachers’ religious identity did not interfere with the relation they have with their students. Ali explained, “I generally had great relations with students.” He discussed that his religious identity did not influence his relationships with students. He stated, “In terms of the faith, you respect everybody. It doesn’t matter what the student’s background or faith is.” In stating, “When you are hired to teach, faith doesn’t come into student relation at all,” he explained that teachers’ religious beliefs do not impact how they relate to their students. This again suggests that although he felt that students need to relate to their religious identity at school, he believed that teachers’ religious identity should not interfere with their professionalism at school.

He explained that he focused on students’ opinions, rather than ignore their voice. He felt that when teachers focus and show interest in students’ opinions, teachers have a better relation with their students because students feel more comfortable expressing their voice to the teacher.
He discussed his experience in explaining that when he focused on students and listened to them, students respect him for it. His words were, “When you listen to kids they actually respect that very much.” He demonstrated that when students ask for extra time before a test because they feel that they need more help, Ali listens to students’ voice. He stated, “When kids say, ‘Sir I just don’t get it. Can you postpone the test to the next day and can you show us one more time.’ If the majority of the class said that I would do it.” Through this example he demonstrated that students’ voice need to be listened to in order for them to feel comfortable in expressing to their teachers. If they are ignored, they are less likely to ask for assistance in the future. His attitude toward his students demonstrates his devotion to his students in aiming for his students to succeed. He also re-evaluated his teaching of the lesson when the majority of the students require further assistance, “Maybe I did something wrong”; through re-evaluating his teaching, he worked on improving his teaching skills. His students’ level of comfort with him in asking for assistance explained the good relation with his students. Consequently, his actions toward his students and his professionalism toward teaching exemplified that teachers’ religious identity has no connection in creating a professional relation with their students.

Both these teachers demonstrated that religious identity does not have any connection in the process of building relations with their students. This is because neither teacher participants discussed their religious identity to advantage or disadvantage the process of producing relations with their students. They both demonstrated working toward creating good relations with their students. Hamid discussed his behaviour of being equal to all his students and forming a good student-teacher relation with all his students, whether or not they shared the same religion as him. Ali discussed the importance of respecting students’ voice in order to build a good relation with his students. Through their discussions both teacher participants demonstrated that student-
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teacher relations are built through teachers’ devotion toward their students’ learning which has no relation to teachers’ or students’ religious identities.

4.2.2 While Ali believed that religious practices have no relation with teaching performances,

Hamid felt that the Islamic practice of fasting made it difficult to teach

In discussing how religious practices influence Muslim teachers’ teaching performances, Ali believed that religious practices should not impact teaching at all. When asked, do you reveal or disclose your religious identity with your colleagues, students, and parents, he responded, “I don’t think it’s necessary [to disclose] because it doesn’t impact how you are teaching in the classroom.” He explained that one’s beliefs and practices are part of their private life that should not be displayed in the workplace; instead religious identity and professional identity should be separated. He puts it, “You don’t share your private life in the school.” It is interesting that although he demonstrated that teachers should separate their religious identity from their professional identity at public schools, he discussed that students need to be able to relate their religious identity at their school environment.

Ali also explained that religious practices, such as Islamic prayer, do not impact his teaching. This is because, as he explained, “The prayer really lasts for 5-10 minutes,” and was consequently very short. Therefore, he did not have to miss teaching time or leave the class during teaching in order to pray. Instead, he explained that since prayer time lasts for three to four hours throughout the day, teachers can pray at their convenience. His words were, “Teachers can do it during lunch or during their prep time”; therefore, he believed that Muslim teachers’ prayers do not typically interfere with their teaching time.
Hamid shared a similar view about praying in school. He explained that it could be done during lunch time in the classroom. He demonstrated the available space for prayer in his classroom, “it’s a big room.” However, he decided to pray at home, rather than at school. He illustrated, “I do everything in the morning before I leave and then I wait till I’m home,” even if it means having to pray after the prayer time has passed. In performing his prayers at home, religious prayers for him consequently did not interfere with his teaching in anyway.

The Islamic practice of fasting during Ramadan is a factor that participants had conflicting views about when relaying their experiences. Ali explained that fasting during Ramadan did not interfere with his teaching profession. He stated, “I am so use to fasting it doesn’t make me tired or sleepy.” His experience of fasting demonstrates that getting used to fasting makes it easier for teachers to experience fasting as a non-interfering practice. In fact, he explained that during fasting, not having to think about hunger led him to work better at his teaching profession as he did not think about frequent snacks and lunch, which took up time. Instead, he was able to devote more time to his profession during fasting. His words were, “I feel more focused during fasting not to have to think about food.”

Hamid however explained his experiences of teaching during fasting differently than Ali. To Hamid, teaching can be difficult during a time of fasting. He stated, “[T]eaching throughout the day, it’s hard.” As fasting involves not eating food or drink from sunrise to sunset, his experience of classroom teaching was very difficult during fasting. He also explained that while he was working as a coach, it was particularly difficult because he was required to be constantly active. His words were, “It’s not easy. You have to keep busy.” He explained an incident in which he had the role of a referee during a game with a different school; he was required to blow the whistle during touchdown, but he found blowing the whistle is difficult during fasting.
Therefore, he explained to the students prior to the game, “[G]uys I can’t blow the whistle because there is no moisture in my mouth. So I might just yell stop or… I’ll try.” He discussed that he could not blow the whistle accurately during the touchdown, “I totally messed up the play because my mind is like… for one second … I had caused our team touchdown.” However, the students did not believe that he had difficulty focusing on the game as a result of his fasting. Therefore, he explained, “[T]hey thought I had favoured the other school. I’m like, ‘No, are you kidding?’ I just kinda lost it there for like five seconds I was in another world there.” Through this experience he explained that students doubted his intentions because he could not fulfill his professional duty to blow the whistle on time for his dehydration from fasting, which resulted to his momentary distraction. As a result, although Hamid and Ali shared similar views that religious prayer does not impact teaching, they had different experiences when it came to how fasting influences teaching.

4.3 Even if public schools reject religious discriminations, participating teachers observed religious discrimination in schools

In this section, I portray the teacher participants’ demonstration of the occurrences of racism and discrimination toward Muslims at schools as a result of their religious identity. Also, I discuss how public schools deal with religious discriminations at school.

Both the teacher participants discussed the occurrence of Islamophobia at public schools. Hamid demonstrated that although the school system discourages religious discriminations, acts of religious intolerance sometimes do still occur within schools. He discussed a Muslim student teacher who was placed at his school with a black female Christian associate teacher. The teacher
candidate wore face cover as her religious clothing. The associate teacher rejected the teacher candidate as a result of her religious clothing. He explained,

The Muslim teacher candidate that came last year and she wore burqa (a long gown that is an Islamic religious clothing), and face cover with only her eyes showing. She was placed with a teacher who claims to be this big Christian. She said, ‘I won’t take her.’ So they had to remove the teacher candidate but they told the teacher that you can’t have any more student teachers.

Not providing the Christian teacher with future student teachers was a way for the school to express their rejection toward the tolerance of religious discrimination at the school. Hamid discussed that administration and other teachers in the school rejected the Christian teacher’s racist attitude toward the student teacher. He explained,

If you look at someone and you say you don’t want them because how they dress […]. We didn’t put up with it. The teacher is still there. They just can’t fire them just like that but it’s pretty well understood. We don’t put up with that. There is not room for stuff like that… and she is black. The vice principal is black. The principal’s wife is black. So it’s not like they are discriminating against her race. That was just bad. I just couldn’t believe it when I heard.

Through this, Hamid demonstrated that in rejecting the Christian teacher of being provided with teacher candidates in the future, school administration was not discriminating the teacher for her race, but instead rejecting her attitude of discrimination toward how Muslim women dress.

Lumb (2014) also discussed that a Muslim female teacher candidate who was placed with a white associate teacher at a public school that had racist behaviour toward the Muslim teacher candidate as a result of her religious clothing, the hijab, which is the religious head cover. However, the Muslim teacher candidate continued working with the associate teacher to complete her placement, instead of receiving support for her discriminatory experiences by the associate teacher. Therefore, unlike Hamid’s school that demonstrated rejecting discriminatory
behaviour toward teacher candidates for their religious clothing, not all Muslim teacher candidates placed at public schools receive assistance for experiencing discriminations at their placements.

Ali also discussed an example of discrimination toward Muslims in the public school system. He explained Muslim students’ experiences of racist comments, by their non-Muslim teachers, as a result of their religion:

I have heard a supply teacher shouting at two Muslim students while they were playing a board game that involves killing. He started shouting, ‘you guys are terrorists.’ What kind of game are you playing?

Here, the supply teacher demonstrated his negative attitude toward Muslims in indicating that Muslim students playing the board game which involves killing will result the students to be violent. As he assumed Muslims to be already violent, through referring to the students as “terrorists,” he felt that this violent board game will make the students gain a more aggressive behaviour. Nacos and Torres-Reyna (2007) explained that western media’s negative representation of Muslims, which identifies them as terrorists, fanatical, and violent, lead westerners to gain a pessimistic view toward Muslims. Therefore, the supply teacher made the negative assumption that Muslims are naturally aggressive and violent. Thus, the supply teacher demonstrated his belief that young Muslim learners need to be prevented from playing violent games in order to prevent making their behaviours worse. Ali explained that the discriminatory behaviour of the supply teacher was rejected by administration when it was reported by “a Muslim staff who saw” the incident.

Ali also discussed, “There have been number of teachers making negative comments toward students. Some have been direct and some subtle.” By this he explained that whether
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discriminating comments are direct or indirect, they are harmful to students as students feel a sense of isolation in the classroom as a result of teachers’ negative behaviour toward students. In their study, Aroian (2012) demonstrated that non-Muslim teachers’ racist and stereotypical behaviours toward Muslim students lead Muslim student to feel humiliation in the classroom. Feeling humiliated by the teacher leads Muslim students to feel embarrassed in front of their peers and uncomfortable at their school environment. Therefore, Ali discussed that it is necessary to address the issue when students are experiencing discriminatory attitude by their teachers in order to prevent it from repeating itself.

4.4 Teacher participants believed that many Muslim students avoid reporting their experience of religious discrimination due to a fear of retaliation and its impact on their academic and emotional well-being

In this section I discuss Ali’s concern about the issue of unreported discriminations at public schools. Ali discussed that in the case in which the supply teacher made discriminatory comments in referring to two Muslim students as terrorists for playing the board game, most likely the Muslim students would have not reported the supply teacher to the principal. However, Hamid explained that since a Muslim staff was present at the scene, the incident was reported to administrators by the staff. His words were, “But there was a Muslim staff who saw and it got addressed by the principal.” Ali also discussed that there have been cases, in which Muslim students report their experiences of religious discrimination to him, as his position is the head of guidance counsellor, instead of reporting to administration. However, he explained that he does not have the power to report that information to administrators. He said,
If the teacher made racist comment students can challenge that and so can parents and take it up with the VP. Unfortunately I can’t bring that information to the principal even if I hear about it, but the student has to go to the principal.  

He discussed that unfortunately many students do not report their teachers’ discriminatory comments toward them to administration out of fear. His words were, “What happen in a lot of cases is that lot of students don’t have the confidence to bring it to the principal because they are afraid it will impact their marks. So it gets unaddressed.” Jandali (2012) also suggested that students’ experiences of religious discriminations “may go unreported by [Muslim] students out of fear of making bad situations worse” (21). Research suggested that students’ inability to express their experiences of racism at school creates a negative influence on students’ mental and emotional state of health, as well as on their academic performances at school (Buxton, Potter, Bostic, 2013).  

Ali expressed his concern about students’ mental health in explaining that students need to report their experiences of religious discriminations at school. He illustrated,  

If a teacher comments something negative about the student’s religious identity then the student should be challenging that the proper way in telling their parents or going to the principal. They should not fear the outcomes, impacting their marks.  

Through this, Ali demonstrated that in not reporting their experiences of religious discriminations by their teachers, Muslim students are less likely to see a change in their teachers’ behaviours. This results in Muslim students continuing to experience discrimination from their teachers. This is because in not being reported, non-Muslim teachers are likely to repeat the same actions again. However, in students reporting, teachers are likely to get addressed and become aware of the consequences which would lead non-Muslim teachers to become cautious about their negative attitude toward their Muslim students. Therefore, although public schools reject discriminatory attitude toward Muslim people’s religious identities in
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institutional environments, discriminations are required to be reported in order to get addressed and prevent future discriminatory experiences for Muslims in the education environment.

4.5 Both teacher participants believed that diversity among teachers is necessary but is lacking in public schools

In this section I discuss the lack of Muslim teachers in public schools as well as the significance of involving diversity among teachers in the school. I also discuss teacher participants’ views about how resemblance with the teacher assists students to cope better in the school environment at public schools. In discussing these areas, two subthemes were identified:

1) Participants believed that diversity among teachers assists students to learn about social diversity and 2) Participants believed that sharing identity affiliations with their teachers helped students to connect better with those teachers and to the school environment.

4.5.1 Participants believed that diversity among teachers assists students to learn about social diversity

Research has shown that western public schools include diverse students of various races from around the world (Lumb, 2014; Niyozov, 2010). Toronto District School Board’s (TDSB) 2006 Census data indicates that TDSB schools constitute about 35% of white students and 69% of racialized students from diverse backgrounds (Yau, O’Reilly, Rosolen, Archer, 2011). Therefore, racialized students constitute the majority of the student population in public schools. However, the lack of diversity among teacher bodies remains visible (Escayg, 2010).

Hamid and Ali both indicated that that they have very few Muslim teachers at their schools. Hamid indicated that he is the only Muslim teacher in the school and Ali stated, “I am
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one of two Muslims amongst a staff of over 80.” Hamid expressed his thought about the lack of diversity among teachers. He stated, “You can’t just be one set teaching,” explaining that schools should not have teachers that are all of one race. This is because in only including teachers that are all of one race, educational environments lack the opportunity for students to learn about social diversity at their school. Escayg (2010) explained that the lack of diversity among teachers results students to lack “the learning opportunities to benefit from the diversity that can be reflected in the teaching staff” (p. 2). This supported Hamid’s view toward the fact that students’ learning about diversity in the society develops in including teachers from diverse backgrounds, such as religious, ethnic, or racial backgrounds, in the school.

Hamid also discussed that there is a lack of Muslim teachers at public schools. As he is the only Muslim teacher at his current school, he expressed the need for more Muslim teachers in the school to teach students about Muslims. He explained that the 9/11 incident has led western society to gain a pessimistic view toward Muslims. Therefore, he stated, “I think it’s needed more now because we need to educate them on who we are,” explaining that more Muslim teachers need to be hired in public schools to teach students to overcome the pessimistic views about Muslims.

4.5.2 Participants believed that sharing identity affiliations with their teachers helped students to connect better with those teachers and to the school environment

Both the teacher participants demonstrated that students like sharing similarities with their teachers. Hamid believed that Muslim students like the resemblance with Muslim teachers as a result of sharing the same religion with the teacher. He discussed that Muslim students like having a Muslim teacher in the school to relate to. He stated, “The kids like the fact that I am
Muslim you know. Somebody just to say salamualikum (an Islamic way of greeting Muslims) to.” By this he demonstrated that even if students are not in his class, and do not share racial or ethnic similarities with him, they will still greet him religiously because there is only one Muslim teacher in the school to greet in the Islamic manner. Thus, he feels that Muslim students prefer having a Muslim teacher to resemble within the school. His words were, “I do get appreciated.” In finding the religious resemblance with the teacher, Muslim students gain a sense of belonging into the school.

Hamid also discussed that Muslim parents like seeing a Muslim teacher in the school as well. He explained that parents of his Muslim students gained comfort in feeling like their child will be treated fairly, rather than be discriminated against for his/her religion. He stated, 

[T]he parents feel safe. I can see that. Like one parent on the first of school said, ‘They got the best teacher in the school.’ I know what they mean.

He discussed that parents of Muslim students in his classroom felt they can rely on the Muslim teacher to ensure that their children will eat according to their religious constraints at school. In Islam, food that is permissible to be eaten is called halal, and food that is not permissible is called haram. Hamid explained that when haram food is presented in school, parents felt that he, as a Muslim teacher, can ensure religious observance; “They know I can say, ‘No guys, not that.’”

Hamid explained that diversity among teachers is necessary for students to find a sense of resemblance with teachers in the school in terms of race, ethnicity or religion. He expressed his views through his words, “I think it’s needed that all the teachers should represent everybody.” He further explained that seeing resemblance between themselves and a teacher in the school, assist students to gain a stronger sense of inclusion in the school environment. Students may also
feel safer and be able to connect better with a teacher that shares similar values with them, whether that is racial, religious or ethnic values. Therefore he stated, “I think every child should have a representative somewhere in school. Have someone they can go to”; through this he explains that the representative resembling the student does not necessarily have to be the student’s teacher, but a teacher who works within the school. In finding the presence of a teacher that has some similarity with students, students can gain a sense of comfort in connecting with that teacher in their school.

Ali shared a similar view with Hamid in demonstrating that when students find commonality with teachers, they engage with those teachers better. Ali believed that Muslim teachers are able to engage better with Muslim students as result of sharing the same religious identity. Since Muslim teachers share similar experiences with Muslim students related to religious discriminations, during Muslim teachers’ own school experiences, Muslim teachers are able to better understand Muslim students’ experiences. Ali explained that during his school years as a student, he had experienced discriminations by teachers based on his religion. As a result, he was able to understand the difficulties Muslim students go through in having similar experiences as Muslim students. He explained, “I heard teachers saying comments but they were subtle comments while I was in school and they were made to me.” He discussed that his goal is to prevent similar experiences for his students. Thus, he encourages his students to always report it to administration rather than ignoring it. He stated, “I always tell the students to address it to the principal.”

Lumb (2014) discussed Amna, a Muslim student teacher candidate who explained that as a result of sharing a similar ethnic background with students in the classroom, she “was able to relate to her students and understand their stories in a way that her white associate teacher could...
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not” (p. 105). This explains that in sharing similarities with students, whether that is through religion or ethnicity, teachers are able to better relate to their students. Ali also explained his ability to relate and understand the experience of students experiencing discriminations as a result of their religious identity. In stating, “I don’t want anyone to have that experience whether they are Muslim or not,” Ali demonstrated his understanding of the experience of religious discrimination as he has experienced it as well. Thus, he took initiative to assist his students deal with discriminations at school as a result of their religious identity by encouraging them to report their experiences to the principal, whether they are Muslim or not.

Ali believed that Muslim students feel more comfortable reporting religious discriminations at school to Muslim teachers in sharing the same religious identity with the teacher. He discussed that many Muslim students came to him to report discriminating issues they experience at school about Islam. He explained that even though as a teacher he cannot report it to administration as students are required to report it on their own, Muslim students continue to come to him to inform him of the incidents. He stated, “I can’t bring that information to the principal even if I hear about it.” This demonstrated that Muslim students feel a sense of freedom and comfort in sharing their experiences of religious discriminations to Muslim teachers, in comparison to administration that has non-Muslim staff, as a result of sharing the same religious identity with the teacher.

Escayg (2010) illustrated that there is no substantial research available to argue that a teacher from a similar racial, ethnic or religious background as the student is a better teacher for that student than other teachers who do not share any similarities with the student. However, both Hamid and Ali believed that Muslim students can engage better with Muslim teachers as a result of sharing the same religious identity of Islam. Ali demonstrated through his experiences
that in sharing religious similarities with the teacher, students gain a stronger level of comfort in connecting to that teacher.

4.6 Participating teachers believed that public schools make religious accommodations for school staff and students to carry out their religious values

In this section I discuss how schools provide accommodation for Muslim students and Muslim teachers as a result of their religious values. In discussing these accommodations, two subthemes were identified. They are: 1) Teacher participants experienced public schools providing space for religious practices for both teachers and students and 2) Teacher participants’ experiences demonstrate the differences between schools providing prayer space and not providing prayer space for Muslim teachers.

4.6.1 Teacher participants experienced public schools providing space for religious practices for both teachers and students

Research indicated that many public schools deny the “daily prayer requirements” for Muslims in not providing accommodations for Muslim students and teachers (Brooks, 2009, p.19). However, both the teacher participants discussed school accommodations for Muslims’ religious prayers. Hamid discussed that students and teachers are provided time to attend the mosque near the school to go and complete their religious prayer. He stated, “They go to the mosque across the street to pray. So they go and they come back.” He discussed that in the past, on Fridays when the mandatory prayer of the week took place, called Zumma prayer, the school provided a prayer room for students and teachers. However, the space is not provided currently because of school construction which led to limited spacing in the school; therefore space is not
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currently available for the school to provide prayer spaces, which is a temporary situation. His words were, “We haven’t started this year yet but they will start soon.” As a result, he explained that students do not have to miss their religious prayer because school provides time to attend the mosque and soon will be provided with space in the school as well.

Hamid discussed that because the school is so highly populated with Muslim students, there is barely any other religious prayer space requested by students or staff. Thus, there is room provided for only Muslims to complete their religious prayer. He stated, “If another group wanted to do something I guess we would probably do the same.” Through this he explained that the school would be open to others’ request for space for diverse religious practices.

Similarly, Ali also discussed that his school provided space for teachers and students to do their religious prayers. He discussed the “multi faith room” in which all students and staff can go to complete their religious prayers. This room is open to staff and students of all religions, not just Muslims. Through his teaching experiences, he stated that “most schools have this room now”; by this he explained that most public schools provide rooms for students and staff to complete their religious prayers. Consequently, both participants explained that public schools provide prayer spaces for students and teachers for which it is not difficult to perform religious practices for the Muslim population within in the school.

4.6.2 Teacher participants’ experiences demonstrate the differences between schools providing prayer space and not providing prayer space for Muslim teachers

Although both teachers explained that they practice religious prayers in their daily lives, however, it seemed that whether there is space provided in the school makes an impact on their level of comfort in praying at school. In the school in which Hamid is currently working, prayer
space was available in the past, but it is no longer provided from the year 2015. Hamid explained about when it was available, “The prayer room was only available for Friday prayers” as Friday prayer is the mandatory prayer of the week in Islam. Even if a room being provided to perform prayers was discontinued, Muslim students and teachers are provided time by the school on Fridays to attend the mosque that is located close to the school.

In comparison, Ali discussed that the “Multi faith room” is reserved all day throughout the week only for prayers. Thus, Muslims can perform their prayer anytime they wanted to. He explained, it is a room “where anybody can come and use it” for religious purpose. Therefore, people felt very conformable is entering and performing their prayers in the room.

When Hamid is asked, if he was uncomfortable praying in the school when space was provided, he responded, “No, I was fine. And when we had the Friday groups, it was good to be with the kids.” Through this he demonstrated that while space was provided, he was able to perform prayers comfortably in the school. He also explained a level of unity among Muslims in performing prayer together in the school. Currently, although Hamid discussed that time is provided for teachers and students to attend the mosque to perform only Friday prayers, however, there is no specific room provided for Muslims to pray in the school. Hamid implied that he can pray in his classroom during lunch hour but he is uncomfortable doing so as his colleagues may come in. Referring to his room he explained, “I know here it’s a big room but like it’s different in the classroom because teachers and others like to come at lunch time.” As a result of feeling discomfort, in praying in his classroom he stated, “I don’t pray in the school.” For the lack of prayer rooms being provided in the school for religious prayers, Hamid demonstrated his level of discomfort, and a sense of isolation, in performing daily religious prayers at the school. He felt a sense of freedom to perform his prayer at school when a room
was provided in the past. In discussing that he is uncomfortable toward his colleagues coming in while he is praying, he expressed his sense of having to hide his religious practice of praying from his colleagues. As a result he stated, “I do everything in the morning before I leave and then I wait till I’m home.”

Unlike Hamid, Ali discussed that he prays at the school on a daily basis. As a result of being provided with a prayer room for Muslims to access at any time during the week, Ali demonstrated his level of comfort in praying within the school. He stated, “The prayer really lasts for 5-10 minutes,” explaining that the prayer time is convenient as it is very short. Therefore, teachers can perform their prayer in the Multi faith room at their convenience in order to pray.

The experiences of Hamid and Ali explained that whether there is space provided by the school for Muslims to perform their prayer, influenced Muslim teachers’ religious practices within the school. When there was space provided in the school for Muslims to pray, Ali’s discussions demonstrated that Muslim teachers were comfortable praying in the school. However, when space was not provided, Hamid’s attitude demonstrated that Muslim teachers felt a sense of discomfort in performing their religious prayers in the school. His attitude also demonstrated that even in finding a space on their own, to pray in the school, such as their individual classroom, when school does not provide prayer rooms, Muslim teachers may choose to not perform their prayers in feeling a sense of isolation in performing religious prayers by themselves. This is because Hamid’s discussion showed that when there was room provided by the school for Muslims to pray in, he liked attending the room and seeing other Muslims performing prayers. However, in having to pray by himself at his own classroom, he chose not to pray at all in the school as a result of feeling uncomfortable and isolated.
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The experiences of both the teacher participants explained that in being provided with space in the school to perform prayers, Muslim teachers gained a sense of freedom to pray at their convenience. However, when there was a lack of specific space for teachers to attend and pray, teachers chose not to pray in the school. Perhaps this is because in schools providing specific prayer space for all Muslims to share, Muslim teachers felt a sense of welcoming by the school to perform religious prayer. However, in having to pray alone at their classroom led teachers to feel like there is a lack of welcoming for prayers within the school; thus, Hamid gained a need to hide his prayer in the school.

4.7 Participants were comfortable revealing their religious identity at their workplace and predominantly felt supported by their non-Muslim colleagues

In this section I discuss how Muslim teachers were impacted at their workplace in making their religion visible. I indicate that both participants discussed receiving respect and support for their religious value of fasting. I also review the literature to discuss to the area of how Muslim teachers’ emotional estate is positively influenced in terms of working at an environment where they feel accepted for their religious identity.

Both teacher participants discussed that their religious identity is visible on its own without them having to state it to their colleagues and students at their teaching institutions. Hamid explained that even if he does not put an effort to look like a Muslim, such as through his clothing, his religious identity becomes visible through his name. His words were, “I don’t really dress like one [but] once I say my name then they’re like ‘oh’”; here the “oh” response from people implied their recognition of Hamid’s religious identity through his name. He explained
that this is because his name was an obvious Muslim name; therefore, his name made his religious identity visible.

Ali also discussed that his religious identity is visible through his name. He explained, “I think my name visibilizes that I’m Muslim.” Thus, he felt that he did not have to mention his religious identity as it is visible by his name that is a common Muslim name. He discussed that his appearance of his short beard may also make his religion visible. He said, “I don’t say out loud that I am Muslim but I think it’s visible by my appearance, my beard, which seems to be the fashion these days.”

Although both participants felt that their religious identity may be visible without it being stated, they both expressed being comfortable in making their identity visible at their workplace. Ali explained that he felt comfortable sharing his religious identity with his student. He stated, “[I]f students ask, I don’t have a problem telling them.” Similarly, Hamid discussed that he did not try to hide his religious identity at his workplace. He said, “I just let them know that I am Muslim.” Hamid also explained that with a large number of Muslim students at his school, he is frequently greeting the Muslims students in the Islamic manner which indicates his religious identity. He said, “[A]ll day long I’m saying salamualikum.” By this he demonstrated that he did not need to mention his religious identity; everyone at school knew through his words of greeting to the Muslim students in the school. Thus, he stated, “I don’t boast it that I am but it comes up.” By this he explained that even without stating his religion, his greeting manner toward Muslims reveal his religious identity to all the students, teachers and staff in the school.

Both teachers discussed that they received support and respect for their religious identity from their colleagues. Hamid discussed that during Ramadan, his colleagues showed a lot of respect toward his religious value of fasting. He stated, “They had a lot of respect for it.” He
discussed that out of respect, some of the colleagues tried fasting over the weekend just to try it out. He explained, “Sometimes they might try it on the weekend at home because they wanna see what it feels like. And then they’re like ‘I don’t know how you do that.’” Through this he explained that in not being able to fast, even over the weekend at home, his colleagues understood the experience of fasting better and in result respected his practice of fasting more.

Similarly, Ali also discussed that his colleagues show respect toward his religious identity. He explained one incident in which his colleague held a party but did not invite Ali. The colleague explained to Ali that this is because he thought Ali may feel uncomfortable at the party as there will be drinking involved. He also explained that he is aware that Ali did not like to attend pubs and did not drink alcohol for his religious values. Ali demonstrated, “Sometimes at Christmas party some colleagues come and tell me that ‘I didn’t invite you because I know you don’t drink so I didn’t want to offend you.’ And I said ‘I appreciate you telling me that.’” Here, Ali showed that he appreciated his colleague’s action toward him in considering Ali’s religious values in not inviting him to the Charismas party. Consequently, both the teacher participants explained that they received support and respect for their religious identity from their colleagues.

In gaining support and respect from their colleagues, both teachers had a good relation with their colleagues. As a result of their feeling of being accepted by the school staff for their religious identity, both teachers gained a sense of freedom to practice their religious values at their workplace. Pajak and Blasé (1989) explained that studies show that teachers’ emotional conditions improve when they are able to connect their personal life, such as religion, at their workplace. These teachers were reported as happy and satisfied teachers. They were also reported as teachers that gained a sense of “enjoyment” in working at their workplace (p.298). As a result of feeling enjoyment at his workplace, Hamid expressed that even if he leaves this
current school for some time, to work at other schools, he always returned to this school. His words are, “[T]his is my fourth times back here. I always leave…come back. I try somewhere else and then come back here.” This explained that respect from his colleagues toward his religious identity led him to enjoy working at his current school. For this reason he returned to this school as he felt happy and satisfied working at this school. Thus he stated, “I prefer it over any other places,” explaining that he enjoyed working at his current school, over other schools that he has taught in, as he gained a sense of support and respect from his colleagues for his religious identity. Similarly, Ali also discussed that his colleague’s consideration of his religious values of not drinking led him to not invite him to the Christmas party. This led Ali to gain a sense of enjoyment in working with such colleagues that demonstrated positive attitude toward Ali’s religious identity in acting respectful toward Ali’s religious values.

Research indicated that many Muslim teachers try to hide their religious identity as long as possible at their teaching institutions (Brooks, 2009). This is because Brooks discussed Natalie (Brooks, 2014) and Amy (Brooks, 2009), two Muslim teachers that worked at public schools in the North America, explained that in revealing their religious identity they experienced isolation from their co-workers and administrators. However, both Hamid and Ali discussed their experiences of revealing their religious identities to be different than that of Natalie and Amy. Hamid and Ali discussed experiencing respect and support from their colleagues, rather than isolation, as a result of their religious identity. This explained that when Muslim teachers experience isolation at their workplace in revealing their religious identity, they are likely to continue to try to hide their identity. However, when Muslim teachers gained support at their workplace, such as Hamid and Ali, they felt conformable in revealing their religion to their colleagues and students at school.
4.8 Participants reported that they experienced more religious discrimination in their workplace since 9/11

In this section I discuss that Muslim teachers have difficulty continuing to work in schools where they experience discriminations toward their religious identity. Through teachers’ discussions, I explore how Muslim teachers are impacted as a result of the September 11, 2001 incident at U.S. I also discuss how non-Muslim colleagues challenge Muslim teachers regarding Islamic practices. Here I have identified two subthemes. They are, 1) The incident of September 11, 2001 has led Muslim teachers to experience difficulties working at public schools and 2) Muslim teachers find it difficult to work in environments where teachers and staff hold discriminatory attitudes toward Muslims.

4.8.1 The incident of September 11, 2001 has led Muslim teachers to experience difficulties working at public schools

Hamid discussed that the event of 9/11 has made the experience of being a Muslim teacher difficult. He explained that when 9/11 occurred, he was at a different city, working at a different school board, teaching grades 7 and 8. He explained that when the community realized that he is Muslim, he could no longer stay there with his family nor work at the school as a result of the discriminations toward his religious identity. He discussed his experience,

[The community] never really grasped that we were Muslims until that day. Until 9/11. Then they all realized. The whole community realized. Hey, these guys are Muslim […] Like you loved us for three years, didn’t know anything. And now its 9/11 and whole different ball game. We ended up moving to Oshawa. It got very difficult. We stayed there for only five years. My plan was to live there.
Through this he expressed that the incident of 9/11 led everyone at his community to become aware of his and his family’s religious identity, which led them to experience difficulty residing and teaching at that location as a result of stereotypes and discriminations toward their religious identity. Although he had initially planned to reside at a different city and work at a different school board for a longer period of time, the 9/11 incident led him to gain the need to leave his teaching job and move from that location with his family. Consequently, he stated, “Once 9/11 hit, we’re all terrorists.” This is because the incident of 9/11 led westerners to compare all Muslims people to relate to those that have cause the 9/11 incident. As a result, it became difficult for Muslims to reside and work at public schools in many places. Thus, Hamid stated, “After 9/11, as a Muslim in some places it got harder to be a teacher.” He discussed that this is because Muslim teachers were experiencing discriminations for their religious identity as a result of the 9/11 incident.

Similarly, Ahmed (2014), who identifies himself as a Muslim, explained that after the event of September 11, 2001, it became more challenging to be a Muslim in Canada. He discussed his experience as a student teacher shortly after the 9/11 incident: he received “the silent treatment” and “negative comments about Islam” from other teachers at a Canadian school in Saskatchewan (p. 3). This explains that after 9/11 it became more difficult to work in Canada for Muslim teachers as they experienced more religious discriminations at schools.

4.8.2 Participating teachers find it difficult to work in environments where teachers and staff hold discriminatory attitudes toward Muslims

Hamid discussed that he quit working at one school to work at a different school as a result of a discriminatory environment. In revealing his religious identity at a public school that
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he quit working at, he explained that he experienced school staff treating him differently. He explained the workplace, “[T]he principal there wouldn’t acknowledge black history month. And then come to find my religion…it just wasn’t going over well.” In explaining that the principal did not acknowledge black history month, he believed this was evidence that the environment was racist. As Hamid’s race is black, he experienced racism as a result of his race. Then, when the school learned about his religion, he explained that he experienced more discriminatory attitudes from school staff. Thus, he demonstrated that it was not going well. Therefore, he left his teaching position at the school. Hamid discussed that even one teacher who holds a negative attitude toward Muslims makes it difficult for Muslim teachers to work in that environment. His words were, “Even one teacher who is against you is too much.”

Ali discussed that one of his colleagues demonstrated pessimistic views toward Islamic values. He explained that his colleague established biased assumptions about Islam. He illustrated,

My colleague once said, ‘I don’t have a problem with your religion but I do have a problem with your book Quran because your Quran orders you to kill me.’ I asked him what verse is that. And he said, ‘I don’t know, I heard it from a friend.’

By this, Ali explained that through an unjustified statement, his colleague was making assumptions about Islamic values which discriminated the practices of Muslim people’s religious norms. Ali demanded proof for his colleague’s statement to clarify to his colleague that it was a false assumption. Therefore, he stated to his colleague, “[O]nce you find this verse in the book let’s talk about it”; however, Hamid explained that his colleague “never came back because he never found it.” Through this discussion, Ali explained that it is necessary to know your religion well as a Muslim teacher because non-Muslim colleagues do challenge you about your religion
in asking questions about your religious practices. His advice to new Muslim teachers were, “Learn about your faith so you are able to explain things better because there are going to be questions that come into your way because of what the media is projecting out there.” By this he explained that the media is presenting a negative ideology about Muslims, which lead non-Muslims to gain a pessimistic view toward Muslim people and Islamic values. Therefore, non-Muslim colleagues working at school have a lot of questions about Islam that Muslim teachers come across.

Research indicated that western societies have produced knowledge about Muslims primarily through media (Byng, 2010). Unfortunately, media’s representation of Muslims is negative (Lumb, 2014; Falah, 2005); therefore, non-Muslims in the west gain a misleading negative understanding of Muslims which disadvantages Muslim people residing and working in the west, such as Muslim teachers of public school. For this reason, Ali explained that teachers come across challenges at their workplace as a result of their religious identity.

The 9/11 incident resulted Muslim teachers to experience difficulty in teaching in many schools; for this, Hamid discussed that he left his workplace as a result of a discriminatory environment. Ali’s experience also demonstrated that the result of 9/11 has led non-Muslims to produce pessimistic ideologies about Islamic values. Both teacher participants’ experiences clarify that Muslim teachers experience the disadvantage of coming across stereotypical assumptions toward their religious faith and values at their workplace.

4.9 Conclusion

Through conducting the two interviews, I have found that both Muslim teacher participants are concerned about the lack of religion at school as this lack leads students
to experience difficulty in finding connections between their religious identity and their academic education; as well as this lack of mixture leads many Muslim students to leave public school to attend Islamic private schools. In inquiring about how Muslim teachers’ religion impacts their teaching, in terms of the relation between their religious practices and their teaching performances, I have found that Islamic religious prayer does not necessarily impact in teachers’ profession as teachers can pray during their lunch hour or prep time. However, fasting during Ramadan is experienced differently by the two teachers; while Ali discusses that fasting does not interfere with his teaching, Hamid discussed teaching to be difficult during fasting. Both teachers agreed that their religious identity has no impact in the process of their professional relation with their students. I have learned that public schools are non-tolerant of religious discriminations, but only when it is brought to the attention of administrators. Through conducting the interviews, I have learned about Muslim teachers’ views about the importance of diversity among teachers. I came to learn about the religious accommodations provided for students and teachers at public schools in respect to their religious beliefs and practices. I have also learned that Muslim teachers gain an enjoyable teaching experience in working with colleagues that are respective and supportive toward the religious practices of Muslim teachers.

Despite receiving support from their non-Muslim colleagues for Muslim teachers’ religious values, and public schools’ rejection toward religious discriminations, I have found that Muslim teachers continue to experience stereotypes and discriminations at their workplace as a result of their religious identity. Therefore, many Muslim teachers, such as the research participant Ali, may prefer working at Islamic private schools as it is
a discriminatory free environment toward their religious identity, as all the teachers and students share the same religion. However, the low income of Islamic private schools leads Muslim teachers to experience difficulty in continuing to work at private schools.

In comparison to the literature reviewed in chapter 2, these participants’ experiences explain that welcoming Muslim teachers’ religious identity in public schools is improving. The two teacher participants interviewed for this research study expressed that many of their non-Muslim colleagues are becoming more and more respectful toward their religious values. In relation to the existing literature, the teacher participants’ experiences provide a more detailed report of Muslim teachers’ self-reported experiences working in public schools in Canada.

In chapter 5, I will speak to the significance of my findings for me as a beginner teacher, as well as for the educational research community. I will also identify areas for future research, given what I have found, and make recommendations based on my findings.
Chapter 5: IMPLICATIONS

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the implications of my research findings that seek to investigate the relation between Muslim teachers’ religious identity and their professional identity. I start by giving the overview of my key findings. Then, I speak to the implications of the education community and my own practice. I then articulate some recommendations and areas for future research.

5.1 Overview of key findings and their significance

The main research question in this study interrogated the relationship between Muslim teacher’s religious identity and their professional identity. I interviewed two teachers and found that Muslim teachers' religious identity influences their professional identity in some areas. These teachers reported that their religious identity did not interfere with their relations with their students (either Muslim and non-Muslim students), however they did report that their religious identity interfered with their relations with their non-Muslim colleagues. Furthermore, even if these Muslim teachers’ religious practice of prayer did not interfere with their teaching time, teaching while fasting during Ramadan was experienced differently by different teachers. This is because although Ali discussed that fasting does not interfere with his teaching, Hamid explained that he experiences difficulty teaching during fasting time as he feels weak from hunger and dehydration. Research (Ahmed, 2014) indicated that Muslim teachers experience religious discriminations at public school in Canada as a result of their religious identity. Both the Muslim teachers that I interviewed also reported that although
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public schools do not tolerate religious discriminations in educational institutions, both the participants experienced religious discriminations as a result of their identity. Hamid, for example, discussed leaving his work at a public school as a result of experiencing religious discriminations from the school principle. Ali discussed coming across colleagues who holds prejudiced assumptions about Islamic values. The literature review indicated that the event of September 11, 2001 has led the norms and values of Islam to become misunderstood by mainstream westerners (Byng, 2010; Moore, 2006). This misunderstanding leads Muslim teachers to experience greater difficulty in working at public schools in Canada (Ahmed, 2014). Therefore, Ali demonstrated that it is important to separate Muslim teachers’ religious faith and their profession because his overall sense was that the expression of religious identity by teachers was not welcome in schools.

Even if the literatures reviewed in chapter 2 indicated that Muslim teachers continue to experience religious discriminations working in public schools (Brooks, 2014; Brooks, 2009), the two teacher participants interviewed for this research study reported that many non-Muslim teachers and administrators have begun to demonstrate supportive attitudes toward Muslim teachers’ religious identities and values. Thus, research findings suggest that these Muslim teachers’ experience of discriminations toward their religious identity is improving as they continue to receive support and respect from their non-Muslim colleagues at public schools.

5.2 Implications

To improve the experiences of Muslim teachers and Muslim students in public schools, changes need to occur within schools. The research findings I have come across have
implications for a range of stakeholders, such as school boards, teacher and administrators, ministry policy, teacher education need to be influenced. In this section I discuss the implications of my findings for the educational community and for me as a teacher and a researcher.

5.2.1 The Educational Research Community

School boards

Both research participants explained that they have very few Muslim teachers and/or administrators within the school. Hamid indicated that even if the majority of students were Muslims in his school, he was the only Muslim teacher in the school. Similarly, Ali reported that even if there were some Muslim students at his school, he was the only one of two Muslims amongst a staff of over 80 people at his school. As students in Canadian public schools are becoming more diversified, diversity among teachers and administrators within schools can assist to develop students’ learning (Escayg, 2010; Lumb, 2014). Therefore, including more Muslim teachers/administrators in the school system, especially in those schools that has majority of Muslim students, can assist Muslim students to find resemblance with teachers and gain a sense of welcoming of their religious identity within their schools.

In reporting that they are one of very few teachers that are Muslims, both Hamid and Ali express a feeling of isolation working in environments which has a majority with non-Muslim teachers and administrators. Thus, school board’s decision to increase more Muslim teachers in schools could help alleviate the feeling of isolation that some Muslim teachers experience in Canadian public schools in relation to their religious identity. This is because in finding similarities in religious identities, Muslim teachers can gain support from each other that may assist them to gain a better teaching experience working in public schools.
Teachers and Teacher Education

Both research participants experienced religious discriminations at their workplace. Hamid demonstrated that some non-Muslim teachers reject working with Muslim student teachers as a result of student teachers’ choice of religious clothing in burqa and niqab. Ali reported that his colleague made negative assumptions in stating that the Muslim religious book, the Quran suggests practicing hatred toward non-Muslims. In order for Muslim teachers to improve their experiences working at public schools, it is necessary that non-Muslim teachers demonstrate positive attitude toward Muslim people’s values in order to prevent making negative comments toward their Muslim colleagues. Therefore, it is important to prepare and support teachers in the area of understanding Islamophobia and developing their understanding of Islam. This could be implemented in teacher education for preservice teachers to acknowledge and practice positive attitude toward their Muslim colleagues throughout their teaching career. This may assist non-Muslim teachers to prevent making discriminatory assumptions toward Islamic values, which in result may gain Muslim teachers a less discriminatory experience working in public schools.

Administrators

Hamid reported that although he can choose to pray in the privacy of his classroom, he chooses to pray at home to prevent making his religious practices visible. Hamid demonstrated that he would feel comfortable praying within the school if prayer space was provided for Muslims to pray in. Research indicated that public schools that deny Muslim teachers the opportunity to practice their daily prayer lead Muslim teachers to lack an enjoyable experience working at their profession (Brooks, 2009). Ali clarified this through his discussions; he reported that his school had a Multi-prayer room in which Muslim teachers and students could choose to
attend and pray at their convenience. Having space provided to pray within the school led him feel comfortable and welcomed in practicing his religious values on a daily basis at his workplace. In their leadership positions, administrators have the opportunity to demonstrate an attitude of welcoming Islamic religious practices by providing areas and time for Muslims within the school to pray at their convenience. In providing prayer rooms for Muslim teachers to practice their religious values, schools can assist Muslim teachers to gain a better sense of feeling welcomed for their religious identity at public schools.

5.2.2 Professional Identity and Practice

As a Muslim who is practicing to become a teacher in the near future at public schools, conducting the interviews and hearing about the experiences of the two research participants have given me a sense of what my experiences may be like working in public schools. Their experiences have taught me that although my colleagues and administrators may be accommodating and welcoming toward my religious identity, I may experience limitations within these accommodations such as limited space and time for prayers and minimal or no accommodations during Ramadan.

In beginning my career as a teacher, I will keep in mind what my research participants advised; Hamid advised, "Just be yourself and they will see you for who you are." With this advice I will remember not to fear exposing my religious identity at schools. Ali suggested, "Know your religion because it will come up." With Ali’s advice I will remember that I may experience negative attitudes and discriminatory assumptions and questions from my colleagues for my religious identity and I can be prepared to respond to these instances. Having learned this,
I can prepare for taking the appropriate approach at the occurrence of religious discriminatory circumstances in a professional manner.

I have learned through this research that student-teacher relations are built upon individual teaching approaches, which has no correlation with teachers’ religious identity. Having learned this through the research participants, I feel a stronger sense of courage in feeling that my religious identity is likely to not come in play with my building professional relations with my students. Thus, I feel less hesitant about how non-Muslim students may approach me as a result of my religious identity. Instead of worrying about my religious identity becoming an issue in developing strong professional relations with my students, I feel I can focus on developing my teaching skills in creating an inclusive learning environment for all my students. This can assist me in gaining students’ respect and in creating professional relations with my students.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on what I learned through my research findings, here I make recommendations for school boards, teachers and administrators with the hope that these actions will improve the experiences of Muslim teachers working in public schools. My recommendations are as follows:

- It is important that when hiring, school boards attend to the significance of diverse representation of teachers across a range of ethnico-cultural, linguistic, and religious identities. It is also important that these considerations figure into decisions regarding advancement in terms of administrator positions in order to include more Muslim bodies in the working positions at public schools.
- Teacher education can implement topics of religious diversity, including Islamophobia, to teach preservice teachers about various religions and religious practices. Learning about religious diversity through teacher education can assist preservice teachers to develop positive attitudes toward religious diversity among their students and their colleagues.

- When holding seminars for teachers to demonstrate the importance of respecting colleagues, school boards need to emphasize on the areas of creating a safe and non-discriminatory working environment for all teachers despite their religious or ethnic differences.

- A concrete action that schools and administrators can take would be to allocate physical space for prayer for students and teachers across a range of faith traditions.

### 5.4 Areas for further research

Based on my findings, here I make suggestions for areas of future research that can help to develop this research topic. Currently, there is very little research available about Muslim teachers expressing their experiences working in Canadian public schools. Further research on this topic will be required to implement strategies to improve Muslim teachers’ experiences working in public schools in Canada. Although this research project conducted two interviews with Muslim teachers that are both males, Muslim females’ teaching experiences are not visible in this research. Including Muslim female participants to compare and contrast the experiences with Muslim male teachers can develop this research in identifying if gender experiences differentiate among Muslim teachers working in public schools.

Neither Hamid’s nor Ali’s religious identity is visible through their appearances. Conducting interviews with Muslim teachers whose religious identity is visible through their
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appearances, such as female teachers who wear religious clothing, the hijab, burqa or niqab, and Muslim men who have long beards and wear a religious hat worn my Muslim men, can assist this research in identifying if religious clothing has any relation with the experiences of Muslim teachers in working at public schools.

Both the teacher participants interviewed for this study work in schools with diverse populations of students. Thus, this research is missing the component of Muslim teachers’ experiences working in non-diverse population among students. Hence, research about the experiences of Muslim teachers working in schools with non-diversity among student population can be used to analyse the relations between Muslim teachers’ experiences working in schools with diverse and non-diverse student population. Both research participants indicated that they are either the only one or one of two Muslim teachers at their schools.

This research is based on teacher participants that have one or no Muslim colleagues at their school. My suggestion for future research is to investigate the experiences of Muslim teachers that have at least 3-5 Muslim colleagues within their school. This can help to identify how Muslim teachers’ experiences differentiate when they have colleagues that share their religious identity in relation to experiences of Muslim teachers who do not have colleagues that share their religious identity.

5.5 Concluding Comments

This research project has provided me the opportunity to grow as a teacher and a researcher. In inquiring about the how Muslim teachers’ religious identity impacts their professional identity, through conducting interviews with Hamid and Ali, I have come to learn about Muslim teachers’ experiences working in public schools in Canada. My research findings
reveal that although our multicultural society has come a long way in overcoming discriminatory attitudes, current issues of Islamophobia portrayed through media can still impact mainstream westerners’ attitude toward Muslims. This in result can have a negative impact on Muslim teachers’ and Muslim students’ experiences in public schools in Canada. Although it may be a long while before Muslim teachers experience a complete discriminatory free environment within public schools, I am hopeful to have learned that both Hamid and Ali have gained confidence and comfort in revealing their religious identity at their workplace as a result of the support they received from their schools and colleagues.
References


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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying the relationship between religious and professional identity for a small sample of Muslim elementary or secondary public school teachers for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 45 – 60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only other person who will have access to my assignment work will be my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,
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Researcher name:  Umme Salma

Phone number:  (416) 454-2165

Email:  usalmaak@hotmail.com

Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic

Phone number:  Email:  angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by ______________________(name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to having the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: __________________________________________

Name (printed):  _________________________________

Date:  ______________________
Appendix B – Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This research study aims to learn about the experiences of Muslim elementary or secondary teachers working in public schools. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes. I will ask you questions about your experiences as a teacher and how your religious identity correlates with your profession. I want to remind you that you may choose to not answer any question you feel uncomfortable answering. Do you have questions before we begin?

**Interview questions**

**Background information**

1. To start, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
   a. Where were you born, raised, and educated?
   b. If born outside of Canada, how long have you lived in Canada?
   c. For how many years have you been a teacher? Have you been a teacher elsewhere (outside of Canada)? If yes, where and for how long?
   d. What grades and subject areas do you teach? What grades and subjects have you previously taught?
   e. Can you describe for me the school you currently work in? (e.g. size, demographics, program priorities)
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f. Do you fulfill any other roles in the school in addition to your role as a classroom teacher? If yes, what role(s)? (e.g. coach, advisor, councillor, leader)

Teacher Beliefs and Perspectives

2. In your view, what role if any does, and/or should, religion have in schools?

3. In your experience, how is religion observed in schools? Which religions? (*probe re: the formal versus informal curriculum)

4. In your perspective, how do students’ religious identities impact their experience of schooling and learning?

5. Do you believe it is important for teachers to disclose their religious identities with colleagues, students, and parents? Why/why not?

6. What does it mean to you to be a teacher?

7. How would you describe your professional identity?

Teacher Practices and Experiences

8. As you are aware, one criterion that you fulfilled for participation in this interview is that you self-identify as a Muslim teacher. Can you tell me what your identity as a Muslim means to you?

9. Do you disclose your identity as a Muslim in school?
   a. Why / why not?
   b. If applicable, to whom do you disclose this aspect of your identity and why?
   c. If applicable, how do you disclose your religious identity to various stakeholders?
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10. Do you believe disclosing or your decision to reveal your religion affects you in your teaching in any way? If yes, in what way? If no, why not? (e.g. professional practice, professional relationships, relationships with parents, attitude toward teaching)

11. In your experience, does your religious identity influence your relationships with students? If yes, how? If no, why not?

12. Have you encountered Muslim students experiencing conflicts in school as a result of their religion? If yes, how do you respond? How do other teachers in the school respond to these incidences? (including Muslim and non-Muslim teachers)

13. In your experience, do you feel that your religious identity influences your relationship with students’ parents? If yes, how? If no, why not?

14. In your experience, do you feel that your religious identity influences your relationship with colleagues? If yes, how? If no, why not?

15. Do you perform religious prayer within the school? If yes, how do you balance between your religious practices and your teaching profession? Do you feel comfortable praying in the school? Are you provided with areas to pray in the school?

16. Do you fast during Ramadan? If yes, please explain your experiences during Ramadan.
   a) Do you attend the staffroom during Ramadan?
   b) How do your colleagues respond to your fasting?

17. In what ways, if any, do you believe your religious identity is an asset to your professional identity as a teacher?

18. In what ways do you believe your religious identity can be a hindrance or barrier?

Challenges and Supports
19. Have you encountered challenges in your professional identity as a result of your religious identity? If yes, please explain. How do you respond to these challenges?

20. What range of factors and resources support your experience as a Muslim teacher?

21. Do you feel that your teaching experience would be different if your religion was different? Please explain.

22. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers who are Muslim and who are unsure how they will navigate the relationship between their religious and professional identities?

Thank you for your time and participation.