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PATTERNS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AMONG MUSLIM REFUGEE YOUTH:

THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN THE TRUMP ERA

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Dedication

In loving memory of my grandmother, Delores Charmaine Thorton Cureton, and aunts, Vicki Lynn Cureton and Teresa Wheaton: Your love will not be forgotten, and your memory will always be cherished.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my mother, Carol Lynn Brown, for encouraging me to pursue my wildest dreams. I could not have accomplished one of my biggest aspirations without your constant love and support.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my research participants. Their story is our story.

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Abstract

The United States refugee resettlement program has been among the largest in the world, welcoming over 3 million refugees since 1975. The past decade has seen an increase in the number of refugee youth entering the United States; thus, schools are among the most influential institutions for newly arrived refugee youth and their families. Despite their significance, little prior research has examined refugees' classroom and out-of-school time (OST) experiences; their levels of academic and social engagement; and the role of parental involvement, community organizations, teachers, and other school staff in their adjustment and success.

Drawing on interviews with 47 students (ages 13–17) and their parents, this study examines patterns of student engagement among Muslim refugee youth and their families in Chicago. It provides empirical evidence of refugee families' experiences of schooling in the United States, their perceptions of the social context, and their support needs. In terms of cognitive engagement, students conveyed an investment in learning English to excel in class and develop peer relationships. Related to behavioral engagement, Muslim refugee youth shared concerns around active class participation due to lack of confidence in their accents and acquired languages as well as an unfamiliarity and general discomfort with classroom, school-based norms in a U.S. context. Students described mixed feelings around their own emotional engagement with school, citing numerous examples of bullying and discrimination from teachers, school staff, and peers.

Data analysis reveals that parental involvement included a welcoming and inclusive environment cultivated by school administrators, staff, and teachers who shared racial and ethnic similarities to the refugee families. Barriers to their involvement included a lack of English language proficiency; a lack of parents' understanding of their need to be involved even if their

children performed well academically; and discrimination and xenophobia instigated against their children, which caused parents to develop a level of distrust in the school leadership and staff and to disengage with the schools. Related to OST engagement, data analysis reveals that refugee boys are typically involved in sports-based programs while girls engaged in arts-based programs to reinforce their feelings of nostalgia for their countries of origin. Favored OST activities included programs offering academic support and homework assistance, encouraging refugee youths' engagement both civically and politically in their schools and communities, and promoting their cultural and ethnic identities.

A major resource for school social workers, mental health specialists, and other stakeholders, this research augments understanding of the experiences of Muslim refugee youth and their families and sheds light on the challenges, needs, and vulnerabilities of this understudied population.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Education gave me the strength to carry on. I wouldn't be here without it." – Syrian refugee and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Muzoon Almellehan

When Saarah Awad was 10 years old, she resided in Aleppo, Syria, with her parents, Oman and Fatimah, and two older sisters, Amara and Tamur. She had a peaceful childhood, often helping her mother cook shawarma, grilled chicken, and zesty salads. She was very close to her older sisters, often playing with dolls and reading short stories with them. Saarah loved attending school, and her favorite subjects were reading and math. She also loved connecting with her friends during recess. Due to her affinity for helping people, she desired to become a nurse one day.

On May 8, 2014, Saarah's parents told her and her sisters that they would be leaving Aleppo due to the increased political turmoil and civil unrest there. Oman and Fatimah were concerned that the conflict in Syria between citizens and the government would cause harm to her family, similar to other families in their network who were harmed by the intense fighting. On the following evening, Saarah and her family members each grabbed a large duffle bag with little more than the clothes on their backs, leaving behind their home, their possessions, their jobs, and their loved ones in search of refuge.

The Awads decided to flee to Amman, Jordan, because of familial connections. They only intended to stay there for a few weeks before returning to Syria. However, as the civil war rages on, millions of people, like the Awads, have been displaced to neighboring countries like Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. Like many of them, the Awads were unable to return to home. In Jordan, the Awads lived in a one-bedroom apartment with another family who had four children. It was an extremely cramped space with Saarah sharing a bed with five other children. Unfortunately, Saarah and her sisters were unable to attend the local school since it was full to capacity, so they often helped their mother sell jewelry in the market or read books with other Syrian children.

The Awad family was eventually referred to the United States for resettlement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). They lived in Jordan for three years before the referral was granted. After registering with the UNHCR to determine their vulnerability and eligibility to resettle in the United States, the Awads' case was processed by staff from the Resettlement Support Center (RSC) to ensure that they fell within the U.S.-designated priorities for processing. The family was later prepared by RSC staff to interview with refugee offices from the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (DHS/USCIS). After DHS/USCIS approved their case, the RSC provided the Awads with a cultural orientation about life in the United States while the International Organization of Migration arranged medical exams and transport. The Resettlement Support Centers also coordinated the Awads' arrival with a Chicago-based refugee resettlement agency.

On the day of their departure, the Awads bid farewell to the family they had resided with in Jordan. It was a joyous yet tearful moment as the Awads were unsure as to when they would reconnect with this family. The Awads had heard, seen, and read so many things about the United States, but it was hard to fathom what it would be like in this new land.

The Awad family flew on a 22-hour flight from Amman to Chicago. Upon arriving in the United States, the family was greeted by a case manager and volunteers from a local refugee resettlement agency. The welcoming committee members were extremely friendly, holding up welcome signs and assisting the new family with their belongings. They transported the family to their new home, which had been selected by the refugee resettlement agency to accommodate the family of five. Food, clothing, toys, supplies, and furniture had been added to the home to ease the family into their new life. The assigned case manager assisted Oman with securing a job and enrolling the entire family in English-language classes. The case manager also connected the

family with other recently resettled Syrian families in Chicago to ease the transition of resettlement and to assist them with developing a community.

Throughout this process, Saarah and her sisters were extremely anxious yet happy to be moving to the United States. Saarah was excited about moving into a new home and attending a new school. On the other hand, she was nervous about attending school because of her limited English language skills, unfamiliarity with U.S. schools, and Muslim identity, which was met with hostility among some teachers and peers. She was also nervous about making new friends and performing well in her classes. Finally, Saarah was still mourning the deaths of her distant relatives in Syria as well as the separation from friends in Syria and Jordan.

Oman and Fatimah were also excited yet apprehensive about their three daughters attending school in the United States. Since their daughters had limited access to schools prior to resettlement, they were nervous about enrolling them in public schools. Receiving assistance from a case manager, the Awads enrolled their daughters into a local high school known for welcoming refugee and immigrant populations. While Oman and Fatimah embraced the school administrators and staff, they were unsure how to navigate this school without understanding the school norms and practices as well as the general expectations as to how they should engage the school staff and structures. While they were learning English at a local refugee resettlement agency, they did not always feel comfortable and aware of how involved they should be at the school. While Oman worked two jobs to sustain the family, Fatimah served as the active and visible parent at the school, connecting with teachers and staff several times a year.

What are the general experiences of Muslim refugee students, like Saarah, who attend U.S. schools? How does Saarah engage with the school environment? How does Fatimah feel about the school? How does she connect with school staff and parents? What are her general experiences at

Saarah's school? The goal of this study is to understand the experiences and patterns of student engagement among Muslim refugee youth who attend public schools in Chicago and the involvement of their parents. More specifically, this study seeks to explore how students experience and engage in schools during the day and after school.

The global refugee crisis is one of the greatest human rights and humanitarian issues of the 21st century. Unparalleled numbers of people from multiple global regions are fleeing their homes because of insurgency, civil war, ethnic or religious persecution, environmental disaster, or famine (Jacobsen, 2001). Nearly 34,000 people are forcibly displaced every day as a result of conflict or persecution, and these numbers are certain to continue rising due to the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere (UNHCR, 2017). Among the 21.3 million people displaced in 2017, over half were under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2017). Defined as refugees, these people are protected by international law. The 1951 Refugee Convention, ratified by 145 State parties, is a key legal document outlining the rights of displaced individuals and the legal obligations of the nations to grant asylum The 1951 Refugee Convention legally defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." Under U.S. law, the term *refugee* refers to a person whose origins stem from outside the U.S., who is of "special humanitarian concern to the US," and has endured some level of persecution or has a well-founded fear of persecution for the same reasons as above (US Citizen and Immigration Services).

The United States has, over recent decades, been the top country for refugee resettlement (UNCHR, 2017). The United States prioritizes refugee resettlement largely according to the

country of origin and the urgency of the individual situation. The U.S. resettlement priorities are defined as follows:

> …compelling security concerns in their country of first asylum; persons in need of legal protection because of the danger of refoulement (forced return to the country of origin); those in danger due to threats of armed attack in areas where they are located; persons who have experienced persecution because of their political, religious, or human rights activities; women at risk; victims of torture or violence; physically or mentally disabled persons; persons in urgent need of medical attention not available to them in the first asylum country; and persons for whom other durable solutions are not feasible and whose status in the place of asylum does not present a satisfactory long-term solution…. (UNHCR, 2017)

Since 1975, the U.S. government has welcomed over 3 million refugees for resettlement from 79 countries with over 70% fleeing five countries where protracted conflicts have driven millions from their homes: the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Syria, Burma, Iraq, and Somalia. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, the United States welcomed nearly 85,000 refugees, roughly 72% of whom were women and children (U.S. Department of State, 2016). According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, over 10,000 refugee youth between the ages of 10 and 19 have resettled in the United States annually since 2011.

Where Do Refugees Come From?

In 2018, the number of people fleeing war, persecution, and conflict exceeded 70 million, which is the highest level of flight that the United Nations' Refugee Agency has witnessed in its almost 70 years. The top 10 countries of origin accounted for 82% of refugees while 57% came

from just three nations: Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan (U.S. Department of State, 2018).

Since 2014, the main country of origin for refugees was Syria with 6.7 million recorded by the end

of the year. Refugees are hosted by at least 127 countries, but the large majority (85%) have

remained in countries in the Middle East. Turkey, hosting over 3.7 million, boasts the largest

refugee populations of any country by a considerable margin. Lebanon hosts the largest number

of refugees relative to its national population. As of 2018, 1 in 6 people in Lebanon was a refugee

compared to 1 in 14 in Jordan and 1 in 22 in Turkey (Saleh, Aydin, & Kocak, 2018).
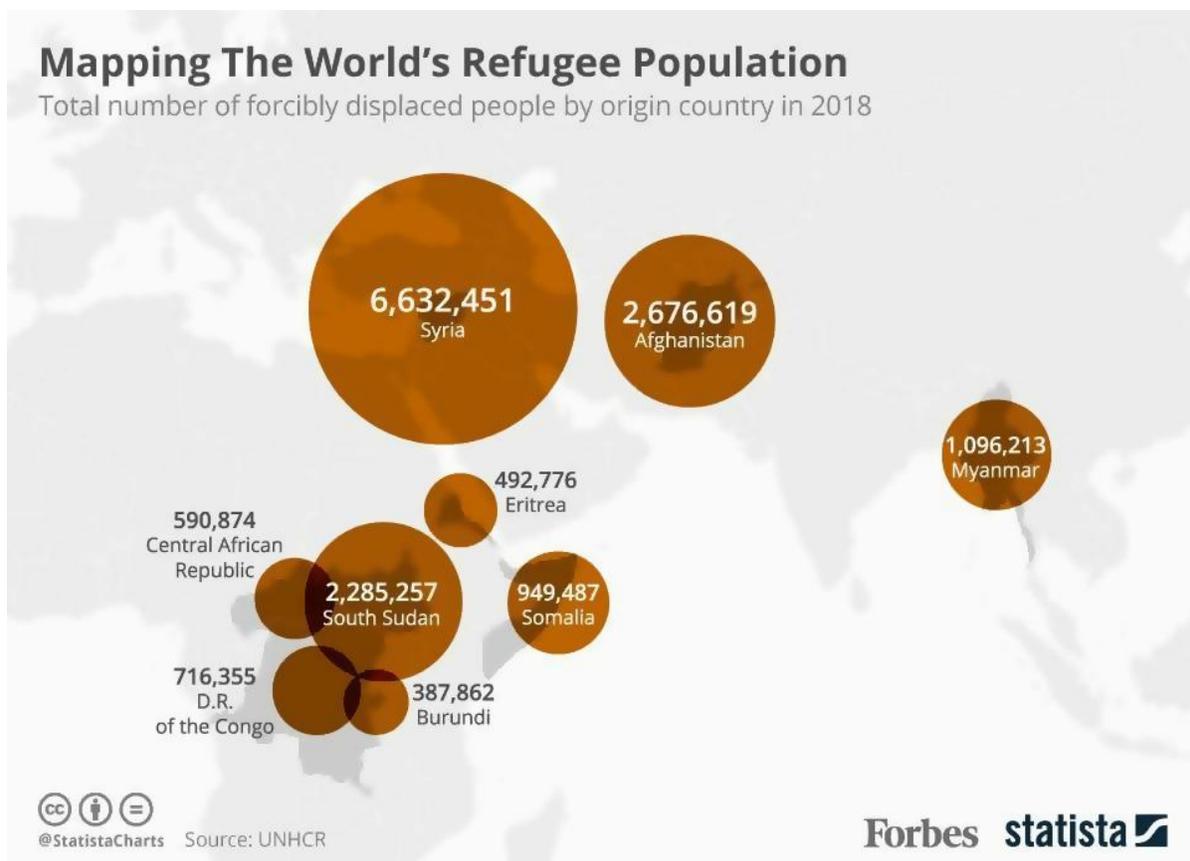
Figure 1. Mapping the world's refugee population. Reprinted from *Mapping the World's*

Refugee Population by N. McCarthy, 2019, Retrieved from

https://www.statista.com/chart/18436/total-number-of-refugees-by-origin-country/.

The Refugee Resettlement Process

Since the Refugee Act of 1980, the United States has resettled over 3 million refugees utilizing the relatively unchanged Reception and Placement program. Under the Reception and Placement program, the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) creates a cooperative agreement with private non-profit agencies, "voluntary agencies or VOLAGs," which have their own network of local affiliates for resettlement. Each resettlement agency is held to the same standards and must provide the same set of "core services" as outlined in the Cooperative Agreement issued by PRM and in the 1980 Refugee Act (Pub.L. 96-212). These agencies arrange food, housing, clothing, employment, counseling, English-language training, medical care, and other immediate needs during the first 90 days after arrival. In addition to these supports, refugees may also have access to additional specialized services such as federal cash assistance and Medicaid for eight months after arrival. They must acquire U.S. citizenship within seven years for continued eligibility. Refugees are permitted to work in the United States, and many refugee service programs focus on helping refugees find employment so they can become self-sufficient. Refugee children are eligible for public education in the same way as other children in the United States, and many states receive federal funding to implement specialized educational programming for refugee children.

The State of Illinois has operated a successful refugee resettlement program since 1975. With funding from the Federal ORR, Illinois has resettled more than 128,572 refugees from 86 countries. The program is administered by the Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Services at the Illinois Department of Human Services, and its goal is to assist refugees with early economic self-

sufficiency and to help them live successfully in their new communities. The resettlement program offers three major components.

- The Illinois Department of Human Services administers a short-term cash assistance program. Refugees who are eligible for federal cash assistance could be assisted for up to eight months.

- Administered by the Illinois Department of Public Health, the Refugee Health Screening Program partners with local health clinic to offer basic medical supports for refugee families.

- Community organizations collaborate with Refugee Employment and Social Service programs to offer a range of supports. Services include case management, employment, mental health, youth, and senior support.

Refugee resettlement agencies in Illinois include World Relief Aurora, World Relief Chicago, World Relief Dupage, World Relief Moline, Catholic Charities, Catholic Charities Immigration and Refugee Services, RefugeeOne, Heartland Alliance of Human Rights and Human Needs, and the Jewish Child and Family Services of Chicago.

During FY 2017, Illinois resettled a total of 3,002 refugees and an additional 76 asylees and 69 individuals with special immigrant visas (such as Iraqis or Afghans who worked for the U.S. government) who were also assisted under Illinois' Refugee Resettlement Program. Seventy percent of all arrivals came from the top five countries of origin, including 727 from Syria, 521 from the DRC, 397 from Iraq, 397 from Burma, and 185 from Afghanistan (Illinois Refugee Resettlement Program FY17 Annual Report). The key Illinois resettlement sites include Cook County with 2,043 people or 65%, DuPage/Kane with 539 people or 17%, Winnebago County

with 382 people or 12%, and Rock Island County with 183 people or 6% (Illinois Refugee Resettlement Program FY17 Annual Report). Finally, regarding the age groups of new arrivals in Illinois, 44% are between the ages of 0 and 18, 53% are between the ages of 19 and 64, and 3% are 65 years or older (Illinois Refugee Resettlement Program FY17 Annual Report).

Iraqi and Syrian Refugees in Illinois

The United States went from admitting nearly 85,000 refugees in FY 2016 before President Trump took office to only 16,230 refugees resettled the following year, according to the U.S. State Department, well below the 45,000 annual cap set by the current administration. Before the Trump administration, the number of refugees resettling in Illinois was on a steady increase in the early 2000s. In FY 2006, 1,227 Iraqi refugees were resettled to Illinois (Martin & Hoefer, 2009) while, in FY 2007, the number increased to 1,872 (Martin, 2010). The number rose to 2,429 in 2008 and to 2,560 in 2009 (Martin, 2010), and these number continued to increase for the next several years. Both the absolute number of Iraqi refugees resettled to Illinois during the last few years and the percentage of total refugees arriving to Illinois who are Iraqi reflect the increases seen in the United States overall during the same period (Martin, 2010).

The largest and oldest Iraqi community in America resides in Chicago, which is home to the largest Assyrian population in the United States, numbering in the tens of thousands. Chicago's first Assyrians, primarily Christian, arrived around the turn of the 20th century and settled along the northern lakefront, establishing a community church in Lincoln Park. The new arrivals have sought residence along the lakefront in Uptown, Edgewater, Rogers Park, and nearby neighborhoods while a growing number have moved to northern suburbs (Martin & Hoefer, 2009). Some community leaders have estimated up to 100,000 Assyrians in Illinois as of 2010 (Schlikerman, 2010).

Arabs constitute the second largest group of Iraqi migrants to Chicago ("Iraqis in Chicago," 2008). Most of Chicago's estimated 6,500 Iraqi Arabs came to the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s in search of economic opportunities. Finally, Kurds and Turkomans constitute small communities in Chicago; both groups are Muslim, but owing to their small size, less than 300 Kurds and 50 Turkomans attend the mosques of other communities.

An estimated 4.1 million Syrians have fled their country's civil war beginning in 2011 amidst the Arab Spring. It has been estimated that almost half of the population of Syria has been displaced (El Neweihi, 2016). Syrian refugees are fleeing their country of origin for a variety of reasons: the Bashar Al-Assad-led Syrian Armed Forces, bombing by Western nations and Russia, and the atrocities committed by ISIS. While many refugees have sought refuge in nearby countries like Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, these nations are unable to provide a safe haven for all refugees. Thus, many Syrians have undertaken perilous journeys by land and sea to reach Europe, Africa, and the United States, where they are confronted with numerous political, social, and logistical obstacles in their attempts to start a new life. Since 2010, over 200 Syrian refugees have resettled to Illinois with most taking up residence in Chicago (Schlikerman, 2010).

The Importance of Schools for Refugee Youth

Schools are a primary developmental context for young people and serve as one of the first and most influential institutions experienced by newly arrived refugee youth in America. For children whose lives have been disrupted by displacement and violence, schools can serve as a supportive space for social interactions and provide the means to develop the knowledge and skills they will need for their future lives and work within the United States (Crisp, Talbot, & Cipollone, 2001). Schools also provide opportunities to learn about the majority culture and build relationships with staff and peers (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008).

Despite the importance of school as a social context for young newcomers, the school environment can be challenging for refugee youth and their families, especially for those who have experienced high levels of migration-related trauma or who have had limited experience with formal schooling prior to migration. Refugee children and youth undergo a myriad of unique migration-related stresses while adapting to a new schooling environment (García-Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Many come to American schools having experienced disruptions in schooling or limited formal education and display gaps in knowledge and skills as well as low English-language proficiency and low literacy. Even if refugees have attended school in first asylum countries (the first country refugees go to after leaving their home country), the instructional quality in those schools is highly variable and often poor (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Refugee children are often exposed to multiple languages of instruction as they migrate from countries of first asylum to countries of final resettlement. This contributes to confused, disorganized educational experiences (Carnock, 2015). Finally, young people's specific racial, ethnic, or cultural identities might affect their overall feelings of connection at school.

Refugees' Enrollment in Public Schools

Refugee and immigrant children are entitled to enroll in public schools regardless of their national origin, citizenship, or immigration status. However, it can be quite challenging for families who are navigating the unfamiliar and unchartered territories of public schools. For example, refugee youth may be discouraged from enrolling in particular schools due to language barriers or age.

According to the U.S. Department of Education regulations regarding school enrollment, schools must adhere to the following policies:

- School districts cannot ask a student or family about their immigration status as it is unnecessary to establish residency in a school district.

- School districts may require proof of residency in the district, such as utility bills, lease agreements, or an affidavit, but cannot require documents that would unlawfully bar or discourage a refugee, immigrant, or undocumented student or his/her/their parents.

- School districts may not bar a student from enrolling if he/she/they lack a birth certificate.

- Providing a social security number is voluntary.

- Homeless children do not have to provide proof of residency; school districts must immediately enroll the child even if he/she/they lack the documents usually required.

In some cases, refugee, immigrant, and undocumented youth may be residing with caregivers and family members other than their biological parents. While 17 states have consent laws that allow relative caregivers to enroll children in schools, the remaining states do not have such laws but allow enrollment by caregivers. When school districts request a proof of guardianship or legal custody, this can have a negative effect of preventing a child from enrolling in school. Caregivers have the option of working with school districts to determine whether the school would accept an affidavit or other assurance of the relationship between child and caregiver. For children released from federal immigration custody, the ORR Division of Children's Services provides a Verification of Release form, which includes language from the U.S. Department of Education regarding the child's right to enroll in a public school. Families may also seek assistance from their country's nearest consular office to obtain documentation from their country of origin to validate a relationship or identity.

Older children may face additional hurdles enrolling in school. Some school districts may deny enrollment to older teens or strongly encourage them to enroll in adult education or GED

programs. Some school districts and caregivers may have strong reservations about whether such students will be able to absorb the content and successfully receive their diploma. State laws vary regarding the ages of children guaranteed schooling. In Chicago, for example, youth are required to graduate high school by 21.

Conceptual Framework for Student Engagement

A large body of educational research has focused on engagement with school as an important component of students' academic, social, and emotional learning (Klem & Connell, 2004). Student engagement has been defined as "the degree to which students are 'connected' to what is going on in their classes" (Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbush, 1996). Although engagement is a broad construct that has been used in a multitude of ways (Fredricks, Blumenfield, & Paris, 2004), engagement occurs when students make a significant psychological and emotional investment in their learning and take pride in incorporating what they learn into their lives.

Engagement has become a primary conceptual model for understanding dropout and promoting school completion (Mosher & McGowan, 1985; Christenson et al., 2008; Finn, 2006; Reschly & Christenson, 2006b). Research has found that engaged students do more than attend or perform academically; they also put forth effort, persist, self-regulate their behavior toward goals, challenge themselves to excel, and enjoy challenges and learning (Klem & Connell, 2004; National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, 2004).

Engagement is conceptualized not as a static attribute of the student but, rather, as an alterable state of being that is highly influenced by the capacity of school, family, and peers to provide consistent expectations and supports for learning (Reschly & Christenson, 2006a, 2006b). Engagement is an active process (Wylie, 2009) involving effortful learning through interaction

with the teacher and classroom learning opportunities. In short, both the individual and context matter.

Student engagement is typically described as involving multiple dimensions. The *behavioral* dimension includes positive conduct, effort, and participation. The *emotional* or *affective* dimension relates to the interests, feelings of identification and belonging, and positive feelings and beliefs about school (Finn, 1989; Marks, 2000; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992). The *cognitive* dimension includes self-regulation, setting goals, and investment in learning (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003). This three-dimensional model acknowledges that student engagement is more than simple involvement or participation. It requires feelings and sense-making as well as activity (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Below is a more detailed description of this conceptual framework.

- *Cognitive engagement* is the degree to which students are engrossed and intellectually involved in what they are learning (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2008). It is the opposite of "being bored" in school.

- *Behavioral engagement* is the component of academic engagement that specifically reflects students' participation and efforts to perform academic tasks (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Behavioral engagement encompasses traits such as regular attendance, appropriate classroom behavior, satisfactory class participation, and turning in assignments.

- *Emotional or affective engagement* is the extent to which students feel connected to their teachers, peers, and others in their school (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Relationships are deemed extremely important as they facilitate students' adaptation to school by providing

students with positive feedback and a sense of belonging in addition to emotional and tangible support (Wills, 1985).
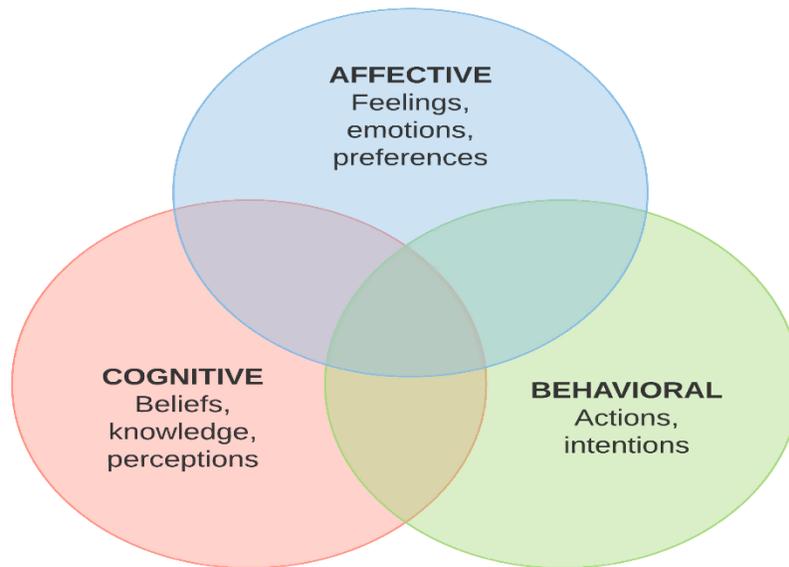
Figure 2. Student engagement framework. Reprinted from *Engaging with the Concept of Engagement* by R. Talbot, 2018, Retrieved from http://rtalbert.org/engaging-with-engagement/.

This dissertation explores student engagement among refugee youth using this tripartite conceptualization of engagement; it examines how the three interrelated dimensions of student engagement (cognitive, emotional/affective, and behavioral) affect refugee students' performance in school (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Student engagement is conceptualized as an individual trait in which an engaged student is one who is involved in learning and out-of-school activities, who identifies her/him/themselves with the school, and who is committed to learning and working to achieve better academic outcomes.

Factors Influencing Student Engagement

An extensive body of academic research indicates that student engagement is malleable, suggesting its capacity to vary as a function of both time and context (Coates, 2006; Collins, 2014;

Conner, 2011; Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012; Franklin, Harris, & Allen-Meares, 2013; Shernoff, 2013). In other words, educators have the capacity to positively or negatively affect student engagement (Trowler, 2010). Student engagement varies depending on teacher and staff behavior as well as the implementation of strategies that yield student academic performance (Jensen, 2013; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Mutch & Collins, 2012; Phillips, 2015; Swiderski, 2011). Engagement may also vary from class to class within the same school and from school to school within the same community (Taylor & Parsons, 2011). Thus, the performance of a poor achiever can be improved through positive student engagement, and that particular label may vary depending on the specific teacher.

Teacher–student interaction is the most important factor in encouraging student learning and participation in the classroom and the broader school. These interactions function as a crucial factor in promoting student engagement, which is promoted by teachers who display an enthusiastic demeanor (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Krause & Coates, 2008; Russell & Slater, 2011), are well prepared (Zepke & Leach, 2010; Russell & Slater, 2011), and are approachable (Russell & Slater, 2011). The culture of the institution and the first-year experience provided by the institution, especially if they provide a range of support services for students like high-quality libraries, medical and mental health facilities and mentoring programs (Leach & Zepke, 2011; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006; Russell & Slater, 2011), and non-institutional support (Leach & Zepke, 2011).

Scholars suggest that students might be more inclined to participate in school if their family and friends understand the demands of their schoolwork, assist with time management, and create space for their academic assignments. The quality and presence of peer relationships influence student engagement. Wentzel (1997) states that the number of friends is related to better grades in

elementary and middle school (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997), better accomplishment of school tasks (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995), higher school adjustment, and greater engagement in school-related activities (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Ladd, 1990; Krause & Coates, 2008; Moran & Gonyea, 2003; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Several empirical studies demonstrate that engagement between schools and families results in better academic outcomes for students with parents playing a central role in shaping their children's behavior and engagement in school (Auerbach, 2009; Mutch & Collins, 2012; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013).

Student Engagement Among Refugee Populations

Despite the large amount of research on the importance of student engagement, the current literature includes few studies on engagement among refugee populations. Mullen (2014) explored the pre- and post-migration experiences of six upper-elementary refugee youth and of U.S. school staff new to working with refugee students. Staff reported that, like native-born youth, refugee students were best able to engage with school when staff used a holistic approach to promoting student learning.

Ramsy & Williams (2003) explored the associations among peer connectedness, parental monitoring, academic self-efficacy, educational barriers, and school engagement in refugee adolescents resettled in the United States. Data were collected from a sample of 120 13–18-year-old refugees who had arrived in the United States from Bhutan, Burma, Somalia, Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan, or Iraq. The investigator found that a significant amount of variance in school engagement was accounted for by educational barriers and academic self-efficacy.

Scholars have more fully explored student engagement among non-refugee immigrant groups and how legal status as immigrants impacts adaptation into school environments. These studies have mainly focused on immigrants arriving from Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean

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(Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). While refugees settle in the United States with legal standing and some supports in their transition, they face additional challenges in their adaptation due to the emotional scars resulting from years, or sometimes decades, of instability in their natal countries (Fong, 2007; McBrien, 2005). In addition, many refugee children and adolescents do not have an opportunity prior to migration to attend school and learn basic skills in their native tongue (Onsando & Billett, 2009). Despite these challenges, refugee youth arrive in the United States with high aspirations for academic success (Shakya et al., 2010) and for a future that provides a sense of safety and security (Segal & Mayadas, 2005).

The existing literature on immigrant families broadly suggests that immigrant parents may feel anxious about engaging with school communities. Conflicting cultural beliefs and language difficulties lead to a situation that Rumbaut and Portes (2001) describe as "dissonant acculturation" in which parents lag behind their children's acquisition of the language and culture of their new country. Parents may feel a loss of control and may experience identity problems when their children feel a strong sense of obligation to support and assist their families with financial support and with caregiving responsibilities (Hardway & Fuligni, 2006). Family conflicts may increase with an ensuing loss of a sense of safety and security on the part of the children. Students may feel that they do not belong anywhere as they become alienated from their parents but are not truly accepted by their peers. Discriminatory practices on the part of teachers and peers increase immigrant students' sense of isolation (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001).

Finally, teachers and school staff's limited experience and understanding of immigrant children's cultural backgrounds may lead to negative educational and psychological outcomes for the children (Kunjufu, 2001). A report from the Longitudinal Immigrants Families and Teachers Study revealed how cultural mismatch in the school context can affect teachers' perceptions and

judgments regarding immigrant children (Rogers-Sirin, Ryce, & Sirin, 2014). Although there has been previous research on school engagement among immigrant youth, this dissertation study focuses on an understudied population—Muslim refugee youth and their families—with regard to student engagement within American school contexts.

Vulnerability of Muslim Refugee Youth

The onslaught of war in the Middle East has led to a refugee crisis of monumental proportions. According to the United Nations, 13.5 million Syrians, 11 million Iraqis, and one-third of the Afghan population are in need of humanitarian assistance. Nearly 39,000 Muslim refugees entered the US in 2016—the highest number on record, making up nearly half (46%) of refugee admissions (Krogstad & Radford, 2017).

Muslim refugees from the Middle East are a particularly vulnerable group, facing concerns such as mental health challenges, acculturation stress, and discrimination based on their religion and national origin (U.S. Department of Education, Newcomer Tool Kit, 2017). Discrimination against Muslims is not a new phenomenon, though. It stems from a deep-rooted demonization of Islam and Muslims that pre-dates the tragic September 11, 2001 attacks (Itaoui & Elsheikh, 2018). Following the 9/11 attacks, the racialization and demonization of Muslims in the United States has normalized Islamophobic rhetoric and resulted in organized, well-funded anti-Muslim movements across the country and around the world (Itaoui & Elsheikh, 2018). A post-9/11 America has been an increasing challenge for Arabs, Arab Americans, and Muslims as they are often seen as the "other" and a threat to the nation and are represented as being linked to terrorism and violence (Ajrouch, 2004; Akram & Johnson, 2004; Jamal & Naber, 2008).

As Muslim asylum-seekers in the United States have steadily increased in number over the last decade, they have been confronted with increasingly anti-Muslim rhetoric (Connor &

Krogstad, 2018). Based on a 2017 Pew Research report relying on FBI statistics, the number of assaults and blatant discrimination against Muslims has recently surpassed the levels immediately following 9/11 (Underwood, 2018). Studies show that hate crimes and attacks against Muslims skyrocketed in 2015 and 2016 (Underwood, 2018). The Trump administration has proposed multiple new anti-Muslim policies that make the United States an increasingly toxic environment for Muslims (Raghunathan, 2018; Hilal, 2017).

Islamophobia has been on the rise in school settings too and is sometimes propagated by reductive curricula and uninformed teachers (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2012; Abu El-Haj, 2002, 2007; Abu El-Haj & Bonet, 2011; Bayoumi, 2008). Media reports have documented a high number of hate crimes directed at Muslim students and other Muslim Americans (Asali, 2003; McMurtrie et al., 2001; Wingfield & Karaman, 1995). For example, the Islamic Center of Maryland and the Haneefiya Learning Center document high levels of fear among Muslim refugee youth and their families, reporting that one in five Muslim students felt intimidated, harassed, humiliated, bullied, or emotionally/physically abused by classmates because of their religious identity. Although a few studies have explored student engagement among Muslim students, none have focused on refugee youth. This dissertation study seeks to fill this gap by focusing on student engagement among Middle Eastern Muslim refugee youth and their families, who experience higher levels of discrimination and bullying in America.

Definition of Terms

The meaning of terms relevant to refugee resettlement policy varies depending on the geographic location. The following list provides working definitions of key terms derived from the UNHCR and the U.S. policies and laws that will be utilized within this study.

- *Asylum-seeker:* These are individuals who request a form of legal protection after arriving in the United States due to a fear of harm or persecution in their country of origin. Similar to an individual who has been deemed a refugee due to being persecuted or a well-founded fear of persecution, *an asylum-seeker must prove the same status* (USCIS). Asylum-seekers must apply for asylum within one year of arrival in the United States. There are two types of paths to seek asylum: *affirmative asylum* and *defensive asylum*. Affirmative asylum pertains to those who are in the United States or have arrived at a point of entry and have declared their application for asylum to the USCIS within one year of their arrival in the country. Decisions can be made by a USCIS asylum officer. Defensive asylum relates to individuals who have requested asylum as a form of relief or defense against forcible removal from the United States before an immigration judge—for example, someone who identifies as undocumented or in violation of his/her/their status when apprehended in the United States or who attempted to enter the United States without proper documentation.

- *Citizen:* This is a person legally recognized as belonging to a State and who receives all of the protections provided by law in that state. Citizenship is defined in the first clause of the first section of the Fourteenth Amendment as follows: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and the State wherein they reside."

- *Integration:* Integration is defined as a two-way process depending on the resourcefulness of the individual and the openness of the society (Strang & Ager, 2010). Ager and Strang (2008) identified the primary functional markers of refugee integration as employment, health care, and housing. Research has determined that the integration process is influenced

by the institutional environment of the receiving society as well as the personal capacities of the settling population (Valtonen, 2004). Within the context of this study, schools serve as a vehicle for integration.

- *Immigrant:* An immigrant is someone who has moved from the country of origin (i.e., homeland) to another country. Immigrants are people who live permanently somewhere other than their homeland.

- *Internally Displaced Person:* People who are forced to flee their homes but never cross an international border are known as Internally Displaced Persons or IDPs. These individuals seek safety anywhere they can find it—in nearby towns, schools, settlements, internal camps, and even forests or fields. IDPs, including people displaced by internal strife and natural disasters, comprise the largest group receiving UNHCR assistance. Unlike refugees, IDPs are not protected by international law or eligible to receive many types of aid because they are legally under the protection of their own government.

- *Legal Permanent Resident:* Also known as "green card" holders, legal permanent residents are non-citizens who are lawfully authorized to live permanently within the United States. Legal Permanent Residents may accept an offer of employment without special restrictions, own property, receive financial assistance at public colleges and universities, and join the Armed Forces. They also may apply to become U.S. citizens if they meet certain eligibility requirements, such as securing employment with a company or marrying a U.S. citizen.

- *Resettlement:* Resettlement is the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another country that has agreed to admit them and, ultimately, grant them permanent settlement.

The UNHCR is mandated by its Statute and the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions to undertake resettlement as one of the three durable solutions to combat the current refugee crisis; the other two are repatriation and local integration.

- *Stateless Person:* A stateless person is someone who is not a citizen of any country. Citizenship is the legal bond between a government and an individual that provides certain political, economic, social, and other rights to the individual and defines the responsibilities of both the government and the citizen. A person can become stateless for a variety of reasons, including sovereign, legal, technical, or administrative decisions or oversights. Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights underlines that "everyone has the right to a nationality" and that "no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality."

- *United Nations of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):* The UNHCR was established on December 14, 1950, by the United Nations General Assembly. The agency is mandated to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide.

- *Voluntary Migrant:* A person who has chosen to live and work in another country on a long-term basis based on that person's own volition is considered a voluntary migrant. Foreign-born people who desire to live permanently in the United States must apply for a temporary immigrant visa.

Dissertation Organization and Overview

This dissertation seeks to address the following research questions and sub-questions:

A. *How do Muslim refugee youth and their parents experience and engage with their schools?*

    a. *How do the stories of engagement among Muslim refugee youth align with and depart from the three dimensions (cognitive, behavioral, affective/emotional) of the school engagement framework?*

    b. *What are the barriers and facilitators around Muslim refugee parents' engagement with schools?*

B. *What are Muslim refugee youths' experiences and engagement with out-of-school time (OST) programs?*

This dissertation focuses on the three major areas. Chapter 2 seeks to understand the refugee student interlocutors' experiences of engagement with school, in part to provide insight into the applicability of the student engagement framework—outlining cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement—to this particular population. In terms of cognitive engagement, students conveyed an investment in learning English with the goal of excelling in their classes and developing relationships with their peers. Related to behavioral engagement, Muslim refugee youth also shared concern around active participation in their classes due to a lack of confidence in their acquired languages and accents as well as unfamiliarity and general discomfort with classroom, school-based norms in a U.S. context. Another finding connected to behavioral engagement relates to refugee youth sharing how they typically relied on mentors, tutors, and youth workers from local community organizations and refugee resettlement agencies for academic support and not on teachers and staff from their local schools. Finally, students described mixed feelings around their emotional engagement, citing numerous examples of bullying and discrimination from teachers, school staff, and peers. They also shared a desire to learn English

with the intent of feeling as if they belong to their academic community. Finally, this chapter delves into the intersection between student engagement and the role of identity in assisting refugee youth to perform well academically and socially.

Chapter 3 describes the patterns of parent interlocutors' experience and involvement with their children's schools. Factors facilitating parental involvement included a welcoming and inclusive environment cultivated by school administrators, staff, and teachers or the presence of staff with racial and ethnic similarities to the refugee families. Barriers to their involvement included a lack of English-language proficiency, a lack of parental understanding of their need to be involved if their child is performing well academically, and discrimination and xenophobia instigated against their children, causing parents to disengage with the schools.

Chapter 4 documents Muslim refugee youths' patterns of participation and experiences in OST activities within their respective schools and local communities. First, analysis of the types of OST programs youth participated in within their respective schools revealed that refugee boys were typically involved in sports-based programs while girls engaged in arts-based programs; for boys and girls, these activities reinforced their feelings of nostalgia for their countries of origins. Second, refugee students typically participated in OST programs within their local communities—but outside of their schools. Favored OST activities included programs offering academic support and homework assistance, encouraging refugee youths' engagement both civically and politically in their schools and communities, and promoting their cultural and ethnic identities. Finally, these findings delve into the perceptions of a handful of refugee youth that OST programs are a distraction from their academic pursuits.

Lastly, Chapter 5 summarizes the major findings and arguments of the dissertation and the implications for social work and education. I argue that local community organizations and

resettlement agencies function as central players in supporting refugee youth and their families as they integrate into U.S. schools and their local communities. Schools also serve as one of the first encountered and most influential institutions for newly arrived refugee youth. Therefore, more intentional collaboration between these institutions is imperative for the development and successful adjustment of refugee youth and their families.

This research also reveals that schools and community organizations must be intentional about offering mental health supports to refugee youth so that they can process and heal from their loss and trauma. In particular, school social workers, counselors, and other mental health specialists would be ideal candidates to support refugee students who are struggling with homesickness or other forms of trauma.

The student engagement framework is applicable to the three dissertation chapters. For the first analytical chapter, the framework is applied to refugee students' perceptions and experiences in schools. I am interested to see how their experiences and perceptions align with or depart from the existing framework. Due to the intersection of their multiple identities (i.e., religion, race, ethnicity, national origin, legal status, gender, etc.), I am interested in how Muslim refugee students connect with their respective schools, drawing on the existing framework.

In Chapter 2, the attention is on parent engagement with schools and schooling. While the student engagement framework mainly focuses on students, parents are instrumental to the academic and social emotional success of students (Auerbach, 2009; Mutch & Collins, 2012; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). When parents are engaged with their children's education, students possess home support and knowledge required to accomplish their assignments and other daily tasks. Students are also more prone to develop a lifelong love of learning. Educators who prioritize parent engagement often see a profound change in their classrooms and in nonacademic spaces as well.

Refugee students may have a difficult time thriving in schools if their parents are disconnected or view school in an unfavorable light.

Within the third chapter, the behavioral dimension of the engagement framework is extended to consider OST involvement with schools and academic activities. Research on student participation highlights students' support (i.e., attendance and positive interactions) of school-sponsored activities (i.e., pep rallies, sports teams, clubs, and extracurricular activities), which provides insight into student motivations to be a part of the school (Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Finn, Pannozzo, & Voelkl, 1995; Jones, Marrazo, & Love, 2008; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). The third chapter delves into Muslim refugee youths' participation in OST and their general perceptions of and experiences with OST.

My findings also indicate the importance of social workers understanding refugee students' pre-migration educational experiences to better gauge their prior and current academic needs. Throughout the study, refugee youth expressed levels of discomfort with or unawareness of particular classroom norms and practices in the United States, which led to an alteration in their levels of engagement and affected their sense of belonging within the schools. Almost all refugee children arrive in the United States with previous educational experiences. While most existing literature on the education of resettled refugees focuses primarily on the characteristics of refugee children at the time of and after their arrival, it would be ideal to explore the pre-migration experiences of Iraqi and Syrian refugees to get a sense of their prior educational experiences. This information would give schools and community staff a better sense of their students' prior experiences, which are often hidden by language barriers, privacy concerns, and cultural misunderstandings. Refugee youth may also disclose mental health concerns and other feelings they may possess, like homesickness, loneliness, and sadness.

Finally, and most importantly, school social workers and mental health specialists can be instrumental in addressing the anti-Muslim, xenophobic, and discriminatory practices that occur at the school and community levels. Schools are supposed to be a safe haven for children to learn, grow, and thrive as they prepare to face the world as adults, and school administrators are positioned to shape these experiences. As my research suggests, Muslim refugee students experience harassment, bullying, and intimidation by their peers and staff due to their legal status, race, and religion. This causes them to become fearful of attending school and exacerbates the trauma they endured during their pre-migration experiences and upon resettling in the United States. Therefore, school social workers and other mental health specialists can offer more one-on-one counseling or group therapy sessions to Muslim refugee students who feel targeted by bullying and discriminatory practices. They can also host schoolwide trainings and informational sessions around antibullying practices to alter the discriminatory and exclusionary culture.

This study provides empirical evidence of refugees' firsthand experiences of schooling in the United States, reveals their perceptions of the social context, and offers insight into what they need to feel supported by school staff. It magnifies the voices of a subset of the student population that is often overlooked, lumped in with traditional "international students," or conflated with the influx of immigrant populations from other regions of the world experiencing turmoil and political strife.

CHAPTER 2: "I WANT TO FEEL SAFE AT MY SCHOOL. I WANT TO FEEL LIKE I BELONG"—EXPLORING MUSLIM REFUGEE STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

"Student engagement is the product of motivation and active learning. It is a product rather than a sum because it will not occur if either element is missing." – Elizabeth F. Barkley, *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*

"There is no one right answer about how to best support newcomer students, but it is clear that schools must provide more than English language skills to help these students achieve academic success and self-sufficiency in their new country." – UNHCR, 2017

Leila, a 15-year-old-girl who identifies as Muslim, was born in Iraq and resettled in Chicago in 2016. She attends a local Chicago high school and is currently in 10th grade. While she has developed friendships with her peers, it has been difficult for her to establish relationships with teachers and staff due to language barriers. She has experienced some degree of bullying pertaining to her religion and her gender identity as a girl. Leila loves attending school, but her anxiety about her academic performance and her English language skills hinders her involvement in school activities.

Amir, a 16-year-old boy also in 10th grade, was born in Syria to a large Muslim family. After resettling in the United States in 2015, he moved to Chicago with his parents and younger siblings. His older brothers remain in Iraq and Jordan, unable to resettle in the United States due to President Trump's Executive Order. As a result of the geographic separation of his family, Amir has been experiencing anxiety and sadness. He does not feel connected at school due to difficulty making friends and lack of involvement in OST activities. Amir also has some difficulty thriving in his courses, mainly due to the language barriers and his negative interactions with some of his peers, who make discriminatory comments about his religious and ethnic identities. While Amir enjoys attending school, it has not been an easy transition for him.

Background

The plight of refugees is one of the greatest human rights and humanitarian issues of the 21st century. Unlike immigrants, who usually voluntarily migrate to another country in search of better economic opportunities, refugees are involuntarily forced to leave their country of origin because of a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees).

The United States has resettled over 3 million refugees since the 1970s, setting a world record in refugee resettlement. In 2017, most of the refugees admitted came from Africa and the Middle East with the DRC, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, and Burma comprising the top five countries of origin (Connor & Krogstad, 2018).

The UNHCR works closely with governmental and non-governmental agencies who are responsible for resettling refugees. The UNHCR is mandated to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. The agency strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another state with the possibility of seeking asylum in another state or settling in a third country. In addition to the UNHCR's screening process, the United States conducts its own security checks to decide whether to accept a refugee for resettlement. The entire process is completed abroad and can take up to two years.

The UNHCR first collects detailed biographical and biometric data (e.g., iris scans, fingerprints, and facial scans) for each refugee referred for resettlement. The U.S. government then screens refugee families as a unit and decides whether to admit them to the United States. This process involves eight U.S. government agencies with six separate security databases, five

background checks, and three in-person interviews. Once refugees have been accepted for resettlement, the U.S. Department of State assigns their case to one of nine U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These organizations work closely with partners in the local community to help refugees and their family members find work, enroll in schools, integrate into their local communities, and adjust to their new lives in the United States.

Upon arriving in the United States, refugees are connected with NGOs that provide a wide range of resettlement services such as housing, clothing, employment assistance, mental health counseling, English-language training, medical care, and other immediate needs during the first 90 days after arrival. In addition to these supports, refugees have access to specialized services such as federal cash assistance and Medicaid for eight months after arrival. Staff from NGOs assist families with enrolling their children and youth in local public schools and refer them to additional academic supports.

Refugees also receive assistance from family, clan, and ethnic community-based organizations known as mutual assistance associations. These organizations provide mutual aid, advice, and support for refugees with shared ethnic, linguistic, or national backgrounds. Refugee families rely heavily on case managers at refugee resettlement agencies upon migrating to the United States. Staff offer academic programs and OST programs to youth and their families with the intent of helping them to adjust to the United States.

Many refugees are children and youth who are forcibly migrating with family or on their own. Data on the actual number of refugee youth are imprecise due to the transient nature of refugees as well as the loss or destruction of records and incomplete information. However, according to data from the UNHCR, over half (51%) of the global population of refugees is thought to be under the age of 18 (Global Partnership for Education, 2016). Refugee youth are a somewhat

invisible and vulnerable population, often fleeing their countries of origin as orphans or travelling alone, making them susceptible to exploitation. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' ORR, over 10,000 refugee youth between the ages of 10 and 19 have resettled annually within the United States since 2011.

As one of the earliest encountered and most influential institutions for newly arrived refugee youth, schools function as a primary driver of integration into the receiving country's culture and as a link to resources and assets that promote healthy development and a sense of belonging among peers and adults (Sarr & Mosselson, 2010).

Refugee children and youth undergo a myriad of migration-related stresses that influence adaptation to their new school environment (García-Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Refugee youth often have experienced heightened levels of violence and trauma prior to fleeing their countries of origin and, compared to adults, are at heightened risk for symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, maladaptive grief, social withdrawal, and behavioral and academic difficulties (Masten & Narayan, 2012; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). Refugee youth encounter a variety of academic, economic, and psychosocial challenges, including separation from family, cultural dissonance, acculturation stress, host country language deficiency, gaps in schooling, distrust or fear of school personnel, conflicting expectations between families and school faculty, and limited financial resources (Bal & Arzubiaga, 2014; Berthold & Hoover, 2000; Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Kanu, 2008; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Roy & Roxas, 2011). All of these factors—as well as racial, ethnic, or cultural identities that differ from their peers'—impact refugee youths' overall feelings of connection at schools (García-Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Refugee youth confront bureaucratic educational systems that force them to quickly learn how to navigate unfamiliar policies and standards (Kaprielian-Churchill, 1996). When they begin attending school in the United States, they must quickly learn academic English and new pedagogical routines while simultaneously learning challenging subject-area content and, in some cases, preparing to take complex standardized tests. Educational policies have historically failed to acknowledge the diversity of experiences of students—and, in particular, of refugees—and, as a result, have limited their access to education (McBrien, 2005; Pinson & Arnot, 2007).

In the face of numerous migration-related stressors, refugee youth are at high risk for school dropout or disengagement (McMichael, Nunn, Correa-Velez, & Gifford, 2017). However, little has been studied about refugee youths' classroom experiences, their levels of academic and social engagement, and the role teachers and other school staff play in their adjustment and academic success. The refugee student population in the United States continues to diversify as refugees enter from a wide range of countries that are both culturally and linguistically distinct (Mendenhall, Rus, & Buckner, 2017). Their experiences vary significantly by the specific context of reception, including how peers perceive the refugee's nation of origin, the levels of discrimination and racism the refugee experiences, and the prevailing national ethos toward immigrants and economic opportunities.

Student Engagement Framework. Within the educational literature, student engagement is a key component of academic success. Although there is variation in how student engagement is defined and measured, the term is generally used to describe meaningful student involvement within the learning environment. Student engagement refers to the degree of interest or involvement students show when they are learning or being taught, which is an indicator of the level of motivation they have for education. Broadly speaking, the concept of "student

engagement" is predicated on the notion that learning improves when students are inquisitive, interested, or inspired and that learning tends to suffer when students are bored, dispassionate, disaffected, or otherwise "disengaged" (Christenson et al., 2008).

Student engagement is instrumental in preventing dropout (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997). Research suggests that engaged students earn higher grades, perform better on standardized tests, report a greater sense of belonging, can set and meet personal goals, persist on academic tasks, expect success, and value educational outcomes (Christenson et al., 2008; National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, 2004). Gallup conducted numerous surveys over the last several years with students in grades 1 through 5 in urban and rural environments within every state. Findings from these surveys suggests that engaged students are 2.5 times more likely to say that they get excellent grades and do well in school and are 4.5 times more likely to be hopeful about the future than their actively disengaged peers (Hodges, 2018).

Conceptualized as an alterable state of being, student engagement is highly influenced by the capacity of school, family, and peers to provide consistent expectations and supports for learning (Reschly & Christenson, 2006a, 2006b). Student engagement is typically described as having multiple components, including cognitive (e.g., self-regulation, learning goals, investment in learning) (Fredericks et al., 2004; Jimerson et al., 2003), behavioral (e.g., positive conduct, effort, participation), and emotional or affective dimensions (e.g., interest, identification, belonging, positive attitude about learning) (Finn, 1989; Marks, 2000; Newmann et al., 1992). Acknowledging that school engagement involves feelings and sense-making as well as involvement or participation (Harper & Quaye, 2009), a three-dimensional framework includes the following:

- *Cognitive engagement* consists of students' investment of time and effort to learn course content. It relates to students' motivation to learn while displaying a persistence to overcome academic challenges. Students engage in deep processing of information through critical thinking and self-regulation.

- *Behavioral engagement* involves students' participation in learning activities, including active participation in academic and cocurricular activities. It also pertains to their active attendance, homework completion, and overall adherence to classroom norms. Students display a level of enthusiasm for school-related tasks through their active participation in schools.

- *Affective engagement* consists of the attitudes, interests, and values students possess related to learning. Students' general feelings and interactions with their peers, teachers, and staff are also connected to this affective dimension. Students want to feel like they have a community amongst their peers and staff.

Research Objectives

The goal of this study is to understand the patterns of student engagement among Muslim refugee youth from the Middle East who are attending public schools in Chicago. The research explores the following questions:

A. *How do Muslim refugee youth experience and engage with their schools?*

B. *How do the stories of engagement among Muslim refugee youth align with and depart from the three dimensions of the school engagement framework?*

Context

The mission of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is to provide high-quality education to every

child. CPS has a total student population of 361,314 with 18.7% who identify as English Language Learners, and as many as one-third have been considered English Language Learners at some point during their education. Thirty-seven percent of all children in Chicago come from families with an immigrant parent, and more than three out of four of these children are second-generation immigrants. Despite the growing number of immigrant and refugee children and youth in Chicago, data on the academic performance of children of immigrants and refugees in Chicago are limited.

The majority of the student participants in the present study (23 out of 28) attended two Chicago Public High Schools located on the north side of Chicago that serve large numbers of immigrant and refugee students. Lee High School has 658 students enrolled. The school offers bilingual and refugee services to eligible students. Classroom instruction is given in English, Arabic, Swahili, French, and Spanish. Classroom aides are also available to students who require additional academic support. Lee High School has a long history of welcoming refugees and immigrants with a foreign-born population of over 300—i.e., 45% of the school's 641 students. The recent outpouring of refugees from Syria and other war-torn countries has turned the school into a global melting pot representing 38 countries and more than 35 languages. After English and Spanish, the most common languages spoken at this school are Arabic and Swahili. The school administration has a long history of supporting immigrant and refugee families by implementing programs and providing resources specifically to support these students. For example, the high school offers over a dozen English-as-a-Second Language classes to refugee and immigrant families. In 2017, the school was designated as a "newcomer center" by CPS for its programming and initiatives for refugee and immigrant students.
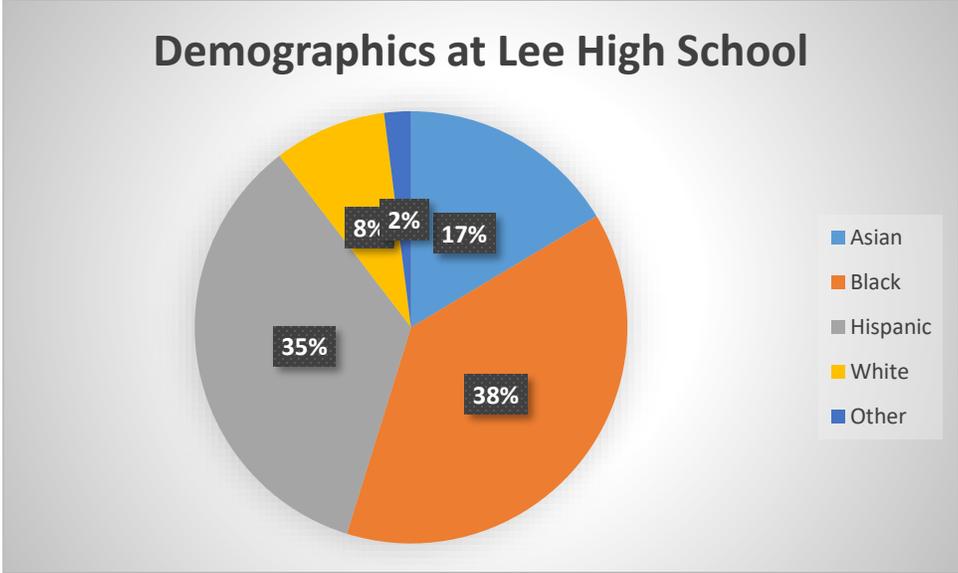
Figure 3. Demographics at Lee High School.
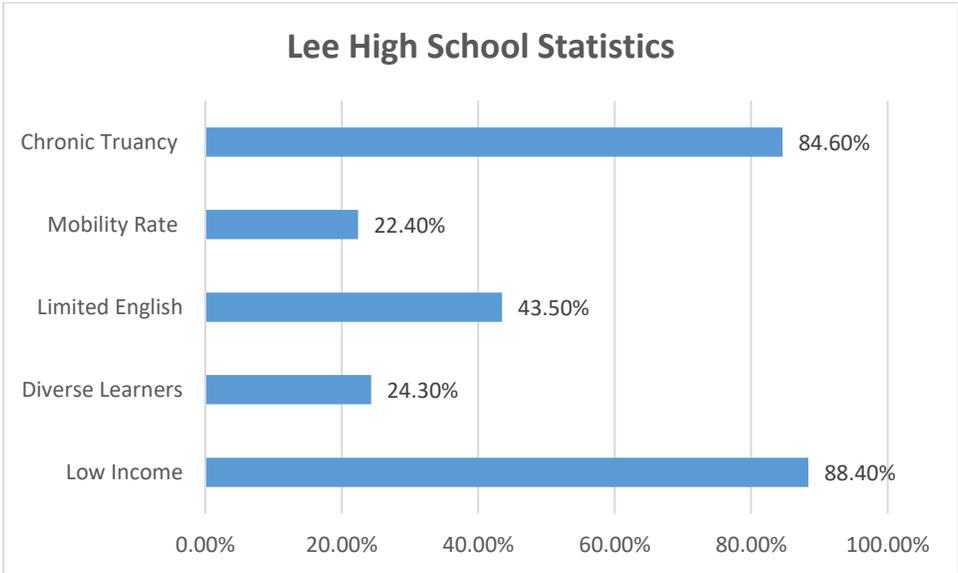
Figure 4. Lee High School Statistics.

June High School has 1,596 students enrolled. The school offers bilingual and refugee services to eligible students. Classroom instruction is given in English, French, and Spanish. Classroom aides are also available to students who require additional academic support. June High School is known for its inclusive and welcoming practices around immigrant and refugee youth

and is demographically diverse with more than 75% of students speaking a language other than English at home. The school has a dedicated team of teachers and staff who are committed to supporting immigrant and refugee youth with their transition to school. The school sponsors a robust Bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL) program to assist students with their coursework. The faculty and staff mirror the multicultural backgrounds of the students, serving as translators and mentors. The teachers are fluent in many languages, including Chinese, Arabic, Assyrian, Spanish, Russian, Serbo-Croat, Gujarati, and Urdu. The school hosts events tailored to refugee and immigrant populations, such as resource fairs and "Know Your Rights" meetings. Finally, the school supports diverse populations by offering students access to groups and clubs such as the African Heritage Club, Arabian Club, and Filipino Club, to name a few.
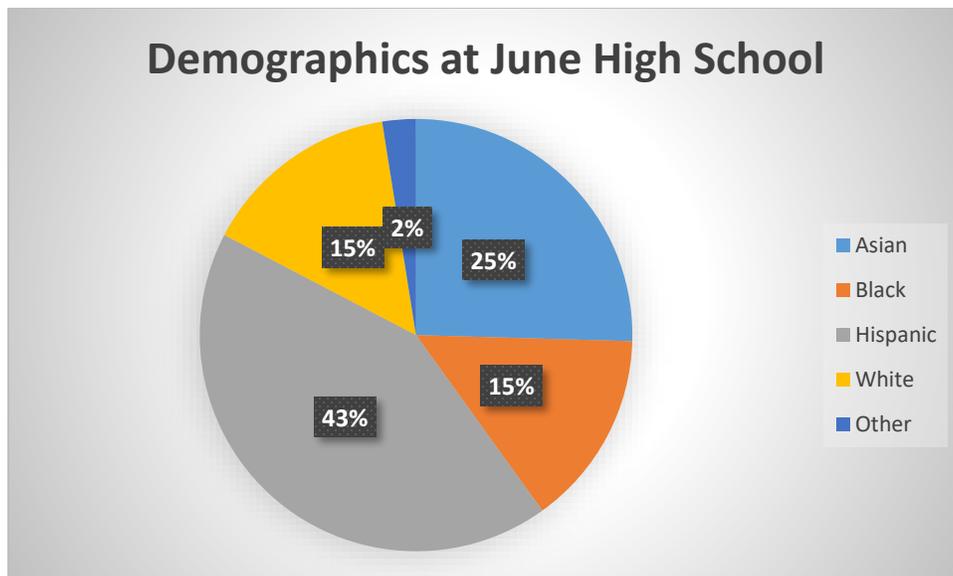
Figure 5. Demographics at June High School.
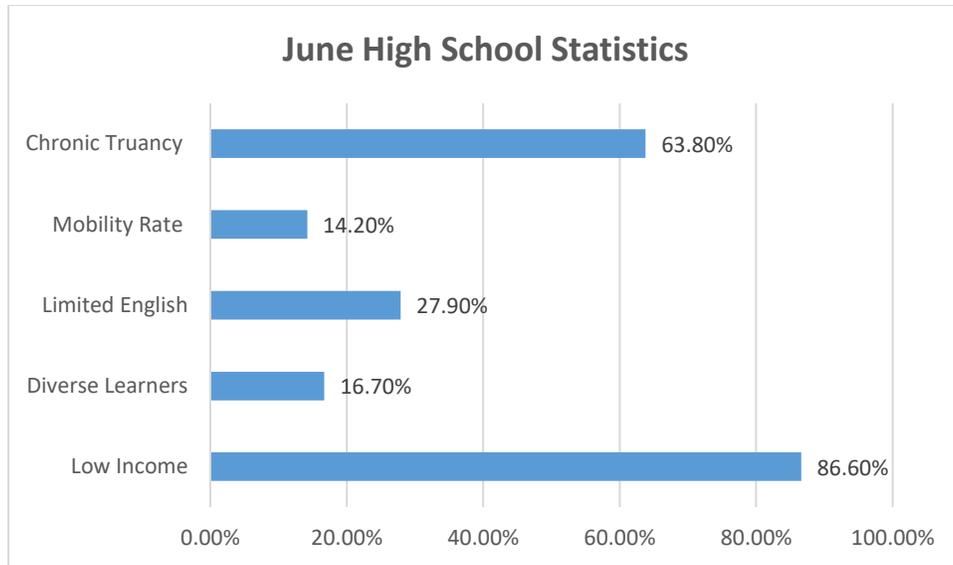
Figure 6. June High School Statistics.

The remaining students (5 out of 28) attended Chicago Public High Schools scattered throughout the north side of the city. These schools do not offer the wide range of supports available at the other high schools highlighted in this study, but the students did receive some level of support from faculty and staff.

Research Methods

This study employs an interpretivist paradigm based on the assumption that social reality is not singular or objective but, rather, shaped by human experiences and social contexts. Research is viewed as a "social reality embedded within and impossible to abstract from the participants their social settings" (Bhattacherjee, 2015). This study prioritizes students' meanings and understandings of their schooling experiences as refugees while simultaneously remaining attentive to their patterns of engagement in schools.

Sampling. This study draws upon in an interpretivist paradigm that prioritizes students' meanings and understandings of their patterns of engagement and experiences within their

schools and local communities. The qualitative methods inherent to the interpretivist approach

applied to this study were in-depth interviews with study participants. The University of

Chicago's Institutional Review Board approved the study. Written informed consent was

required from parents, followed by assent from youth. Consent documents were available in

English and Arabic. Youth received $10 Target gift cards for their participation.

      Participants. Twenty-eight Muslim refugee students participated in this study (18

female, 10 male). Students hailed from Syria (21) and Iraq (7). Interviews with students were

held at the Iraqi Mutual Aid Society (IMAS) office or in the students' homes with parental

consent. IMAS staff were used to identify refugee youth who were students at local CPS and to

select a mix of gender, school grade level, country of origin (e.g., Iraq or Syria), age, and number

of years in the United States. To be included in the study, students needed to be either from Iraq

or Syria, identify as Muslim, be between the ages of 13 and17, be enrolled in middle or high

school, have attended a U.S.-based public school for at least one year, and speak Arabic and/or

English. Participants also needed to have legal status as refugees. IMAS staff invited

participants' parents to the organization to describe the study to them in Arabic and to obtain

signed consent forms, which were available to them in English and Arabic. I was present at this

introductory meeting to share my personal and professional background and to answer questions

about the study. Upon receiving consent from the parents, IMAS staff facilitated in-person

introductions between me and the youth. These sessions typically occurred after school, and the

youth received a description of the study from me. Finally, I received consent forms from the

students who agreed to participate in the study.

      Participants were predominantly in high school concentrated in several communities on the

north side. Most of the participants lived in two-parent households with 2–3 siblings. The average

age of the participants was 15.4.

Table 1

Characteristics of Youth Participants

Measure	Full Sample	Iraqi Sample	Syrian Sample
N (Households)	18	8	10
N (Parents)	19	8	11
N (Students)	28	7	21
N (All Participants)	47	21	26
Mean Time in United States (Months)	29.3	43.4	18.1
Mean Student Age	15.4	15.3	15.4

Data collection. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed, reviewed by two qualitative research experts, and edited based on their feedback *(Appendix B)*. I administered two pilot interviews to two refugee youth associated with the IMAS before interviewing youth in the study. Based on those pilot interviews, I made adjustments to the interview protocol to capture the perceptions of the students' involvement in schools. I designed the interviews to elicit understanding of refugee youths' current experiences and perceptions of school as well as their levels of student engagement. The interview protocol consisted of questions centered around the three dimensions of student engagement (e.g., cognitive, behavioral, and affective) as well as questions about participants' general feelings about school. The following are sample questions in each of the dimensions of the student engagement framework:

Cognitive Engagement

- Tell me about your classes.

- How would you describe your coursework? Homework?

- When you need additional homework support, whom do you ask for help?

Emotional Engagement

- How do you feel about attending your school?

- What has it been like to make friends?

- Describe any teachers and school staff you feel close to at your school.

Behavioral Engagement

- How would you describe your participation in class?

- Can you tell me about your involvement in after-school programs?

Even though most of the interviews were conducted in English, a translator was available to assist the students who were not confident speaking English or who desired to have a trusted adult present in the sessions with them. All of the interviews were audiotaped for accuracy; lasted between 45 and 60 minutes; and, based on participants' preferences, were conducted in the participants' homes or at the IMAS. Probes and follow-up questions were employed in response to developing themes as the interview process progressed. All interviews were conducted by me, and verbatim transcripts were generated. Youth received $10 store gift cards for their participation. Interviews were transcribed and later coded using MAXQDA, a software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative methods. Pseudonyms were assigned to every participant and community organization to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Data were collected from January through September 2018.

Data Analysis

This study employs a hybrid process of inductive and deductive thematic analysis to interpret raw data on how the experiences of refugee youth relate to the student engagement framework. The methodological approach integrated data-driven codes with theory-driven ones. Below is a description of the two-stage process.

The first stage of analysis was to develop conceptually driven codes to describe students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement. The data analysis process began with me reading each transcript twice to immerse myself in the data. Memos were recorded to achieve further immersion and to highlight key concepts.

After reviewing the interviews and the scholarly literature on engagement, a codebook was developed to provide a formalized operationalization of the student engagement codes. I made sure that the definitions were specific yet encompassed the dimensions in the data. After an attempt to code the data utilizing the initial codes, I revisited definitions that contained too much extraneous information and that could potentially cause interpretation problems, reducing them to capture only essential elements of the code. After solidifying the code labels and definitions, selected quotes within the data were used to illustrate each code.

The second stage of analysis employed a more inductive approach to explore how Muslim refugee youths' engagement departed from the existing framework in the literature. Inductive coding (Thomas, 2016) began with a close reading of the interview transcripts and consideration of the multiple meanings inherent in the transcripts. At the end of each interview, I transcribed the audio-recorded interview verbatim and wrote out the field notes. I listened to the recordings at least once before transcribing and several times during the transcription process. The transcripts were merged with the field notes for analysis. I later coded the transcripts and field notes by

drawing out phrases, paragraphs, and whole sections using markers and highlighters. As patterns and themes began to emerge from the data around students' engagement in schools and their general perceptions of school, I sorted through the data. I analyzed and discussed each participant because each participant may "represent a different thematic finding" (Chapelle & Duff, 2003). It was my goal to track the unique characteristics of participants' experiences in school while also emphasizing commonalities that ran across the cases. As a result, I was able to sort through the data in meaningful ways and look for similarities and differences among the participants.

Throughout the coding process, debriefings and stakeholder checks were conducted at the IMAS to provide opportunities for people with specific interest in the evaluation, such as service providers and funding agencies, to comment on categories used and the interpretations made. Member and stakeholder checks allow study participants to evaluate the research findings, interpretations, and conclusions (Thomas, 2016). For this study, stakeholder checks were conducted to verify interpretations and the data gathered in earlier interviews. Conversations with the translator, who also functions as a staff person at the IMAS, were also held after each interview to clarify terms or phrases used by study participants. The interviewer and translator also discussed some of the major themes mentioned in the interviews, and a final draft copy of the interview was provided to the stakeholders (i.e., respondents or participants being studied) for review. The interview drafts were translated into Arabic to ensure that all participants could access the documents.

Findings

The findings from this study seek to understand the refugee student interlocutors' experiences of engagement with school, in part to provide insight into the applicability of the student engagement framework to this particular population. In terms of cognitive engagement,

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Muslim refugee youth demonstrated an investment in learning English with the goal of excelling in their classes and developing relationships with their peers. With respect to behavioral engagement, Muslim refugee youth shared anxiety around active participation in their classes due to a lack of confidence in their acquired languages and accents as well as an unfamiliarity with classroom and school-based norms in a U.S. context. Related to the behavioral engagement dimension, Muslim refugee youth shared how, for academic, social, and emotional support, they typically relied on mentors, tutors, and youth workers from local community organizations and refugee resettlement agencies—people with similar shared identities—rather than teachers and staff from their local schools. Students described mixed feelings around their emotional engagement and cited numerous examples of bullying and discrimination from school staff and students. Each of these themes will be discussed in turn.

Cognitive engagement: Investment in learning English. Cognitive engagement dimension refers to the overall investment of time students devote to their academic work. It is related to students' general willingness to learn as well as their persistence in overcoming academic challenges. Cognitive engagement also refers to their deep processing of information through critical thinking and self-regulation. Refugee youth shared their resolve to learn English with the intent of mastering course content.

Tasneem, from Syria, described how her grades improved upon learning English, which ultimately boosted her confidence in classes. She stated:

I knew a little English before I came to the United States.… It didn't take too much time to learn. I spent every free moment practicing English. Once I learned it, I started to do better in school.

Tasneem recognized how vital it was for her to learn English in order to participate in the

cultural and social activities of the school. She also acknowledged how much she wanted to improve in her level of English, connecting how the mastery of English would enhance her learning and overall comprehension of the course.

Muhammad, from Syria, noted how challenging learning English has been, despite being engaged with it for over two years. He mentioned how his grades have improved despite the courses being difficult.

> School was so hard before I learned English…. Like, really hard. I was taking ESL classes, but my classes were still hard. It's been two years—and now my classes are much easier. They're still hard though, especially classes where I have to read a lot.

Similar to the other participants, Tasneem and Muhammad felt the need to master English to ensure their academic success in school. They also received advice from family, friends, mentors, and teachers on the value of learning English. The participants often referred to their ESL course as an anchor for them to absorb the content at their own pace and in a relatively safe environment. While some of the students were still enrolled in this course, many others had transitioned out of it but still mentioned how helpful it had been to their academic development.

Behavioral engagement: Anxiety around active participation in their classes.
Behavioral engagement refers to students' participation in learning activities. Examples of behavioral engagement include participation in the classroom and extra-curricular activities. Behavioral engagement involves active attendance and being on time to school as well as successful homework completion and an adherence to classroom norms.

Muslim refugee youth reported anxieties around active participation in class due to a lack of awareness around U.S.-based classroom norms and customs. Prior to attending school in the

United States, most of the youth had limited or no exposure to formal schools. Even if they had earlier engagement in primary or secondary schools, classroom norms and practices differ depending on context. In a U.S. context, classroom participation is deemed a crucial part of students' learning.

Maia, a teenage girl from Iraq, shared how the classroom expectations in Iraq differed from those in the United States, leaving her unsure of the appropriate behavior to display in class:

In Iraq, school is different. You don't ask questions. You listen to the teacher and do the work. The teacher doesn't ask us a bunch of questions to answer. Here [in the United States], teachers want you to talk. They care about what you have to say…. That was different.

Maia shares how the classroom norms and customs in the United States are vastly different from what she encountered in her previous educational experiences in Iraq. For example, in Iraq, youth interact with teachers in a more formal manner, and the teachers and students do not engage in an exchange about ideas or concepts. Students also do not regularly speak aloud in class. Maia was unfamiliar with an expectation that she should be vocal in class, which negatively impacted her grades and the teachers' general perception of her.

Similarly, Amir, a teen from Syria, also shared his perspective on how difficult it was for him to adapt to the classroom customs and norms in the United States since he was not expected to be vocal in classroom settings in Iraq: "We don't talk to the teacher in Iraq. We just do our work. She lectures, and we do the work. That's it. It's so different here [in the United States]."

Onur, a Syrian teen, also compared his educational experiences in his country of origin to school in the United States:

School is so different here. In Syria, classes are harder. You don't talk much in class. You

listen to your teacher. Also, we didn't always meet for class if it was too dangerous. Like, some of my teachers didn't show up because they were receiving threats from men.

All three examples share a common thread of students' initial unfamiliarity with the U.S.-based customs and norms in their courses. Youth entered their classrooms with vastly different expectations from U.S.-born students regarding how to participate in classroom settings. Students were receiving lower grades for being less vocal in their classes, which impacted their overall enthusiasm and engagement with their courses. For example, reflecting on their prior educational experiences before migrating to the United States, especially in Iraq, youth explained why they were not vocal in their classes, recalling how teachers in their countries of origin typically presented course content in a lecture-style format while the students absorbed it. A dialogue did not typically occur between students and teachers due to a common perception that teachers are experts who should not receive any critiques or follow-up questions. Moreover, other students had no prior educational experience to draw on, so they had no expectations regarding classroom norms. Now that time has elapsed, students have slightly adjusted their behavior to be active participants in their classes, but they still expressed levels of discomfort with these general expectations. Several students still expressed some confusion around what was expected of them in the classroom.

Behavioral engagement: Academic assistance from community organizations. My findings revealed that, when Muslim refugee youth were unfamiliar with course content or required additional homework support, they were unlikely to reach out to teachers or staff. Rather, they reached out to staff and volunteer tutors and mentors from local refugee resettlement agencies and mutual aid societies. Leila, from Iraq, shared how she felt more comfortable receiving academic support from her mentor at a local refugee resettlement agency

due to a level of familiarity with her and her circumstances:

I spend a lot of time on my homework. It's kinda hard. But I have a tutor from GirlUniverse—we meet twice a week. She helps me with my work. I've known her for a while. I know her, and she knows me. It's good.

When asked to describe why she feels particularly close to her mentor, she expressed the following:

So, I've been here [the United States] for a while, like a year. When I first came here, I met Mary. She's been here since the beginning. I feel close to her. She also happens to be a refugee so, like, she gets what I'm going through. We talk about everything, not just school. She's a big sister to me.

Alena's rationale for engaging with her mentor stems from a general perspective that her mentor possesses similar identities as her—a legal status as a refugee and being originally from the Middle East. She felt particularly close and safe with her mentor, so she preferred to direct any academic or personal questions to her.

Korian, a teen from Iraq, echoed this preference for connecting with staff or volunteer tutors for homework assistance due to some level of discomfort in meeting with his teachers at school. More specifically, he felt like he was being scrutinized by his teachers, especially if he lacked some mastery of the course content due to language barriers. He also preferred to express his ideas in Arabic instead of English. Since his tutor spoke Arabic and English, Korian felt he was better able to pose his questions in a comfortable manner:

When I need help with my homework, I rarely go to my teacher—she's not that nice. I usually go to my tutor from SANI. I don't feel pressure to know the answer, and I can say it in Arabic if I can't find the right word.

Beyond academic work, Saarah, from Syria, also shared how she sought out her mentor

from the IMAS for socioemotional engagement. When I asked her a follow-up question about whether she felt comfortable connecting with a school counselor or social worker for mental health support, she emphasized her preference to meet with her mentor due to their shared identities, establishing how she did not feel particularly close to school staff: "I go to my tutor for everything. She's probably tired of seeing me, but she is so helpful. I feel a lot more comfortable with her than my teachers. Plus, she knows, like, everything. She's like me."

Drawing on these quotes, it appears students were inclined to seek out additional academic and social support from their mentors and staff from refugee resettlement agencies and mutual aid societies, those individuals who had been supporting them since they resettled in the United States. While academic programs were available at their respective schools, the students preferred to access tutoring programs through local organizations due to a higher level of trust and dependence on the staff and volunteers as well as their familiarity with the organizations. Several refugee resettlement agencies and local organizations offer academic programs, such as ESL classes, after-school programs, summer programs, in-home tutoring and mentoring, parent education courses, and classes on school readiness. Due to the wide range of programs offered by these organizations, refugee youth feel more comfortable accessing these programs over school-based programs. Upon resettling in the United States, refugee youth encounter these supports even before they are enrolled in schools, so they have developed a level of trust and awareness with these community-based support prior to enrollment.

Emotional engagement: Bullying and discrimination from school staff and students. This dimension pertains to students' attitudes, interests, and values related to learning. It relates to their overall feelings towards peers, teachers, and staff as well as their general sense of belonging. One finding relates to how youth described high levels of bullying from their peers,

decreasing their sense of belonging and general positive feelings about school. Gabi, a teen girl from Iraq, mentioned how she felt a level of fear after being bullied by one of her peers:

This boy—he kept trying to remove my hijab in class. Like, every day when I moved to the United States. I didn't say anything at first, but after a few times, I told my teacher. I was so scared. My teacher didn't do anything, so I went to the principal. He met with the boys, and then it stopped.

Due to this mistreatment, Gabi experienced a wave of emotions—fear, anger, despair— which forced her to disengage with the school. At a later point, she shared how she really did not want to attend the school, and her mother encouraged her to keep attending. She shared how she did not feel safe among her peers, a feeling that caused her to retreat in classroom settings.

Similarly, most of the female participants shared how they were taunted or ridiculed by their peers for wearing their hijab. Zeena, a teen from Iraq, stated:

They [her classmates] kept asking me questions about my hijab. I told them that I wear it for my religion. They told me it was weird and that I should take it off. Some even told me that it's ugly, to cover up your hair. I didn't know what to say. I went to the bathroom and cried. I didn't know what to say.

Due to the consistent taunts from her peers, Zeena did not feel safe at the school. She did not participate in her classes, and she was apprehensive about participating in afterschool programs. She felt her peers were mistreating her due to her appearance.

Bassma, a Syrian teen, also shared negative interactions with his peers, describing how he experienced bullying and discriminatory comments from a group of boys in his class:

While I was walking home, these boys kept telling me to "go back to your country, you terrorist. You don't belong here." I was so afraid. I started taking a different route to school. I didn't want to go back. I didn't attend school for a week.

After this incident, Bassma shared how he became increasingly disengaged in classes and in afterschool programs and felt nervous that he would be targeted in the future by the same boys or a different set of students. He also felt levels of fear and anger towards the boys, wondering why they wouldn't leave him alone. He stated, "I didn't even know those guys. I think I have a class with one of them. But not the others. I don't know why they're mad at me."

Youth also described high levels of discrimination and xenophobia from teachers and staff, decreasing their sense of belonging and general positive feelings about school. Shamir, a teen from Syria, described how his teacher used discriminatory language in class, which had a negative impact on his involvement and sense of belonging:

My teacher thought I was talking in class, but I wasn't. I really wasn't. Other people were talking, but not me. She walks towards me and says, "Why are you even here? I'm so glad President Trump won't allow your people here." I didn't know what to say. What do you say? She's the teacher. I didn't tell anyone about it. I was so sad.

Shamir felt like he was being targeted by his teacher even though he was not the student being disruptive in class. After this negative interaction, Shamir refused to speak in class out of fear that doing so would provoke his teacher to yell at him.

Amir also shared a negative comment from his teacher, which caused him to stop attending this class:

I had a teacher tell the entire class that this country is letting too many refugees into the country. He said that these people are dangerous. I felt like he was looking at me the whole

time. I didn't talk to him ever again. I didn't talk in that class. I didn't want him to fail me.

I wanted to be invisible.

Amir felt a lack of trust and support from his teachers due to their discriminatory comments about his religious and ethnic identities. While the comment was not directly stated to him, he felt unsafe as a result of his teacher's comments. He also assumed that his teacher's negative perceptions of him might impact his grades. As a result, Amir chose to minimize his presence in the room through fewer classroom interactions with his peers and the teacher.

Identity and the Student Engagement Framework

While the student engagement framework is helpful in exploring how refugee youth engage with their schools across the three dimensions, the influence of identity is less well understood, particularly regarding the impact of identity on Muslim refugee youths' engagement in schools. We know little about how personality traits might interact with environmental contexts to shape student engagement. Additionally, researchers have yet to examine how profiles of personality traits might interact with each other to influence student engagement. More nuanced research in these areas will aid in the development of learning strategies and educational contexts that may yield more successful outcomes for various personality types.

A growing body of literature provides evidence that racial and ethnic discrimination functions as a risk factor for negative academic outcomes. Previous studies focus on the academic outcomes among Black adolescents, who have experienced an increased risk of racial discrimination that exposes them to negative treatment from teachers (e.g., stereotype-based treatment) and peers (e.g., social exclusion, verbal or public harassment) (Fischer & Shaw, 1999). Furthermore, documented race differences in teacher/administrator disciplinary practices indicate Black adolescents' likelihood of experiencing racial bias and discrimination in school (Sellers &

Shelton, 2003). Findings suggests the harmful influence of discrimination on the academic engagement of African American adolescents, which is particularly detrimental to their academic or cognitive engagement

Schools are contexts in which adolescents spend significant proportions of their time in curricular, extracurricular, and social activities. As such, interactions with teachers and peers at school influence how youth think about themselves as learners. Racial discrimination has been linked to a variety of outcomes relevant to school success for Black adolescents—such as declines in grades, academic self-efficacy, and school utility values (Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, & Cogburn, 2008); decreased school bonding (Smalls, White, Chavous, & Sellers, 2007; Thomas, Caldwell, Faison, & Jackson, 2009); and increased school problem behaviors (Smalls et al., 2007).

The few existing studies mainly focused on how racial and ethnic discrimination and stereotype-based treatment impacted African Americans' cognitive and behavioral engagement, but this literature aligns with the experiences of Muslim refugee youth. Like African American students, Muslim regufee youth experience discrimination and stereotype-based treatment due to their ethnic, racial, and religious identities, which causes them to be less engaged in their classes and other schools contexts. More specifically, youth described how they attempted to push back on the negative perceptions of Islam by behaving like a "Good Muslim" instead of a "Bad Muslim" in school contexts. Mahmood Mamdani (2008) uses this term to describe the way Muslims around the world have been characterized by Westerners since the mid-1970s. He argues that prominent scholars have mischaracterized Muslims by claiming that they are potential enemies who are split between "good Muslims," which the United States should support, and "bad Muslims," which Americans should undermine (Huntington, 1993; Mamdani, 2008). "Good Muslims" are peaceful,

law-abiding citizens who abhor acts of violence that threaten the authority of the secular Western state (Mamdani, 2008). The phrase "Bad Muslims," in contrast, refers to people who commit acts of violence, are terrorists, and lack a moral compass. While students did not specifically use the terms "Good Muslim" or "Bad Muslim," they were familiar with this sentiment, describing the pressure to be perceived as a "Good Muslim" in school contexts in order to push back on negative, anti-Muslim perceptions of their ethnic, racial, and religious identities. For example, Shaia, an Iraqi girl, stated:

> I don't know; I wish people didn't think of me as a terrorist. My religion is very peaceful. When we moved to the United States, I was so nervous about attending school. I didn't go for a few days. What if people were mean to me because I'm Muslim? I'm good.

> Similarly, Gabi stated:

> I sometimes don't wear my hijab to school. I take it off when I leave the house. I don't want people to know my religion, to think I'm a bad person. It's too much. People say things about it all the time. It's less of a hassle when I don't wear it.

Finally, Muhummed, a Syrian refugee youth, also mentioned how he does not want others to perceive him as "bad":

> I'm always looking over my shoulder. I mean, what if someone considers me to be bad, to be mean? I'm not mean. But people think my religion is bad. Mr. Trump thinks we're bad people. I keep my head down and do my work. If I come to school, I do nothing.

All three students reflected on the pressure to dismiss the "bad Muslim" narrative that pervades political and social discourses. They are aware that the school staff and peers may consider them to be "terrorists" or "radicals" who did not embrace American ideals. They were regularly bombarded with negative interactions and images depicting Islam in a negative light. On

that note, a handful of students chose to avoid the school setting, minimizing their interactions with their peers and staff and their overall behavioral engagement in school. Students were aware of the stereotypes that existed about Muslims and attempted to combat them by displaying "good" behavior around their communities.

Limitations and Future Research

Another limitation pertains to the student engagement framework being so broad and, as a result, failing to capture the nuances and distinctions among all student populations. For every human phenomenon, there is thought, emotion, and behavior of some kind, but this varies depending on the experiences and how they are enacted by different populations. More research is needed to explore how the student engagement framework is applied to refugee and immigrant populations as well as other marginalized groups who depart from the experiences of U.S.-born youth.

Prior research on student engagement has mainly focused on cognitive engagement or academic-related activities over the other dimensions. Although academic experiences are critical factors in educational success, school is also a place where students socialize with their friends and participate in OST programs (Wang & Degol, 2014). Focusing exclusively on cognitive engagement dismisses the school's role as a developmental context in which students engage in OST activities that shape their identities. For example, students who struggle with academic learning but are musicians may experience more engagement in the music room than in the classroom. Through school, students build skills and relationships that are critical to their academic success. Hence, analysis of students' schooling experiences should include various forms of engagement, including extracurricular or OST program engagement. More research is needed to integrate this form of engagement in school and examine how the forms interact to influence

students' academic and socioemotional well-being.

Discussion

This study provides an empirical opportunity to learn about refugee students' firsthand experiences of schooling and engagement in school. Student engagement is about supporting students to take an active role in their learning, enabling them to shape their own experiences and outcomes they want to achieve. It is about encouraging students to be active partners in the learning process.

Refugee youth displayed high levels of cognitive engagement, particularly focused on learning English to understand course content and to forge relationships with school staff and peers. The acquisition of English remains an important component in successful integration into their schools. Numerous studies suggest that learning English is critical to refugees' overall integration process to the United States (Colic-Pesker & Walker, 2003; Taylor, 2004; Ager & Strang, 2008). Across interviews, the majority of Muslim refugee youth explicitly and repeatedly identified the importance of learning English, expressing high levels of motivation to learn the language in order to feel connected to the schools. The students viewed learning English as an integral part of their academic and professional success while also considering it a necessary skill in assisting their families. Learning English also enabled students to meet new people and build new friendships, which helped them to combat isolation and loneliness.

This study aligns with that larger body of research with youth making it clear they see language skills as critical to their academic and future success. Whether they received this message from their parents, their mentors and case managers at local organizations, or school staff, refugee youth prioritize learning English over all of their other academic goals.

Related to the behavioral engagement dimension, refugee students described their initial feelings of anxiety around active participation in their classes, in part due to a lack of mastery of English and their accents. They also expressed some unfamiliarity with Westernized classroom norms, which expect that students should be vocal in their courses. American educators have embraced class participation as an important feature of student learning. When students are vocal in class, they demonstrate what they have learned by expressing their ideas in a coherent manner. When students ask questions, they learn how to obtain information to enhance their own understanding of a topic. Studies have divided active classroom engagement into five categories: preparation, contribution to discussion, group skills, communication skills, and attendance (Rocca, 2010; Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005). Participation also has been defined as "the number of unsolicited responses volunteered" (Burchfield & Sappington, 1999). This is an expectation that is engrained in U.S.-born students at an early age. However, refugee families and youth are unfamiliar and uncomfortable with this expectation to be vocal in classroom settings.

Connected to the behavioral dimension, refugee youth relied on their existing external supports from resettlement agencies and local community organizations for academic support instead of their teachers and school staff. Refugee resettlement agencies and youth-focused community organizations offer a range of supports to families upon resettling in the United States. Organizations create specialized refugee services, such as "youth services," "psychosocial services," or "mental health interventions." While youth-focused programs benefit refugee youth and adults, there are particular concerns with youth solely relying on them for academic and social supports. These programs function as a primary source of support for refugee families, especially youth. As a result, refugee youth often minimize their interactions with school staff by requesting

academic supports and programs from the community staff. The schools remain a distant and unwelcoming environment for students to seek out additional academic and social supports.

Students described mixed feelings around their emotional engagement with schools, citing numerous examples of bullying and discrimination from staff and peers, affecting their overall participation in their classes and out-of-school programs. Present research suggests that Muslim children and youth are more likely to be bullied in school than children of other religious identities. A new survey by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding reveals that 42% of Muslims with children in K–12 schools report bullying of their children because of their faith compared with 23% of Jewish and 20% of Protestant parents (Muslims for American Progress, 2018). Similarly, a report described increased incidents of bullying against Muslim students, from hijab pulling to cyberbullying (Muslims for American Progress, 2018). The report also mentions that the rise of Islamophobia plays a major role in this shift.

Findings support the existing research that Muslim refugee youth experience high levels of bullying and discrimination from their peers in academic settings. Nearly every student cited examples of bullying or discrimination in their classrooms, during their commutes to school, or on online platforms. The current study broadens the perpetrators of bullying and discrimination to include teachers and school staff, establishing another circumstance that decreases the youths' overall sense of belonging and engagement in their classes and school programs. While teachers and school staff are supposed to cultivate a warm and welcoming environment by mentoring and nurturing students, refugee students did not describe positive interactions with their teachers. Further, many of the participants did not feel like the teachers and staff were allies or trusted members of the academic community. Participants conveyed how they felt like the teachers and staff maintained a toxic educational environment by spewing the same anti-Muslim, xenophobic

rhetoric they were confronting among their peers and through news outlets. The participants felt particularly unsafe and unwelcomed in the classroom, which led them to disengage in their classes and school-based programs altogether.

While the student engagement framework is helpful in exploring how refugee youth engaged with their schools across the three dimensions, the framework has some limitations around exploring the role of identities in impacting Muslim refugee youths' engagement in schools. Muslim refugee youth experience discrimination and stereotype-based treatment due to their ethnic, racial, and religious identities, which causes them to be less engaged in their classes and out-of-school programs. More specifically, youth described how they attempted to push back on the negative perceptions of Islam by behaving like a "Good Muslim" instead of a "Bad Muslim" in school contexts. Therefore, it may be useful to expand the student engagement framework to consider the role of identity in motivating students to engage in school.

Recommendations

School districts should continue to offer ESL classes to refugee youth at the school level, even after they have transitioned out of the foundational courses. While there is a growing number of courses being offered in most urban schools, this is not a universal practice. Due to refugee youths' preference to seek out supports at refugee resettlement agencies, mutual aid societies, and youth-based organizations, it is important for there to be some level of continuity and overlap between these institutions. While refugee youth developed proficiency in English, they still struggled with advanced English or with subjects that relied heavily on reading and writing, like history or English. Students often described their grades as being much lower in these courses and feeling like they could not return to their beginning-level ESL classes after their transition. These same students were in a particularly tough spot, which caused them to feel less engaged in their

work. To combat this issue, students should have access to ESL courses or ongoing refresher trainings to review concepts.

Related to refugee youths' unfamiliarity with classroom expectations, school administrators and staff could provide a comprehensive orientation to refugee families upon enrollment. By engaging in an initial intake process, staff can learn about students' prior educational experiences, expectations, migration experiences, and any specific needs they have to be successful in school. They can also share with families how the classes are designed along with the general workload of the students. Parents and youth could also be invited to shadow the classrooms and speak directly with teachers and staff. The goal is to demystify any aspects of U.S. schooling for the families who may be completely unfamiliar with the norms and practices at the school levels. These initial introductions could also allow the youth and their families to share any specific needs they may have as well as sharing their migratory and prior educational experiences with the administrators and school staff. Moving beyond introductions, refugee youth and their families can discuss ways to bridge the gaps between U.S. classroom expectations and their pre-migration educational experiences. It would be helpful for teachers and school staff to have more context on how students' experiences and behaviors are dictated by prior schooling.

Finally, school districts should require anti-bias training for teachers and staff to combat implicit biases against and negative perceptions of Muslims. Schools must tackle the "Trump Effect," which is defined as an increase in bullying in schools caused by the rhetoric Donald Trump used during his presidential campaign (Sword & Zimbardo, 2017). Muslim youth remain the target of discrimination and bullying, which have risen in the current political climate. The Human Rights Campaign cites a rapid increase in youth bullying. After surveying a diverse group of 50,000 youths, ages 13 through 18, the Human Rights Campaign found that 70% of respondents

had witnessed bullying, which included hate messages or harassment, throughout the campaign period and in the immediate aftermath of Trump's election victory. Therefore, more anti-bullying policies and programs need to be created to protect Muslim refugees and immigrants at schools and in their communities.

Schools should be intentional about creating welcoming and inclusive environments for refugee youth and their families, which can occur in several ways. First, schools can train their staff to understand and embrace the cultural norms, practices, and values of refugee populations. Schools can host a variety of educational programs and initiatives to honor and share students' cultural backgrounds and specific needs (Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, & Henderson., 2013; Morrison & Bryan, 2014; Tamer, 2014). For example, schools could possibly invite Muslim-identifying students, parents, teachers, and community members to speak to the broader student body and clarify misconceptions with the intent of humanizing Muslims. Moreover, when schools are acknowledging prominent leaders in the United States, they can be intentional about highlighting noteworthy Muslims.

Second, teachers and staff should receive ongoing training on cultural sensitivity to better understand the Muslim refugee families they are serving at their respective schools (Teaching Tolerance, 2013). In-school curricula should include mandatory trainings to address implicit biases, stereotypes, threats, prejudices, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and racism with the intention of improving the experiences of refugee youth (Tamer, 2014). An exchange of cultural backgrounds should occur among families, teachers, and staff to embrace the rich backgrounds and heritage of these various stakeholders (Tamer, 2014).

It would be worthwhile to understand students' pre-migration educational experiences to better gauge their prior and current academic needs. Almost all refugee children arrive in the

United States with previous educational experiences. Dryden-Peterson (2016) argues that pre-settlement experiences of refugee children constitute a "black box" in their post-settlement education. While most existing literature on the education of resettled refugee focuses primarily on the characteristics of refugee children at the time of and after their arrival, it would be ideal to explore the pre-migration experiences of Iraqi and Syrian refugees to get a fuller sense of their prior educational experiences to inform their interactions with them. It would also give schools and community staff a better sense of their prior experiences, which are often hidden behind language barriers, privacy concerns, and cultural misunderstandings. Refugee youth may also disclose mental health concerns and other feelings they may possess, like homesickness, loneliness, and sadness. These initial meetings would provide staff with an opportunity to gauge what types of OST programs would address the students' academic and social emotional needs. School social workers, counselors, and other mental health specialists would be ideal candidates to facilitate this intake process among students and their families.

Given the current political turmoil and the increased movement of people across borders, refugee populations will continue to grow in the United States, changing the landscapes of classrooms and schools across the country. While some school districts have made strides in supporting the vulnerable population of refugee students, many schools remain ill-equipped to handle the kinds of issues that are particular to refugee students. While students expressed relatively positive experiences and levels of engagement in schools, schools need to be intentional about developing more welcoming environments for students and their parents to mitigate the discriminatory and xenophobic practices that arise in these settings.

CHAPTER 3: "I SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE A STRANGER AT THE SCHOOL. HOW

CAN I GET INVOLVED—DOES IT EVEN MATTER?" FACILITATORS AND

BARRIERS REGARDING REFUGEE PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

"At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents." – Jane D. Hull

Family engagement is not a single event. It is shared responsibility in which regular two-way communication ensures that the student is on track to meet grade-level requirements." – Heather Weiss, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Introduction

Parental involvement has been deemed one of today's most important topics in educational spheres. Educators and scholars have been increasingly concerned about the degree to which parents are involved (or uninvolved) in their children's education. Numerous studies on parental involvement in schools have underscored the gains to children's social, emotional, and academic achievement at both elementary and secondary school levels (Christian, Morrison, & Bryant, 1998; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; McBride & Lin, 1996; Muller, 1998; Singh, Bickley, Trivette, & Keith, 1995). Parental involvement is also positively related to high school students' academic achievement (Paulson, 1994; Steinberg et al., 1996; Trusty & Watts, 1996), time spent on homework, favorable attitudes toward school (Trusty & Watts, 1996), and reduced rates of high school dropout (Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, & Ritter, 1990). Research suggests that children whose parents are involved in their schooling tend to be motivated learners, have high educational aspirations, get better grades, and experience a sense of belonging in school (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Georgis, Gokiert, Ford, & Mulki, 2014; Kuperminc, Darnell, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2007). Parents who encourage their children to learn at home and who help them develop positive attitudes toward school contribute to their personal growth and academic success (Comer, 2005; Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Ford & Amaral, 2006). Studies have documented that, regardless of the economic, ethnic, or cultural background of the family, parent involvement

in a child's education is a major factor in determining school success (Jeynes, 2003; Comeau, 2006).

Within educational literature, the term "parent involvement" typically refers to the multiple ways parents may support their children's learning and achievement, usually through direct involvement with their children's school. Parent involvement in school may be reflected in many ways, including through volunteering or serving on a committee at the school or attendance at a general meeting, a parent–teacher conference, or a school or class event (Child Trends, 2018). Parents have the option to participate in schools by attending school functions and responding to school obligations (for example, parent–teacher conferences or report card pickup). Parents may also function as advocates for a school and serve as volunteers in the classroom or on field trips. They can take an active role in the governance and decision making necessary for planning, developing, and providing an education for the community's children. Epstein (1986) also describes a model of parental involvement with schools, which highlights participating in communication with the school, performing basic obligations, and assisting at the school.

The Importance of Schools for Refugee Youth

Schools are a primary developmental context for American young people and serve as one of the first and most influential institutions experienced by newly arrived refugee youth. Schools can function as a supportive environment for social interactions and provide a space to develop the knowledge and skills they will need for their future lives and work within the United States by building relationships with staff and peers (Crisp et al., 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).

Despite the importance of school as a supportive social context for these newcomers, schools can be challenging places for refugee youth and their families to navigate, especially for those who have experienced migration-related trauma and who have had limited experience with

formal schooling prior to migration. Refugee children and youth undergo a myriad of unique migration-related stresses while adapting to a new schooling environment (García-Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Many come to American schools having experienced disruptions in schooling or limited formal education and with gaps in knowledge and skills, low English-language proficiency, and low literacy. As noted in a recent Migration Policy Institute report (2015), even if refugees have attended school in first asylum countries (i.e., the first country a refugee goes to after leaving their home country), the instructional quality in those schools is highly variable and often poor. Refugee children are often exposed to multiple languages of instruction as they migrate from countries of first asylum to final resettlement. This can lead to confused, disorganized educational experiences (Carnock, 2015). Furthermore, young people's specific racial, ethnic, or cultural identities might affect their overall feelings of connection at school.

The Importance of Parental Involvement in Schools

Parental involvement may even be more beneficial for refugee students as they integrate into U.S. schools. Jackson and Davis (2000) assert that encouraging parental involvement is particularly essential in facilitating a smooth transition for recent immigrant children in U.S. schools, bridging cultural gaps between the home and school lives of language-minority students, regardless of how long they have lived in the United States. Jung and Zhang (2016) also state that parental support enables refugee and immigrant children "to have a positive relationship with academic achievement and performance in school" (333). Several studies (Georgis et al., 2014; McBrien, 2011; Segal & Mayadas, 2005; Tadesse, 2014) have emphasized the importance of culture in refugee parents' perceptions of and participation in their children's education.

Facilitators of Parental Involvement in Schools

Parental involvement in schools may be facilitated by various circumstances. First, parents may feel invited to the school by their child in ways that are explicit (e.g., a child asking a parent to help with a fundraiser) or implicit and parent-driven (e.g., a parent observes that a child is struggling with a class and talks with the teacher) (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Invitations may also originate from the school either through a specific teacher or staff person to a specific parent (e.g., the teacher invites the parent to volunteer in a classroom) and through general invitations for all parents to be involved with the school (Walker et al., 2005). General invitations for parent involvement from the school create a welcoming school environment and effectively publicize school events to parents and are examples of ways to support families (Walker et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Barriers to Parent Involvement in Schools

Increasingly, research on parent involvement with schools is focusing on better understanding of factors that present barriers to parental involvement for marginalized families and ways to promote involvement. Existing research highlights several reasons why parents are not involved in schools, such as teachers' inability to devote time to connecting with families (Caplan, 2000) and disconnect with regard to communication styles between families and teachers (Baker, 2000; Caplan, 2000; Liontos, 1992). Common barriers also include teachers' underestimation of parents' abilities to navigate schools due to their marginal statuses and limited educational backgrounds (Caplan, 2000). Lack of time is the major reason given by family members for why they do not get more involved. Limited family resources, such as transportation and childcare, also serve as a barrier to parent involvement. Parents' lack of comfort with the school is another a common barrier. Many parents feel intimated or unwelcome at the school,

especially those who are unfamiliar with U.S. customs and norms with regard to schooling. Other parents experience feelings of inadequacy or suspicion toward the school (Jones, 2001; Caplan, 2000; Liontos, 1992). While this list of reasons is not exhaustive, it highlights some of the many reasons why immigrant families are not involved in schools.

Refugee Parental Involvement in Schools

Immigrants and refugees are one of the fastest growing populations in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2015). Children who have at least one parent born outside the United States presently make up almost one quarter of the children in the country (Capps, 2001; Valladares & Ramos, 2011) and an increasing share of the school population (Cherng, Turney, & Kao, 2011). By 2060, it is projected that 20% of all Americans will be foreign-born, and, by 2044, more than half of all Americans will belong to a minority group (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Among the 21.3 million displaced people in 2017, over half were under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2017). In 2016, the United States welcomed nearly 85,000 refugees, roughly 72% of whom were women and children (U.S. Department of State, 2016). According to the ORR in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, over 10,000 refugee youth between the ages of 10 and 19 have resettled in the United States annually since 2011. The number of people in the United States who identified as having Arabic-speaking ancestry increased approximately 72% between 2000 and 2010, and the number of Arab households has increased by 91% since 1990 (Arab American Institute Foundation, 2010; Asi & Beaulieu, 2013; Parker, 2016). The Latino population constitutes the largest proportion of all immigrants and half of the overall population growth in the United States (Olivos & Mendoza, 2010).

Refugee parents face many challenges upon resettling in the United States, some of which may make it difficult for them to engage with the U.S. educational system and support their

children in school. Language barriers are a major reason why immigrant and refugee parents are less engaged in their children's schooling (Antony-Newman, 2017; Tadesse, 2014; Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015). Refugee parents' lack of mastery of the English language makes it difficult for them to participate in school-related activities and successfully communicate with school staff (Turney & Kao, 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). In 2016, 62% of students with two parents who did not speak English had a parent attend a school or class event compared with 71% of students with just one parent who did not speak English and 82% of students with two parents who did speak English (Child Trends, 2013). Most schools in the United States have documents (such as permission slips for field trips) that are not translated, have teachers who only speak English, and lack access to translators or interpreters, making it difficult to support immigrant students effectively (Morrison & Bryan, 2014; Tamer, 2014; Teaching Tolerance, 2013; Williams & Butler, 2003).

Pre-migration trauma or psychological stress related to adapting to the United States also serves as a barrier to immigrant parents' involvement in school (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lipson, 1993). Refugees are at higher risk for mental health problems such as PTSD due to exposure to stressful and traumatizing experiences, including racial and ethnic discrimination, urban violence, abuse by law enforcement officers, and forced removal or separation from their families (Teodorescu, Heir, Hauff, Wentzel-Larsen, & Lien, 2012; Foster, 2001).

Refugee parents confront challenges due to cultural differences and a general lack of knowledge about the American public school system (Tadesse, 2014; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Kaufman & Huang, 1993). Some immigrant and refugee parents may be unaware of expectations around student involvement (Nderu, 2005). A study by Moosa, Karabenick, and Adams (2001) suggests that culture plays a big role in parental involvement among Arab mothers from Iraq,

Yemen, and Lebanon. While personal contact is deemed a valued form of communication within Arabian culture (81% of the mothers attended parent–teacher conferences, and 97% of mothers expressed their willingness to participate if requested to do so), many mothers expressed high levels of anxiety when attending parent-led workshops or felt less compelled to participate in additional educational programming.

Refugee families are a highly marginalized group. Refugees arriving in the United States have typically fled one country only to spend years in an intermediary country, living in exile or in limbo and often experiencing a series of traumas (Mulimbi & Dryden-Peterson, 2018). Mulimbi and Dryden-Peterson claim, "Once uprooted from home, refugees and immigrants often settle in places where they are dislocated by exclusion and lack of opportunities, whether through laws that limit their ability to access services such as schools or through experiences in which they are made to feel that they do not belong" (Shafer & Walsh, 2018). By the time a refugee family arrives in the United States, parents and youth may be fearful of interacting with educational institutions, having less academic knowledge, and struggling to learn English.

Research Objectives

The goal of this study is to understand the patterns of student engagement among Muslim refugee youth from the Middle East who are attending CPS. The research explores the following questions:

A. *How do Muslim refugee parents experience and engage with their schools?*

B. *What are the barriers and facilitators for Muslim refugee parents' engagement with schools?*

The present study describes patterns of involvement with their children's schools among a sample of Muslim refugee parents who identify as either Iraqi or Syrian. From the perspective of

the parents, it describes factors that facilitate their parental involvement (such as a welcoming and inclusive environment cultivated by school administrators, staff, and teachers or by staff who share racial and ethnic similarities with the refugee families) and barriers to their involvement (such as lack of English-language proficiency, parents' failure to understand their need to be involved if their child is performing well academically, and discrimination and xenophobia against youth and parents). Finally, recommendations are offered with regard to how schools can better assist refugee families in becoming more involved in schools.

The justification for narrowing the sample to include only Iraqi and Syrian refugees is twofold. First, Iraqi and Syrian refugees are currently two of the largest groups of resettled refugees in the United States (Martin & Yankay, 2014). Second, minimal research exists on Arabian refugees broadly and Iraqi and Syrian refugees specifically. Finally, the general perceptions of Iraqis and Syrians have been primarily extrapolated from prior research on refugees and immigrants in general. Generalizing findings can be problematic, creating generalizations that may be erroneous when applied to a different population. A study highlighting Syrian and Iraqi refugees' perceptions of parental involvement in U.S. schools is needed to address issues that might be particular to their identities as Arabs within the United States. The current study seeks to add to the sparse literature on the dynamics related to schooling of Iraqi and Syrian refugee children.

Context

CPS provides high-quality education to all children in the region. CPS has a total student population of 361,314 with 18.7% who identify as English Language Learners and as many as one-third who have been considered English Language Learners at some point during their education. Moreover, 37% of all children in Chicago come from families with an immigrant parent,

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and more than three out of four of these children are second-generation immigrants. Despite the growing number of immigrant and refugee children and youth in Chicago, data on the performance of children of immigrants and refugees in Chicago are difficult to isolate.

The majority of the parents' children in the present study (23 out of 28) attended two Chicago Public High Schools (*Lee High School* and *June High School)* located on the north side of Chicago. The remaining youth (5 out of 28) attended Chicago Public High Schools scattered throughout the north side of the city. These schools do not offer the wide range of supports provided by the two high schools highlighted in this study, but the students did receive some supports from faculty and staff. While these schools sponsor Local School Councils and Parent Advisory Councils, they do not offer the same plethora of resources to parents as the two main schools in this study.

Research Methods

This study employs an interpretivist paradigm based on the assumption that social reality is not singular or objective but, rather, is shaped by human experiences and social contexts. The interpretive paradigm views the world through the perspectives and experiences of individual participants and explores their world by interpreting participants' understandings of their experiences (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). This study prioritizes parents' meanings and understandings of their schooling experiences as refugees while simultaneously remaining attentive to their levels of engagement in schools. This study's qualitative methods, involving in-depth interviews with study participants, were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Chicago.

Sampling and participants. Nineteen Muslim refugee parents participated in this study (18 mothers, 1 father). Most of the interviews were conducted with mothers without their husbands present. Only one mother–father pair was interviewed in the study. Eleven refugee

parents hailed from Syria, and seven were from Iraq. Interviews with parents were held at the IMAS office or in their homes. IMAS staff assisted in identifying refugee parents who had students attending local CPS. To be included in the study, parents needed to be from either Iraq or Syria; identify as Muslim; speak Arabic and/or English; have legal status as a refugee; and have children who (1) were between the ages of 13 and 17, (2) were students in middle or high school, and (3) had attended a U.S.-based public school for at least one year.

IMAS staff invited refugee parents to the organization's facility to describe the study to them in Arabic and to obtain signed consent forms, which were available in both English and Arabic. I was present at this introductory meeting to share my personal and professional background and to answer questions about the particular study. Upon receiving consent from the parents, in-person introduction meetings were held with them to schedule interviews. A translator was also present to assist with scheduling and during the actual interviews. The interviews were typically conducted during the school day while participants' children were at school, in the early evenings, or on weekends. Most of the participants' children were in high school and had lived in the United States for between two and three years.

Table 2

Characteristics of Parent Participants

Measure	Full Sample	Iraqi Sample	Syrian Sample
N (Households)	18	8	10
Table 2, continued.			
N (Parents)	19	8	11

Mean Time in United States (Months)	29.3	43.4	18.1
Mean Student Age	15.4	15.3	15.4

Data collection. A single interview session lasting between 45 and 60 minutes was conducted with parents who participated. Parents received $25 Target store gift cards for their participation. Since most of the parents only spoke Arabic, a translator was available to facilitate the interview process. The translator was a staff person at the IMAS who possessed over 10 years of experience serving as a translator. All interviews were digitally recorded for accuracy, and notes were kept with regard to participant responses, capturing impressions from body language as well as providing a backup to the digitally recorded data. Verbatim transcripts of all interviews were generated. Interviews were transcribed and later coded using MAXQDA, a software program designed to support computer-assisted qualitative methods. A pseudonym was assigned to every participant and community organization to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Data were collected from January through September 2018.

The interview protocol consisted of semi-structured questions centered on parents' levels of involvement in their children's schools as well as questions about parents' general feelings about school and their opinions on the current political climate with regard to Muslim refugees. Probes and follow-up questions were employed in response to developing themes as the interview process progressed. The interview protocol was reviewed by two qualitative research experts and edited based on their feedback *(Appendix C).* The interview guide was pilot tested with three parents connected with the IMAS.

The interview questions were designed to elicit understanding of refugee parents' current experiences as well as both facilitators and barriers to parents' engagement in school. The interview guide also contained questions around parents' general attitudes, interests, and values with regard to learning and connecting with staff and other parents, focusing on their general participation in learning activities and extracurricular activities. The following are sample questions in each of these dimensions:

1. *What are your general perceptions of your child's school?*

2. *How often do you attend the school for school-based functions or meetings with the school staff and teachers?*

3. *Are you involved in any school-based parent groups?*

4. *Describe any relationships you have with teachers and staff from the school.*

5. *How do you feel about the principal and school staff?*

Data Analysis: Finding Themes and Patterns

The goal of data analysis is to "transform data into terms that are pertinent to potential readers" (Wolcott, 1994). In this study, data analysis was intended to shed light on the experiences and patterns of Muslim refugee parents' engagement with and perception of schools. In the process of data analysis, interview transcripts and field notes were systematically arranged and explored and then divided into manageable units; these were then synthesized, examined for patterns and themes, and evaluated for significance (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Inductive analysis of the data, focusing on parents' involvement in schools, was conducted, with particular attention paid to the facilitators and barriers around parents' involvement in schools and identifying themes that emerged around parents' general perceptions of schools.

At the end of each interview, meetings were conducted with the translator to clarify terms or phrases used by study participants and to discuss some of the major themes emerging from the interviews. Each audio-recorded interview was then transcribed verbatim and supplemented with field notes. Recordings were listened to in their entirety at least once before transcription and were reviewed several times during the transcription process. The transcripts were merged with the field notes for analysis. Review of the transcripts and field notes assisted in generating expanded or revised questions and in identifying recursive patterns and themes. Questions to address parents' involvement and perceptions of their children's schools were updated accordingly and refined to better capture the range of experiences of refugee parents at their children's respective schools. Transcripts and field notes were analyzed by highlighting key phrases, paragraphs, and sections using markers and highlighters in an effort to identify patterns and themes within the data. Each interview was analyzed fully in acknowledgement of the potential for each interview to "represent a different thematic finding" (Chapelle & Duff, 2003).

After initial examination of data, debriefings and stakeholder checks were conducted at the local organizations connected to the study to provide opportunities for people with specific interest in the evaluation, such as service providers and funding agencies, to comment on categories used and data interpretations. Stakeholder checks (i.e., reviews by respondents or participants being studied) were conducted throughout the study process to verify accurate interpretations of data gathered. A final draft copy of the interview was provided to stakeholders for review.

Findings

Patterns of school-based parent involvement. Parents' involvement in their children's education consists of their practices around supervising their child's education and homework, participation in the Local School Council, and volunteering at the school and at other related

activities. While refugee parents often do not offer hands-on academic support to their children due to English language barriers and a lack of content knowledge, many refugee families support their children at home by structuring time for homework and preparation for school. All of the parents in the current study shared how they encourage their children to seek out academic support from older siblings, teachers, mentors, or tutors at local community organizations.

All of the parents expressed their belief that education is beneficial for youth to attain their educational goals. Farah, an Iraqi parent, stated that she asks her son every day about his school day and his homework:

> When he gets home, I ask about school. What did he do today? What did he learn? Does he have homework? I can't always help him—I don't know that much English, but I want to know what they [his teachers] are teaching him. If he can't figure it out, I tell him to ask his older brother or ask his teacher. If he can't translate a word, I tell him to Google it.

Khadeejah, who is also originally from Iraq, states, "I tell my children how important school is. They have to go to school every day."

Numerous parents shared how much they value education and how they emphasize its importance to their children. As a strategy to motivate their children to perform well in school, some parents report sharing with their children stories about their previous challenges in accessing education within their countries of origin or in temporary settlements. One parent mentioned how she reminds her children on a daily basis about how lucky they are to be in the United States where they can attend school. She encourages them to work hard, because they were not always able to attend school prior to resettling in the United States.

Most parents shared how they did not connect with many other parents at their children's school and were not actively involved in the Local School Council or other parent-sponsored

groups at the school level. However, many parents reported interacting with parents in out-of-school settings at local resettlement agencies and ethnic community organizations that offer parent-based programs and initiatives. They felt more compelled to connect with parents in such familiar spaces. Mira, a Syrian mother, stated:

> I don't like to attend those parent meetings at school. I don't have the time to do it, and I don't know what they do. If I want to talk to parents, I go to the Syrian Network Community for All. I can talk to parents there. I like it better.

Facilitators for Parent Involvement

A welcoming and inclusive school environment. Arriving in a new country is an overwhelming experience for refugees, especially for those who are still adapting to the culture and language and who may already have experienced substantial disruption and trauma. One of the first places where refugee families have the opportunity to connect with others is in schools. Schools foster a welcoming environment when the staff develop positive relationships with parents and students by communicating, showing an interest in their personal experiences, displaying a level of empathy, and demonstrating an awareness of the families' unique transition to the United States (Roxas, 2011). A welcoming school environment increases students' self-confidence and sense of well-being and increases the likelihood of greater academic achievement. A welcoming and inclusive school environment also improves rates of parental involvement and lowers student dropout rates.

Several parents in the study suggested that they were more likely to engage with the school when they felt welcomed and accepted by the administrators and school staff. For example, Sarah, an Iraqi woman, described how the principal was extremely accommodating and welcoming upon her family's arrival:

We felt close to him [the principal]. He was a good guy. He understood what we were going through. He [the principal] knew a lot about other cultures like Iraqi, Afghanis, and these people—and Syria. And he said we could call him if we needed anything.

Talora, an Iraqi woman who works as a Special Aid Classroom Assistant at Lee High School, also conveyed her enthusiasm for the school due to the attentiveness of the staff to her family. She was recruited for the assistant position by a school counselor who was familiar with her background in education and her fluency in Arabic. The school was in need of someone with her educational and linguistic background, making her an ideal candidate. Talora described how the principal openly embraced diverse populations and promoted an atmosphere of inclusivity and difference. For example, at the beginning of each academic year, the principal gives a welcome statement, acknowledging the various cultures and ethnic groups at the school. He is intentional about sharing his enthusiasm for refugee and immigrant populations. The principal, along with the other administrators, also meets with all of the refugee parents to learn more about their individual backgrounds and to anticipate what supports might be needed from the school. Talora shared:

I think the school is good. Even their teachers, I like them. Like one day last year, there was an accident at the school with my son. The school called the ambulance for him, and they called me right away…. So, everyone was involved, even the principal, the assistant principal, the coach…everyone. They calmed me down, and they made sure someone could speak to me in Arabic when I didn't understand English…. Yeah, they tried to do all the best for him.

Talora described how she felt supported by the school due to their responsiveness and genuine care of her family. Talora was extremely anxious about the physical state of her son, and the school was helpful in mitigating her concerns. Providing the family with an English/Arabic

translator also demonstrated a high level of responsiveness to the family's needs.

Adira, a mother from Syria, also praised the school's creation of a safe and welcoming environment for her children:

> They are doing a great job. I mean, I like the principal. My kids don't like the strict school, but I do [laughter]. They [the staff] care about my kids. They ask me how to make our experience better in the United States. When I go to the school, they [the staff] are very welcoming. I feel like they are not criticizing me. If my kids have a problem, they reach out to me to talk. They don't make my kids feel bad.

Adira shared how the schools offered a non-judgmental, supportive space for her to connect with staff when she expresses a concern. She also applauded the school for initiating contact with her, which made her feel like a valuable member of the community. Adira felt that the school staff were invested in her children's academic growth and well-being. Finally, the teachers and staff were familiar with the identity and prior experiences of her family as refugees, demonstrating a genuine concern about their integration into the school environment.

Zena, who is originally from Syria but lived in Jordan for a few years before resettling in the United States, described how welcoming the school has been to her and her 14-year-old son, Yazin:

> I like the teachers. They understand that we don't speak English, and they don't judge us for that. They treat us very well. Whenever the principal has anything to ask me about, she's so nice to us. She listens to us, and, when she doesn't understand, she finds a translator. She even tried to learn a few words in my language [Arabic]. I appreciate that.

Zena later described how the school hired a few Arabic speakers to assist her and other parents during school-based programs and to translate documents like permission slips and report

cards from English to Arabic. She acknowledged how the principal and teachers at the school are intentional about making her and her family feel connected to the school by seeking to connect with them despite the language barrier.

Similar to the other mothers, Zena expressed a feeling of connection to the school despite language and cultural barriers. Zena described a strong sense of belonging and identification with the community, feeling an "emotional safety" with school staff and teachers, who attempted to provide structure and security. The investment and involvement of the school in Zena's children and their family's integration created a valuable and meaningful sense of belonging. Zena had anticipated some resistance from the school staff due to her identity and lack of skills in speaking English.

Amala, a mother from Syria, claimed that school staff were welcoming:

The security lady brought me a cup of coffee. I had several questions about her classes, and they told me. They made me feel comfortable. I was worried about her attending school here [the United States]. You hear about the violence. And people don't like Muslims. On her first day of school, I stayed there the whole day—I needed to make sure she was safe.

While, at the time of the interview, Amala and her family had only lived in the United States for three months, she felt completely safe sending her daughter to the school. She attributed this to the consistent check-ins with staff and teachers. Despite language barriers, she still felt connected to the school.

Muna, also originally from Syria, shared how she still feels somewhat disconnected from the school, but she expressed appreciation for how the teachers consistently reach out to her and her daughter:

I still feel like a stranger to the school. Like a foreigner. I'm in a new country. This is a

new experience, new people. It's a lot to be at the school. But they [school staff] are very nice to me and my daughter.

While she has not fully adjusted to living in the United States or to American schools, she feels accepted and more receptive to the new environment due to the staff being intentional about welcoming her and her family.

As these cases suggest, a welcoming school environment is instrumental to parents feeling connected and becoming involved in the school environment, particularly for those from refugee populations. Parents whose children attend more refugee-friendly institutions express patterns of inclusion that make them feel more connected to the schools. The parents mentioned how they did not feel judged by the staff despite language barriers or unfamiliarity with U.S. school norms. The families also expressed gratitude for linguistic inclusion, acknowledging how it helped them feel connected to school staff. Hiring Arabic speakers and having translators and interpreters available demonstrated to the parents the schools' levels of commitment to embracing their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Finally, the school administrators possessed prior knowledge about their plight and their legal status as refugees, which gave the parents some level of comfort. Muslim refugee parents enrolled their children in the schools with preconceived notions and anxieties about how their families would be perceived and treated by school administrators, staff, and teachers based on their identities. Parents assumed that these stakeholders would have negative perceptions of them as Muslim refugees. However, they were relieved to encounter a welcoming school culture to assist them and their children with adapting to their new schools.

Shared racial-ethnic identity with school staff. Refugee parents in this study expressed higher levels of engagement when they were connected to teachers and staff at their children's respective schools through a shared racial-ethnic identity. More specifically, parents shared how

they felt particularly connected to the school when teachers or supportive staff members identified as Middle Eastern or Arab and/or engaged with them in Arabic. Mounting evidence from other investigations demonstrates that students benefit when assigned to a racially-ethnically similar teacher. Such research has found that student–teacher demographic similarity is related to gains in student achievement (e.g., Dee, 2004; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015); more favorable teacher perceptions of student engagement, performance, and ability (Dee, 2005, 2007; Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016; Ouazad, 2014); reductions in student absences and suspensions (Holt & Gershenson, 2015); a lower probability of students dropping out of high school (Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017); and feeling more cared for by teachers who express an interest in their schoolwork and communicate with the students in a more favorable way. These students also reported putting forth more effort in school and having higher college aspirations (Egalite & Kisida, 2018). While most of the findings are applied to U.S.-born students, this study also supports a trend around refugee parents' preference to interface with Arab teachers and school staff.

For example, Mira expressed how she and her son, Ali, a Syrian teen, developed a particularly close relationship with his math teacher, who identified as Iraqi.

Ashley: Have you identified an adult at the school who can assist your family?

Mira: Yes, I really like my son's teacher. She's Iraqi, and she is so smart. I trust her with everything.

Ashley: Has your son identified an adult at the school who he feel feels particularly close to?

Mira: Yes, he talks to his math teacher, who is Iraqi. He has a very good relationship with him—he helped him [the student] out a lot, especially in the beginning. He spoke to my son in Arabic. He helped him with math and English.

Ashley*:* How did he assist your family?

Mira: He was very important, actually. He supported us a lot. He kept encouraging us with our transition. The encouragement was important. My son felt alone, not speaking the language, not being from America, so Mr. Smith was helpful. He made him feel safe and welcomed.

Mira shared how these interactions between Mr. Smith and her son occurred several times throughout the last academic year. These one-on-one meetings typically happened during the school day or after school. These meetings were mostly spontaneous, occurring when her son was particularly stressed about his academic performance or when the student expressed times when he felt unsafe or targeted by his peers due to his Muslim identity. Mr. Smith typically shared how he, as an Iraqi man, navigated schools and other institutions. Mira's son would usually report back to his mother on these interactions with Mr. Smith, which reassured her that her son was receiving academic and socioemotional support from school staff. She was particularly happy to hear that her son was being supported by a teacher with similar a racial and/or ethnic identity to her family's.

Zena also mentioned how she felt particularly close to the school and willing to participate in activities due to some of the teachers and staff identifying as Iraqi and/or being Arabic speakers:

The school, they have some Arabic speakers working there from Iraq. His [her son's] teacher, she is from Iraq. She understands what my family is like. She gets what it's like to move here. She gets my language. She gets my religion [as a Muslim]. She's from my country.

Since Zena and the teacher are both from Iraq, the parent expresses a level of ease and familiarity at the school due to her ability to connect with a teacher who shares a similar racial or ethnic identity as her. While Zena did not expound on the nature of her relationship with the teacher, she displayed a level of ease around discussing the teacher. She also explained that she "comes to the school because Mrs. Smith is there. When she invites me to come, I come; I like her, and she gets me more than others [teachers]."

The presence of co-racial and ethnic staff members conveyed that school is a space shared with people who are culturally and racially familiar and who also possess power at the institution. Parents felt a level of ease and familiarity with these teachers and staff, feeling compelled to have some level of involvement at the school. From meeting with parents to discuss school programs in Arabic to offering to have a translator present at school programs to advocating on behalf of the school administration to hire more Arabic speakers to serve as classroom assistants and supportive staff, parents felt a close connection the school when staff shared similar identities to theirs and used their influence to advocate for particular resources and supports. Finally, parents felt safe to confide in staff with similar identities about their particular challenges with adapting to the United States due to their legal status as refugees and their Middle Eastern identities.

Barriers to Parent Involvement

English-language proficiency. Consistent with existing research, this study also highlights several barriers to refugee parents' involvement in schools. The language barrier was the most frequently cited problem related to connecting with school staff and participating in school activities. While every parent mentioned the lack of English language as a particular barrier, most parents were still able to navigate their schools with assistance from their children and school administrators. However, several parents mentioned how language barriers still functioned as a

barrier for their lack of involvement at the schools. For example, Fatimah from Iraq claimed that she was not involved with the school due to feeling uncomfortable about how the teachers and staff would perceive her. She also internalizes those feelings, attributing her lack of English language acquisition to something being inherently wrong with her. "I feel annoyed with myself that I can't communicate with the teachers and staff. I am trying very hard to learn English, but it takes time."

Similarly, Kifah, a parent from Syria, is less engaged with the school staff and parents, because she does not want to be perceived as incompetent or less intelligent during their interactions. "I don't want the parents to think I'm stupid—it's embarrassing not to speak English. I don't know what they're trying to say. I will wait until I've learned enough."

An Iraqi mother, Zena, also stated that her lack of engagement stems from her personal anxieties around speaking in English, even though she is at an intermediate level. "I feel very shy when I speak—it makes me feel extremely nervous. What if someone does not understand me? What if they correct me? I won't know what to say."

Beyond feeling embarrassed among school staff and parents, some parent participants also perceived their children expressing levels of embarrassment with their lack of fluency in English, causing them to be less involved in school. Lena stated that she was not involved with the parent groups or meetings. When I probed Lena to explain her position, she stated that her son discouraged her from getting involved. He did not inform her of parent–teacher conferences or other family–friend functions. "He keeps telling me that I don't have to come [laughter]. 'You don't understand anything; you don't know what they're trying to say. That's not the right thing to do [laughter]. I don't want to translate for you.'" He reassured his mother that he was performing well in school, so she trusted his judgement. She also did not want to embarrass her son while he

was adjusting in his new school.

The lack of English-language proficiency continues to function as one of the biggest barriers to refugee parents' lack of involvement in school. While all of the parents desired to increase their level of involvement with their children's schools, language barriers limited their participation. Some of the parents also internalized their inability to master the English language as an indicator that they are less intelligent or incapable of offering academic support to their children.

Students' academic success as a barrier. Parents engaged in the school to a lesser degree if they perceived or knew their children were performing well academically and behaviorally. To many parents, involvement with the school was only necessary if their children performed poorly or teachers contacted them with direct requests to come to the school. Otherwise, school involvement was not deemed a priority. Three mothers shared narratives around being less engaged in schools when their children are performing well in school.

Tana, a Syrian mother, shared an experience:

My daughter is doing well in school—mostly As and Bs. She is a good student. She helps

out the family. I don't need to go to the school. If she starts performing badly in school,

then I will go. But she's good for now.

Khadeejah, an Iraqi mother, shared a similar narrative: "I don't go to the school. My kids know English. Their grades are fine. I only go to the school if their grades aren't good."

Finally, Ruth, a mother from Iraq, shared how she did not feel the need to visit her child's school since she was "doing good in school": "We didn't visit the school in Iraq. Teachers tell me if something is wrong, but you don't to the school. Teachers know what's best for children." When confronted with a follow-up question around the differences in schooling between Iraq and the

United States, Ruth stated, "Yeah, her school wants me to come there for meetings and stuff. When I ask my daughter how she is doing is school, she tells me she's doing well. So, why do I need to come to the school?"

All three of these parents expressed a level of resistance or confusion around school-based expectations for them to be engaged with the school when their children are performing well. They interpret one-on-one meetings with school staff and teachers as an indication that their children are not excelling in school or need additional support. However, the parents were not opposed to visiting the school if they were invited to come due to an academic and/or behavioral concern. As mentioned by Ruth, active participation in U.S. schools as defined in a U.S. context is a departure from what they experienced in previous educational experiences. As described by parents, school administrators and staff displayed a level of deference to parents as being experts on children's academic and socioemotional development. Many of the parents do not feel qualified to offer any insight on how to support their children outside of the home. Therefore, when they resettle to the United States, they are not accustomed to this expectation for them to be active and visible agents at their children's schools.

Bullying and discrimination. Bullying and discrimination served as a consistent reason why parents were less involved with schools. Half of the parents described feelings of anxiety and fear for their children's safety and well-being due to acts of discrimination or bullying at the school or local community. They also expressed levels of disapproval with how school administrators handled these incidents. For example, Hana, a Syria mother, described how her son was bullied by his peers and a teacher when they first resettled to the United States.

Ashley*:* Have you or your son ever felt unsafe at school or maybe experienced something that wasn't good at school?

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Hana*:* Yeah. He got bullied at the beginning because he didn't speak English. Also, he was placed in lower grades [classes]. So, other kids started rolling the paper and throwing it at him and mocking his accent. A few students labeled him a terrorist. At the time, he didn't know what to say because he didn't speak English. One of his teachers was also very mean to him because he didn't know English. She told him that it shouldn't take this long to learn the language—it made him feel very sad. He didn't want to go to school for some time. His English has improved over time. He helps us learn English now.

Prior to these experiences, Hana liked the general climate of the school. However, after the described incident, she was concerned about her son's negative experiences with teachers and his peers. She was also concerned about how it was handled by school administrators:

I liked the school when we first came here. People seemed to be really nice. But now, I'm nervous about my son being at the school. People are mean to him because he is Muslim. That's not right. His teachers said mean things to him. And kids were mean to him. It was hard for him to meet new friends. When I went to the school to complain, the principal didn't do anything. And the teacher did not apologize. I don't want him at that school, but I don't know where else he could go.

Hana was extremely upset by these negative encounters at school as well as the lack of punishment of the teacher and boys who targeted her son. However, she also felt powerless to remove him from this toxic space. She recognized that her son was being targeted due to his ethnic and religious identities. Due to the mismanagement of the situation by the school administrators and teachers, Hana chose to disengage with the school.

Similarly, Sameena from Iraq described a time when her son, Ali, was being bullied by two male students:

I mean, he got bullied, and they hit him on his face. And he fell down. They screamed mean things to him. And it seems like there was a team playing something in the park. They called the police. So, that was very bad—I mean, scary—a very bad experience. He was scared. Me too. So, after that, he decided to go to the gym and to gain weight.

Unlike Hana's experience, Sameena described an incident with her son being bullied during recess when no one intervened. While Sameena did not elaborate on this incident, she expressed concern about her son attending the school and the lack of support he received from school staff. She is concerned that he is being targeted by his peers due to his religious and ethnic identities. Similar to Hana, Sameena chose to decrease her level of engagement with the school due to their inability to support her son and for the general toxic climate of the school. She would have preferred for school staff to respond quickly and consistently to bullying behavior to support her son and to send a message to the entire school community that bullying, harassment, and discrimination will not be tolerated at the school.

Finally, Oman shared how his daughter was being bullied in one of her classes:

My daughter came home one day to tell me that some boys kept pulling off her hijab. What an awful thing to do. That's part of her religion. That's not a joke. I went to her school to talk to the principal, and he wasn't going to do anything. Like, I asked him to suspend the boys, but he wanted to give them a warning. That made me mad. That's not right.

While Oman displayed a level of agency to reach out to the school with his concerns, the initial response he received from the principal was dismissive. Eventually, the principal decided to punish the boys for harassing his daughter. Despite the outcome, Oman still expressed a level of fear for his daughter navigating the school and community. "I can't be with her every time, so I want to believe she is safe at school."

With an increasingly divisive socio-political climate, bullying of Muslim refugee children and adolescents is on the rise, and these examples support this shift. Muslim refugee parents are grappling with how to respond appropriately to incidences of bullying and discrimination at schools, constantly concerned about their youths' well-being and ability to maintain a sense of normalcy. Many parents expressed doubt regarding school leadership's ability to support their children, so they became disengaged with participating in school-based activities and programs. They also encouraged their children to be less involved in school for fear of them being further victimized.

Recommendations for Urban Schools with Muslim Refugee Parents and Other Immigrant Populations

The findings from this study yield insights regarding how to improve refugee parents' perceptions of and participation in their children's school, particularly in urban settings. Many of the findings and lessons learned from their experiences are relevant and feasible for different types of schools accommodating refugee children and youth.

As the data suggest, a welcoming school environment is instrumental to parents feeling connected and involved with schools, particularly among refugee populations (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). A welcoming and safe school environment consists of school staff employing policies and practices to ensure that refugee parents feel comfortable. More than half of the world's refugee population lives in urban areas (Mendenhall et al., 2017; UNHCR, 2016; UNHCR, 2012). Urban schools can make sure all school documents and handouts are translated into Arabic so that families can read it. Ideally, schools can have Arabic translators serving as staff or volunteers to convey important information to their Arabic-speaking families at school functions and other parent meetings.

School administrators can also create a welcoming environment by promoting diversity and inclusivity at the school level, offering a wide range of programs and initiatives that showcase the diverse populations attending the school. For example, schools could host a local fair or carnival showcasing different cuisines or cultural practices among the various racial and ethnic populations, drawing on the expertise of refugee families to showcase their talents. School administrators can also be intentional about hiring staff who possess similar racial and ethnic identities to those of the Muslim refugee parents and their families. This would enable Muslim refugee parents and their children to develop strong relationships with staff who possess some familiarity with their identities and experiences in the United States. They can provide the schools with more context for the specific needs of refugee families as they adapt to this new environment.

Family/school liaisons. Schools should develop liaisons or mediators at the schools to work closely with refugee families (Hamilton, 2004). Current research emphasizes the importance of a "mediator" between school and refugee students and their families. Mediators, such as school social workers and mental health specialists, function as individuals "who need to have an in-depth understanding of both the culture of the school and that of the refugee family and child [and] can act as brokers to develop good communication channels between the child, school, and parents" (89). These family and school liaisons would work closely with refugee parents to determine their specific needs from the school, advocating on their behalf for additional supports. Each newly resettled refugee family would be assigned to a family/school liaison, who would function as an additional layer of support for the families.

Anti-bullying programming. To combat bullying at a school level, school administrators should be intentional about creating dialogues and programming to dismantle the divisions among students. The bullying of Muslim refugee youth in schools is generated due to a lack of

understanding and acceptance of differences and can be combated in multiple ways. On a societal level, the removal of these harmful stigmas and stereotypes around Muslim refugees will alleviate some of the pressure felt by students to fit or to pushback on negative images or perceptions of them. Within schools, however, teachers and staff seeking out strong relationships with refugee youth and their families has been shown to have positive effects for breaking these stereotypes and biases held by teachers and other students regarding refugee youth (Peguero & Bondy, 2011).

Treating these bullying incidents as bias incidents is another way in which schools can work to decrease bullying. Restorative justice approaches to dealing with bullying are frequently successful. This method stresses an understanding of why the act was harmful and holding perpetrators accountable for their actions (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services, 2014). Schools could also conduct workshops on bullying prevention and coping with discrimination for both parents and children. These programs should help refugee youth identify bullying, know their rights in schools and what actions can be applied, and know how they should handle these experiences on a practical level. This would enable families to display a level of agency, moving beyond the perception that refugees are victims or powerless.

Family orientations at the school. School administrators and staff should facilitate family orientations and periodic check-ins with families to ensure their students' academic success. These sessions may include pertinent information around school policies and expectations and on the significance of parental engagement to students' academic achievement and development. Refugee families resettle in the United States from diverse backgrounds with a wide range of needs and prior educational experiences. Language proficiency varies depending on the origins of the refugees. Some may not speak English while others may come from countries where English is taught in the schools. These cultural and linguistic differences pose challenges to schools that want

to engage parents in their children's education.

One of the most important steps in engaging refugee parents is to understand that they are coming from a very different cultural outlook when it comes to their expectations and involvement with schools. This may be due, in part, to the deep respect parents have for teachers, deeming them to be the experts on child development and education, not the parents, which is a departure from the norm in the United States (Breiseth, Roberston, & Lafond, 2015). Refugee families place a high value on education, but they hold different ideas about whose responsibility it is. For example, they may see the teacher's role as promoting academic knowledge and the family's roles as instilling morality and character in their children. As a result, parents may hesitate to ask questions to avoid the appearance of doubting the teachers, or they may assume that schools do not want them to insert their opinion about their child's education. Upon arriving in the United States, refugee parents may not be aware of the expectations for them to be active participants in their child's education by being vocal and present at schools. Additionally, Muslim refugee families come from cultures that are oriented towards the group (the family, the class, the society, etc.) rather than the individual (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008). While teachers may perceive refugee parents as displaying a lack of interest in their child's education, parents are merely concerned with their child's personal development and how this will affect the child's ability to thrive in the classroom.

To support refugee families in adjusting to a new school community and to help them become valued partners with the school, school staff first must understand who these families are, their needs, and how schools can bridge the linguistic and cultural gaps between homes and schools. When the students enroll in the schools, the administrators or staff members could conduct an interview or assessment to acknowledge and prioritize the specific needs of the families. School

leaders and educators must be sensitive to the specific challenges and needs refugee families must contend with in schools as well as how being so situated plays out in relationships between school practitioners and refugee communities. Schools could also offer English classes for the parents at the schools, exposing parents to some of the jargon used in school settings. During these classes, ESL instructors and school staff could teach basic classes in English and give workshops on school-based policies and programs. They could even review official school documents in this space to ensure that parents are clear about the schools' expectations for their children.

Finally, schools should provide multiple ways for parents to be involved, considering their other family and community commitments. They can also share with families how the classes are designed along with the general workload of the students. Parents and youth could be invited to shadow the classrooms and speak directly with teachers and staff who will be working closely with the students. The goal is to demystify any aspects of U.S. schooling for the families who may be completely unfamiliar with the norms and practices in the United States.

Conclusion

As the United States continues to receive resettled children and youth in the coming years, these lessons learned by Muslim refugee parents are useful and relevant for school staff and teachers across myriad educational settings. Gaining a better understanding of their overall perceptions and patterns of participation in schools will be critical in creating a welcoming and safe environment for parents and students whose lives have been disrupted due to persecution, violence, and war and who now find themselves in a new and unfamiliar environment. By addressing some of the barriers hindering parents from being actively engaged in their students' lives, such as lack of English language proficiency, parents' unfamiliarity with the expectation to be involved in their children's education, and bullying and discrimination from peers and students,

schools can ensure that Muslim refugee parents feel compelled to be active members at schools.

CHAPTER 4: BEYOND THE SCHOOL DAY: EXPLORING REFUGEE YOUTHS'

PERCEPTIONS AND PARTICIPATION IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

"It doesn't take a Ph.D. to figure out that young people need some place positive to go after school to stay off the streets and out of their empty houses.... With 17 million American parents scrambling to find care for their school-age children during work hours, the problem keeps growing." – Newsweek, April 27, 1998

"A good high school goes a long way, but what kids learn outside the classroom can be just as powerful." – Newsweek, September 14, 2014

"The whole point of education is to prepare our kids for the workforce. They need academic skills, but they also need social skills, emotional skills, professional skills, confidence and collaboration—these are all things that kids can get in after-school programs." – Jodi Grant of nonprofit Afterschool Alliance

"I just want to have a normal life, a better life—in school and after school, like the whole American experience." – Saarah, 15, Syria

Introduction

OST provides important contexts for children's development and well-being. Children and youth spend more of their waking hours out of school than in school, and more than 14 million school-age children and youth participate in organized OST programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). Scholars suggest that approximately 83% of adolescents (ages 12–17) participate in at least one organized OST activity (Moore, Manlove, Terry-Humen, Williams, Papillo, & Scarpa, 2001). OST programs are adult-supervised programs that young people regularly attend when school is not in session, such as before and after the school day or in the summer, and may be located on a school campus or in off-campus locations such as community centers and parks. OST programs may focus on academic tutoring, provide enrichment in a specialty area (e.g., sports teams, arts enrichment programs, STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math]), offer multipurpose

activities and services (e.g. YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, community centers, scout troops), or primarily provide recreational activities (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2011; Peguero & Bondy, 2011; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005, 2007). Structured OST activities may also include volunteering or working for pay (Yu, Newport-Berra, & Lui, 2015; Staff & Schulenberg, 2010).

OST programs serve multiple purposes. They are increasingly viewed as an important way for working families to bridge the supervision gap between the end of the school day and the time parents get home from work. While the workday continues to grow longer for working parents, the school day has remained the same. The gap between work and school schedules is as much as 25 hours per week, which presents working parents with the challenge of finding a trusted adult to care for their children while they are at work (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Larson & Verma, 1999). OST programs also function as supplements to what children and youth learn during the regular school day, exposing them to a wide array of enrichment opportunities that promote cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and moral growth and development. Middle- and upper-income families often pay substantial sums for their children to participate in OST activities. With the increase of funding from the government and foundations to support organized activities in low-income areas and low-performing schools, students from less affluent families have more access to such programs (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012).

Research has documented that involvement in OST activities is beneficial to youth. Although random assignment research is becoming more common in the realm of education, it is still somewhat rare to have strong grounds for making causal claims (Heath, Anderson, Cureton Turner, & Payne, 2018). Nonetheless, existing research suggests that OST programs improve students' academic achievement and reading and math test scores (Klein & Bolus, 2002; Vandell et al., 2007; Lauer et al., 2006; Camacho & Fuligni, 2015; Roeser & Peck, 2003; Mahoney &

Cairns, 1997; Dunleavy & Milton, 2009; Fullarton, 2002; Kuh, 2008). OST programs increase students' engagement in activities through which they demonstrate effort and persistence (Blomfield & Barber, 2011). Participation in OST programs also assists students with the development of relationships with adults beyond their families and teachers and with their peers (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000; Osgood, Wilson, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 1996; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Larson, 2000; McLaughlin, 2000; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). Finally, OST programs play a significant role in encouraging physical activity and healthy dietary habits, creating positive health outcomes and reducing obesity (Mahoney, Lord, & Carryl, 2005).

In addition to promoting positive youth development, engagement in OST programs is associated with youth spending less time in unsupervised risky activities. For example, participation in OST programs has been associated with reduced drug use and criminal behavior (Cunha & Heckman, 2006). After-school hours, particularly between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m., are the peak times for juvenile crimes and risky behaviors such as alcohol and drug use and unprotected sex (Afterschool Alliance, 2009). Youth who do not participate in OST programs are 49% more likely to use drugs, become teen parents, or be victims of violence after school (National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center). Furthermore, youth who do not participate in OST programs are three times more likely to use marijuana and to smoke cigarettes (After-School All Stars, 2012).

Research has shown that students from marginalized communities especially benefit from participating in OST activities. Mahoney and Cairns (1997) found that participation in OST activities gives students from marginalized populations an opportunity to create a positive and voluntary connection to their school. The researchers claim that involvement in OST activities

may support at-risk students by maintaining, enhancing, and strengthening the student–school connection.

Despite evidence for the benefits of OST involvement, participation in particular activities varies for racial and ethnic minorities (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005, 2007). For example, youth from lower-income families are less likely than youth from wealthier families to participate in structured OST activities, and minority youth are less likely than non-Hispanic white youth to be engaged in OST activities (Heath et al., 2018). Research suggests that participation in OST activities increases psychological and social adjustment among racial and ethnic minorities, including higher self-esteem and peer acceptance, as well as reducing negative behaviors like drug use and aggression (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Mason & Chuang, 2001; Morrison, Storino, Robertson, Weissglass, & Dondero, 2000).

Children of migrants, asylum-seekers, immigrants, and refugees may have unique challenges engaging with OST programming. Children who have at least one parent born outside the United States make up almost one-quarter of the children in the country (Capps, Fix, & Passel, 2002; Valladeres & Ramos, 2011) and an increasing share of the school population (Cherng et al., 2011). Compared with children of native-born parents, children from immigrant families are less likely to participate in OST activities (Cherng et al., 2011; Reardon-Anderson, Capps, & Fix, 2002). Several factors have been shown to be related to immigrant youths' low levels of involvement in OST activities, including family responsibilities, limited financial resources, unfamiliarity with the American school system, lack of transportation, safety concerns, the negative influences of peers, and fear of racism or discrimination (Heath et al., 2018; Bejarano, 2007; Simpkins, Delgado, Price, Quach, & Starbuck, 2013; Simpkins, Ripke, Huston, & Eccles, 2005; Vernez, Abrahamse, & Quigley, 1996). However, participation may depend on the specific

immigrant and refugee group and type of activity (Heath et al., 2018; Simpkins, O'Donnell, Delgado, & Becnel, 2011).

Refugee students face additional layers of challenges during their adjustment to their new school and community environments. Refugee children and youth undergo a myriad of migration-related stresses that can influence adaptation to a new after-school and community environment (García-Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). These include separation from family, cultural dissonance, acculturation stress, limited English proficiency, gaps in schooling, distrust or fear of school personnel, conflicting expectations between families and school faculty, and limited financial resources (Bal & Arzubiaga, 2014; Bush & Saltarelli, 2003; Berthold & Hoover, 2000; Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Kanu, 2008; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Roy & Roxas, 2011). Refugee youth from the Middle East who practice the Muslim faith face additional challenges given the increasingly anti-Muslim rhetoric within the United States over the last decade (Beutel, 2013).

OST programs have the potential to serve as an anchor for refugee youth and their families who lack familiarity with American schools and communities. OST activities can function as a space to support motivation and achievement among refugee youth by offering them a layer of social capital (Pong, Hao, & Gardner, 2005; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). Although it is likely that engagement with OST programs would benefit their academic success, social adjustment, and adaptation to American society, little is known about the process of engagement for Muslim refugee youth. Moreover, their challenges with OST participation may be different than for other newly arrived or ethnic minority families.

Research Questions

Using an interpretivist paradigm approach, this study seeks to understand the overall perceptions and experiences of Muslim refugee youth living in a large urban area with regard to OST activities. This study explores how Muslim refugee youth perceive OST as well as their overall participation in these programs and the type of programs they tend to be involved with:

1. *What are Muslim refugee youths' experiences with OST programs?*

   a. *What are the factors that promote or discourage participation in out-of-school programs?*

2. *What are their patterns of participation in different types of OST activities within their schools and communities?*

Context

June High School is known for its inclusive and welcoming practices around immigrant and refugee youth and is demographically diverse with more than 75% of students speaking a language other than English at home. The school has a dedicated team of teachers and staff who are committed to supporting immigrant and refugee youth with their transition to school. The school sponsors a robust bilingual/ESL program to assist students with their coursework. The faculty and staff mirror the multicultural backgrounds of its students, serving as translators and mentors. The teachers are fluent in many languages, including Chinese, Arabic, Assyrian, Spanish, Russian, Serbo-Croat, Gujarati, and Urdu. The school hosts events tailored to refugee and immigrant populations, such as resource fairs and "Know Your Rights" meetings. Finally, the school supports diverse populations by offering students access to groups and clubs such as the African Heritage Club, Arabian Club, and Filipino Club, to name a few.

The remaining students (5 out of 28) attended Chicago Public High Schools scattered

throughout the north side of the city. These schools do not offer the wide range of supports available at the other high schools highlighted in this study, but the students did receive some level of support from faculty and staff.

Research Methods

Approved by the University of Chicago's Institutional Review Board, this study followed an interpretivist paradigm that prioritizes students' assessments and understandings of their out-of-school involvement and experiences within their schools and local communities. In-depth interviews were conducted with study participants upon receipt of written informed consent from parents followed by assent from youth. Youth received $10 Target gift cards for their participation.

Participants. Twenty-eight Muslim refugee students participated in this study (18 female, 10 male). Students hailed from Syria (21) and Iraq (7). Interviews with students were held at either the IMAS office or students' homes with their parents' consent. IMAS staff identified refugee youth who were students at local CPS and assisted in selecting a sample representing a mix of gender, school grade level, country of origin (e.g., Iraq or Syria), age, and number of years living within the United States. To be included in the study, students were required to be either from Iraq or Syria, identify as Muslim, be between the ages of 13 and 17, be attending middle school or high school, have attended a U.S.-based public school for at least one year, and speak Arabic and/or English. Participants also were required to have legal status as a refugee. IMAS staff invited participants' parents to the organization to describe the study to them in Arabic and to obtain signed consent forms, which were available in English and Arabic. I was present at this introductory meeting to share information about my personal and professional background and to answer questions about the study. Upon receiving consent from the parents, in-person introductions between me and youth were facilitated by the IMAS, during which the

youth received a description of the study. Consent forms were obtained from students who agreed to participate in the study.

   Data collection. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed, reviewed by two qualitative research experts, and edited based on their feedback (see Appendix). Two pilot interviews were conducted with refugee youth associated with the IMAS before interviewing the youth in the study in order to identify necessary adjustments to the interview protocol to better capture the essence of the students' experiences. The interviews were designed to elicit understanding of refugee youths' current experiences and involvements during OST. The interview protocol consisted of questions regarding students' types of involvement in OST activities and their general experiences within OST programs:

   1. What do you like to do after school?

   2. Describe any activities or programs you like to participate in outside of school.

   3. Describe some of the OST activities you like to participate in at the school.

   4. If you need homework help, where do you seek support?

   While most of the interviews were conducted in English, a translator was available to serve as an interpreter and translator for students who were not confident speaking English. All interviews were audiotaped to ensure accuracy of interpretation and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Youth received $10 store gift cards for their participation. A pseudonym was assigned to every participant and community organization to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Data were collected from January through September 2018.

Data Analysis: Finding Themes and Patterns

   The purpose of this study was to identify the experiences and patterns of Muslim refugee students' involvement in OST activities in school and community activities. Interview transcripts

and field notes were divided into manageable units, synthesized, and analyzed for patterns and themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Inductive analysis of the data was employed, focusing on participants' OST involvement and examining all themes that emerged, regardless of whether they had been anticipated in advance. The particular types of OST activities and programs youth participated in were tracked, such as sports teams, arts-based programs, organizations to encourage youth to be civically engaged, and organizations that offered homework assistance and tutoring. Finally, students' general perceptions of OST programs were explored.

At the end of each interview, I transcribed audio-recorded interviews and wrote out the field notes. For instance, shortly after each interview, I transcribed the interviews verbatim. I listened to the recordings at least once before transcribing and several times during the transcription process. This listening was the beginning of my data analysis, and the analysis continued with multiple readings of transcripts of the interviews. The transcripts were merged with the field notes for analysis. I constantly reviewed the transcripts and field notes, and, in doing so, I came up with expanded or revised questions as well as documenting recursive patterns and themes emerging from the data. For example, I initially only asked questions around students' OST involvement at the school level. However, upon reviewing the transcripts and field notes, the students consistently referenced their engagement in OST programs at local agencies. Therefore, I refined my interview questions to capture the range of programs in which youth could participate beyond the school day. I later coded the transcripts and field notes by drawing out phrases, paragraphs, and whole sections using markers and highlighters. As patterns and themes began to emerge from the data around students' perceptions and patterns of participation in OST programs, I sorted through the data. I analyzed and discussed each participant because each participant may "represent a different thematic finding" (Chapelle & Duff, 2003). It was my goal to track the

unique characteristics of each participant's OST experiences. On the other hand, I emphasized commonalities that ran across the cases. As a result, I was able to sort through the data in meaningful ways and look for similarities and differences between out-of-school experiences among the participants.

Findings

The findings from this study document Muslim refugee youths' patterns of participation and experiences in OST activities within their respective schools and local communities. Refugee boys were typically involved in sports-based programs like soccer. Refugee girls, on the other hand, typically engaged in arts-based programs that emphasized performance and writing as an opportunity for them to express feelings of nostalgia for their countries of origin.

Second, important themes were identified related to the types of OST programs refugee students typically participate in within their local communities outside of the school context. Students typically participate in programs that offer them academic support and homework assistance, encourage refugee youth to be civically and politically engaged in their schools and communities, and promote their cultural and ethnic identities.

Finally, the general perceptions of OST programs by a handful of refugee youth who perceive them to be distractions from their academic pursuits were examined.

Youths' participation in school-based programs. Participation in school-based OST programs varied based on gender. Muslim refugee boys typically participated in sports-related activities like soccer whereas refugee girls typically engaged in arts-based programs that emphasized performance and writing. Saheed, an Iraqi boy, described his motivations for participating in soccer: "I used to play soccer a lot back at home [in Iraq]. Like, I was good too. Like really good. I like playing soccer 'cause it reminds me of home. I used to play all the time."

While Mohammad, an Iraqi refugee, mentioned how his participation on a soccer team was critical to his adjustment to the United States, he also noted that soccer serves as a reminder of his home country:

Playing soccer is my favorite thing to do. Like, favorite thing. I used to play all the time when I lived in Iraq. That's what you do. When I came here [to the United States], it was my goal to play soccer. When I heard about the school team, I tried out for it. I had to be on it. It gives me a chance to play. And I almost forget that I'm in America—it reminds me of home.

Assad, an Iraqi youth, echoed the same sentiments around his motivations to play soccer, stating, "Soccer is everything to me. I would like to play professionally one day. I think we play more soccer in Iraq than in America. We play a lot over there. It's cool." Sadiq, another student from Syria, shared how he attempted to join the soccer team but did not make the team, leaving him extremely distraught:

Ashley: What do you like to do after school?

Sadiq: I tried out for the soccer team, but I didn't get it.

Ashley: How did you feel about not making the team?

Sadiq: I was upset. I really wanted to be on the team. I don't know why I didn't make it. I wanted to play with the other kids. Like, a lot of boys from my country are on the team. It would have been nice to play with them.

Ashley: Do you think you'll try out again?

Sadiq: Naw, I don't think so. It's too much work. They [the coaches] should have picked me the first time. It would have been cool to play with my friends.

Involvement in sports plays a significant role in the everyday lives of young refugee boys and teens, allowing them to connect with their peers who identify as Middle Eastern and/or as refugees while participating in a universal sport like soccer. Soccer continues to be the most popular game in the world, and refugee boys tend to gravitate towards it as an OST program. Lapchick (2018) states, "No other sport speaks to a global audience like soccer, which is why so many have used it to reach and aid refugees" (47). These boys find value in playing soccer due to their familiarity with the sport, and it functions as a reminder of their countries of origin. Soccer serves as a distraction to refugee boys who long to return home yet desire to embrace their new lives in America. Participation demonstrates that they have successfully integrated into American culture since they are also embracing an activity that is widely shared by Americans. Playing soccer can also help heal their emotional scars and restore at least some semblance of normalcy. While the refugee boys discussed their interest and involvement in soccer, they did not mention their participation in any other sports teams at their respective schools, nor did they participate in any other school-based OST programs.

While boys gravitated toward sports as a mechanism to maintain close ties to their countries of origin, refugee girls did not typically engage in sports activities at their schools. When they participated in school-based OST activities, it was mainly within arts-based programs, including visual or theater arts, drama, dance, crafts, literature, and music. Program activities included performing, drawing, painting, sculpting, singing, and playing instruments (Hughes, 2005). Sharonda, a Syrian girl, described her preference for arts-based programs:

> I don't really care for sports. It's a bit too physical for me. The boys can get kinda mean, too. I am involved in a music group at my school. It's pretty fun. I get to learn new music and sing.

Several other girls shared a similar perspective around their involvement in arts-based OST programs, often noting their delight at participating in arts and music activities with peers with similar identities as Middle Eastern and/or refugees. Yalanda, from Syria, stated:

I like to hang with my friends after school. We are in this program together through Play After-School Matters. We get to learn how to be a fashion designer. I want to learn how to make prettier hijabs and shawls for girls who look like me. That would be so cool.

Other girls commented on their enthusiasm to participate in arts-based OST programs around performance and music. Farah, from Syria, stated:

I love to dance and sing. I would like to be a performer one day. That would be so cool. Being in this program gives me a chance to practice this stuff. Maybe I could do it one day for real.

The refugee girls described their participation in arts-based programs as a mechanism for coping with the trauma and anxieties around their recent resettlement and integration into the United States. Several girls described how stressful their lives have been adapting to new schools and communities, and they expressed appreciation for how participating in a drama and writing club at school allowed them to write about their stressful pre- and post-migration experiences. With the intent of possibly developing a play or mini-skit around these narratives, the girls were encouraged to write down thoughts and feelings related to their migration from their countries of origin. The facilitator of this theater/drama writing group was a local artist with a background in both social work and drama. She was affiliated with a local arts-based community organization and theater company with the goal of exposing high school students to dance, drama, media arts, music, and/or visual art at the school level and through visiting artist partnerships, performance, and/or museum trips. While the facilitator did not personally identify as a refugee or immigrant,

she had years of experience working with students from marginalized, immigrant communities in Chicago. She also partnered with several CPS to implement similar programs.

One goal of the drama-writing group was to help students make connections between arts learning and other subjects while also promoting technique development in the arts. Youth had the option of writing stories, skits, songs, or poetry instead of a narrative account of their lives. While the program was tailored solely to participation of members of refugee groups, participants gravitated toward this program from two schools. Participants described how they joined this group to gain access to an arts-based curriculum and to practice their writing skills. With the facilitator functioning in a dual role as a counselor and master artist from the local community, the girls were able to delve deep into difficult topics within a safe space with their peers who share similar identities. Shaia from Iraq stated:

> I love this group. I mean, I really love it. I like to write, and this program allows me to write whatever I want. It was hard to be here [in America] when I first came, but it's gotten better. I have some friends. I know a lot more English. But I still get sad sometimes. Like, I miss home. I want to go back. Writing helps me to process the fact that I want to go home.

When I asked Shaia to describe her writing themes, she told me:

> I like to write about my home…what it looked like. It was so pretty. It's different than the U.S. I write about my friends. I write about my family. Some of my brothers are still in Lebanon. They want to come here [to America], but they can't. I miss them so much. Sometimes, I don't know what to do, I miss them so much. This writing group lets me write whatever I want. Sometimes, I write for hours about everything that makes me sad. I feel so much better.

Similarly, Tasneem from Syria, stated:

I like this group. My friends are in it with me. I started coming to the meetings because I want to act one day. That's my dream. But we started talking about our feelings and writing about our feelings, and I don't know.

When I asked Tasneem to describe the themes she writes about, she stated:

I write about my new life here. I write about home, too. I write about it so that I don't forget home [Syria]. I miss it so much. I write about my brother, who is still there. I write about my friends at home and here [the United States]. I just write, like, whatever comes in my head.

Many girls conveyed feelings of nostalgia, separation, loss, abandonment, guilt, and shame as well as favorable childhood memories with regard to the traditions and religious beliefs of their countries of origin. Engaging in drama and reflective writing through the school-based OST program allowed refugee girls to process and reflect on their migration experiences by exploring these themes within a safe and transformative space. Writing allowed the girls to maintain some form of connection to their homes and to embrace their new settings. The girls had the opportunity to perform their narratives or plays for each other or before a broader audience, which was also therapeutic for them. While the OST program was not initially intended to serve a therapeutic function, the girls shared how they used the theatrical space to process their strong feelings of nostalgia, leading to transformative and therapeutic change through the senses. This program allowed the youth to engage in self-reflection and mood control. Students have very limited spaces to express their thoughts in a structured environment, so their participation in visual and literary arts within an OST setting is extremely beneficial to them.

These findings suggest that nostalgia and a strong connection to one's home country is quite salient among refugee youth. Homesickness is often an overlooked psychosocial problem of

refugees. The act of leaving their countries of origin evokes intense feelings of separation and conflicting emotions (Rumbaut, 2005b). Cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physical adversities may be triggered when youth and their families are forced into exile and unable to return home. Many of the refugee youth still yearn for home while also seeking to embrace their new homes within the United States.

The finding that boys participate in sports at higher rates than girls replicates other studies about American youth participation in OST activities. Girls' participation is dispersed across a greater variety of activity types (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Feldman & Matjasko, 2007; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Jacobs, Vernon, & Eccles, 2005; McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 2001; Posner & Vandell, 1999). The study also offers new findings regarding refugee youth participation in various activities. For the boys, involvement in sports functions as a reminder of their previous lives in the Middle East. For the girls, engagement in arts-based programs like drama and writing groups allow them to reflect on their prior lives and engage in self-reflection and mood control. They have few opportunities to express their thoughts within a structured environment, so their participation in visual and literary arts within an OST setting is extremely beneficial.

Refugee youths' participation in community-based OST programs. In addition to participating in OST programs at their schools, the refugee youth engage with programs located within community organizations, particularly organizations providing support for refugee families. Community-based programming tends to focus on academic tutoring, civic engagement, and recreation.

Tutoring programs for academic support. Refugee youth were more likely to seek out OST programs for academic support and homework assistance from local community organizations and refugee resettlement agencies than from their schools. While academic-oriented

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OST programs were available at their respective schools, the students preferred to access tutoring programs through local organizations due to a higher level of trust and dependence on the staff and volunteers as well as their familiarity with the organizations. Several refugee resettlement agencies and local organizations offer academic programs, such as ESL classes, after-school programs, summer programs, in-home tutoring and mentoring, parent education courses, and classes on school readiness. Due to the wide range of programs offered by these organizations, refugee youth and their families feel more comfortable accessing these programs over school-based programs. Upon resettling in the United States, refugee youth encounter these supports even before they are enrolled in schools, creating a high level of trust.

Onur, from Iraq, stated:

I go to RefugeeWorldOne to get help with my homework. I have a tutor who works with me on Mondays and Wednesdays with math and English. It's just easier for me to go there [the organization] than to meet with teachers.

Similarly, Gabi, from Iraq, described how she preferred to meet with her tutor at GirlWorld than at the school due to her close bond and familiarity with her tutor: "I've known my tutor for a few years now. She's very helpful. I like meeting with her." When I asked her about connecting with teachers and staff at the school for homework help, she quickly dismissed my question, stating, "I don't like meeting with my teachers. My English is not always good enough to explain why I don't understand something. I get nervous talking to them."

I asked Gabi whether tutoring programs were available at the school level, and she stated, "Yeah, there a few at my school. I'm sure they're fine. I just like to meet with my tutor at GirlWorld. It's just easier. Like, I know her."

Reema, from Syria, shared a similar sentiment, expressing high levels of anxiety about

seeking homework help from teachers. "My teachers are okay. Like, they're pretty nice to me. But I don't ask them for help with anything. They seem very busy. And I don't want them to think that I'm stupid." When I asked the student where she seeks homework help, she stated, "I go to RefugeeWorldOne to meet with my tutor. We've worked together for two years. He's like in college and stuff."

Several students shared how they felt more comfortable seeking academic support from their assigned tutors and mentors at local community agencies than accessing tutors available at their school. While the schools offer onsite-tutoring programs through external partners, the youth either did not mention the use of those programs or expressed reluctance to access them. The youth had developed strong ties with adults in the tutoring programs within local community organizations, so they chose to connect with them instead of school faculty or staff. The students shared how these supplemental academic programs were instrumental in helping them to perform better academically. Students expressed slight anxiety about accessing supports and resources from teachers and adults at their local schools. While they acknowledged that their teachers were kind and approachable, they did not feel comfortable requesting additional assistance with their homework and assignments, especially beyond the formal school day. The students also did not feel comfortable with or were unaware of school-based tutoring programs.

In addition to homework assistance at community organizations or resettlement agencies, students also sought support from older siblings or other family members, like cousins. Saarah stated, "My older sister helps me with my homework. She's very smart, and she knows this stuff [math]." Syman, a boy from Syria, also claimed that his older male cousin, Ahmet, helped him with schoolwork. "I can't really go to my parents for help. But my cousin lives here [in Chicago]. He went to same school that I'm at now. He knows the work, so I go to him for help." Zena, a

Syrian girl, shared how she prefers to receive homework help from her older sisters instead of meeting with faculty and staff from school. "I go to my sisters if I need additional support. They understand my classes. They understand what it's like to be a student in the United States. It's easier to meet with them."

These students expressed how older siblings and other family members are vital to supporting their academic development and how they prefer to seek homework assistance through sibling support due to their siblings' prior knowledge of the content or particular insights with regard to teachers. Students did not express any negative feelings toward their teachers, but they preferred to seek academic support from existing networks.

Refugee youths' involvement in civically engaged OST programs. During interviews, refugee youth described their participation in OST programs that encouraged them to be civically engaged in their communities. Civic engagement refers to the "individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern" (Ehrlich, 2000). Civic engagement can take on various forms, including individual voluntarism, organizational involvement, or electoral participation. It may involve efforts to address a particular issue, collaboration with others within the community to solve a problem, or interaction with the institutions of representative democracy. At local community organizations, refugee youth participate in a range of activities, such as serving as informal teaching assistants and as classroom aides in English language courses for older adults, writing letters to elected officials about refugee and immigrant rights, and protesting against city and state policies that negatively affect refugee and immigrant populations.

Refugee youth described several forms of civic engagement around political issues impacting Arab communities in Chicago. For example, youth shared how they participated in an organization committed to promoting immigrant and refugee rights to participation in the civic,

cultural, social, and political life within their local communities. This organization works closely with refugee resettlement agencies, mutual aid societies, and comparable organizations on issues related to health care access, voter registration, civic engagement, and education initiatives. Youth can participate in a range of programs, such as letter writing campaigns in support of politicians who support refugee and immigrant populations within Illinois and policy and advocacy campaigns to create the necessary infrastructure to quickly and accurately disseminate pertinent information and coordinate legal services for immigrant and refugee groups directly impacted by federal and state immigration policies.

One advocacy program created a "Youth Civic Leadership Academy" with the intention of empowering and training immigrant and refugee youth about human rights and bringing about positive change in their local communities through active participation in local, city, and state governments. After receiving comprehensive training on the importance and process of writing letters to government officials, the students devoted several days to drafting personalized letters, receiving feedback on the content, and mailing the letters to the appropriate parties. The youth were adamant about sharing their personal experiences as newly resettled refugees from the Middle East and advocating for additional supports for their local communities. When asked to explain the reasons for their efforts, several youth described feeling "obligated" or a sense of duty to assist both their families and others with similar identities. Amir, a Syrian teen, stated, "I'm in America. I've got to do something. I can't just sit around and not do anything. People think we [Muslim refugees] are bad people. But we're not. It's up to me to speak up." Samira, from Syria, also echoed this general sense of duty to be civically engaged on behalf of her family and community:

I try to help my family. I try to help my community. I mean, I'm still learning about the U.S., but it's important to speak up if I see something wrong. I try to say something or

write to government people with my issues. We learned how to write letters to government people. We learned to speak up when people say bad things about us.

Leila, an Iraqi refugee girl, elaborated on her civic involvement with local communities with the intent of supporting her family and friends. "I like attending the meetings on letter writing and protests. I didn't know you could do that in the United States. I didn't know people actually cared about what I had to say."

Youth also described how they were active participants in political protests and in trainings through a local youth-based organization that aims to inform refugee and immigrant youth of their human and legal rights within the United States. Amir stated:

When the President started saying mean things about Muslims, I got very scared. What if my family had to leave? But I went to the RefugeeForwardOn, and the staff told me not worry—that I was legally here. But I was still scared. I couldn't sleep or eat or anything. The same woman asked if I wanted to join her and some other kids to protest and stuff. I said "yes." I've been protesting stuff for almost a month now when school is over, like on the weekends.

Amir is an example of a young person who is civically engaged in protests and trainings to tackle discriminatory laws and policies against Muslims. After feeling somewhat despondent about the Executive Orders issued by the Trump administration, he decided to mobilize with his peers to protest these acts. Seeking to become more aware of and resistant to the current toxic political environment and the rhetoric against Muslim refugees, he attended additional trainings so that he could inform his friends and family members on how the policies affect them directly.

Refugee youth shared examples of civic engagement through attendance at "Know Your Rights" trainings at local agencies. These trainings provide immigrants and refugees with

workshops on their fundamental rights, giving them information on how they can use those rights to advocate for themselves and respond appropriately if they encounter police or immigration enforcement officers. Several refugee resettlement agencies and mutual aid societies offer such training as a mechanism to keep immigrant and refugee communities and local stakeholders informed of their rights. Rahul, a Syrian refugee youth, described his rationale for participating in this training:

> I had to learn this stuff. Like, I wanted to know about my rights so that I could help my family. My mom doesn't know English that well, and she was nervous when she heard the news. Like, would we be sent back to our home [Syria]?

> Abia conveyed a similar sentiment around participating in "Know Your Rights" training:

"I wanted to learn stuff. I had a lot of questions. The training answered my questions. It's good to know that I have rights — that I am safe in America."

During the interviews, the majority of students explicitly and repeatedly mentioned the importance of being more involved in their local communities and their desire to "give back" to people within their network. They also expressed an obligation to support their families as well as incoming refugees, who may have questions about or express levels of anxiety around the political environment. For example, many refugee youth described their involvement in a "Welcoming America" movement, which uses an inclusive approach to build bridges between newcomers and longtime residents' works to ensure refugees have a smooth transition when resettling in the United States. This movement also seeks to increase positive interactions between refugees and U.S. citizens in order to counter negative narratives about refugees, especially Muslim refugees from Arab countries. Several youths were highly involved in this initiative or similar ones with the goal of supporting their newly arrived peers.

Refugee youth also expressed a desire to push back on Islamophobia rhetoric and policies and programs directed towards Muslim families and communities. They seek to have a voice in their communities, functioning as political actors towards change. By participating in community-driven initiatives and OST programs within their local organizations, refugee youth have learned the meaning and importance of civic engagement. They participate in these organizations to receive information on policies and programs that may directly affect their families. The youth want to remain informed about these policies to placate any fears or doubts that arise among their family and friends.

Recreational OST programs. Most of the youth became involved in recreational OST programs outside of school to embrace aspects of their cultural or ethnic identities, like language, dance or music, or outdoor adventuring. For example, Saarah shared how she joined a youth musical ensemble at a resettlement agency to connect with her peers while learning new skills closely connected to her cultural identity. She stated:

> I really wanted to hang out with other girls like me—people who identify as Arab. It reminds me of home. I miss home so much. My school doesn't have a lot of programs for people who are like me. I like learning the dances, too.

Ashaki, an Iraqi girl, also mentioned how she likes to participate in culturally themed OST programs sponsored by a local community organization that focuses on empowering refugee adolescent and young adult girls from over 30 different countries by providing mentoring and educational programs. She stated, "I feel like I'm at home when I come to the center. I feel very close to the other girls. And I really like to dance."

Umarah, a Syrian teenager, participated in an OST program that gives refugee boys access to summer and weekend adventure camps, leadership training, and science-related study. Ahmed

stated, "I love this program. I get to be outside with my friends. It reminds me of home [Syria]. I used to take long walks with my brother. I miss it. In Chicago, it's hard to do stuff outside."

Youth participated in the outdoorsy summer camp with the intent of engaging in activities that were associated with their cultural and ethnic identities or that reminded them of their countries of origin. The majority of students interviewed desired to retain aspects of their identities by participating in OST programs that would enable them to embrace their dual identities. The youth were particularly drawn to participate in these activities outside of a formal school setting, where they felt like they could embrace their cultural backgrounds and practices without being scrutinized by school staff.

Refugee youths' negative perception of OST programs. While most of the youth participated in some type of OST program, a handful viewed these programs as a distraction from their academic development. While adjusting to their new school environments, many of the refugee youth devoted most or all of their time to academic endeavors, such as learning English and performing well in their courses. They found less value in participating in academic and/or recreational activities, especially if these activities hindered them from thriving in their courses. For example, Leila stated, "I don't stay after school for stuff. I don't really see the point. I go home to work on homework. That's what's important." Amina failed to see the value of participating in OST programs, seeing it as a distraction from her academic work.

Maia also felt like engagement in OST programs was more of a distraction, noting the futility of participating in school-based programs. She stated, "I have so much homework to do. I don't have time to play sports or hang out after school. I need to come home to do my homework and to help my family." Samira noted how she had to care for her younger siblings and manage other household tasks in addition to her academic work, leaving limited time to engage in OST

activities.

Muhammed, from Syria, shared a similar view with regard to participating in OST programs: "I wouldn't mind playing soccer, but my homework is hard. I don't have time to have fun. Programs after school are all about having fun. My family did not come this far to have fun." While Saul possesses some desire to participate in OST programs, he feels the need to prioritize his schoolwork over OST activities. He also experiences feelings of guilt with regard to the desire to become involved in OST programs rather than focusing all of his attention on his schoolwork.

Several youth perceived OST programs as being less valuable and more time-consuming than their first priority—their academic work. Even if they need academic assistance, they are less inclined to seek support at their schools through structured tutoring programs. While some of the students reach out to their teachers for homework assistance during the school day, they typically work on their assignments at home in isolation or with older siblings who are familiar with the content. The youth prioritize completing their academic assignments and learning English over participating in recreational activities. Several students conveyed a level of anxiety around their prior and current academic performance, which had motivated them to devote their time and energy to their courses.

Several refugee youth also mentioned internal and family pressures to perform well in school. They reflected on the difficult process of resettling in the United States and how their families depend on them to thrive in school with the goal of eventually attending college. Youth also described other family commitments and tasks that they had to fulfill, which left very little time for participation in OST programs. Engagement in OST programs seemed like an additional burden to some of these youth, so they opted out of participating in any activities. While some students did not express disdain for participating in OST activities, priority was typically given to

academic work.

Recommendations

OST program implementation has increased drastically in the United States over the past 15 years (Apsler, 2009), and there is widespread support in the literature that such programs have a positive effect on all youth, including refugees. Historically, immigrant and refugee youth and families have faced challenges with regard to accessing schools and OST programs, hindering them from accessing the benefits associated with participation in these programs.

The findings from this study document Muslim refugee youths' patterns of participation and experiences in OST activities within their respective schools and local communities. First, this study documents the types of OST programs youth participated in, with refugee boys typically involved in sports-based programs and girls engaged in arts-based programs, reinforcing their feelings of nostalgia for their countries of origins. Second, refugee students typically participated in OST programs within their local communities—not their schools. OST activities included programs to offer them academic support and homework assistance; programs to encourage refugee youth to be civically and politically engaged in their schools and communities; and programs to promote their cultural and ethnic identities. Finally, these findings delve into the general perceptions of OST programs by a handful of refugee youth who perceive them to be distraction from their academic pursuits.

The findings from this study yield important insights regarding the overall type and level of OST programs Muslim refugee youth participate in beyond the school day. Educators, social support agencies, and policymakers all play critical roles in providing meaningful programs for refugee youth.

First, educators and social support staff from schools and community organizations should

consider explaining the value of OST activities to refugee youth and their families in order to combat the perception that OST programs are solely recreational and lack benefits for personal development. When refugee families are being resettled in the United States, case managers and other staff members from resettlement agencies and mutual aid societies should describe the purpose and benefits of OST programs in supporting students academically, physically, and emotionally. Urban schools should also provide a similar message during family orientations.

Additionally, OST providers at schools and community organizations should devote time to developing programs that are more meaningful to refugee youth. As this study suggests, refugee youth gravitate towards school-based OST programs that allow them to feel connected to their countries of origin, reflect on their pre-migration experiences, and connect with peers who share identities or experiences similar to their own. Refugee youth also want to participate in activities that will enable them to engage with their local communities as well as participating in activities to explore their own ethnic and cultural identities. While refugee youth seek to adapt to U.S. culture, they do not want to abandon their cultural and ethnic identities upon resettling in the United States. They need to process their unique and often traumatic experiences with their peers and trusted adults. Therefore, more programs should be created and promoted to refugee youth that will enable them to embrace their dual identities.

Second, urban schools should seek to develop more comprehensive partnerships with community organizations to ensure a level of continuity in the programming being offered to refugee students. Since most of the youth in this study were highly engaged in OST programs within both schools and community organizations, it would be ideal for these institutions to collaborate and offer more overlapping resources to ensure that refugees receive appropriate supports. For example, since refugee youth prefer to seek academic support and homework help

from tutors and staff from local organizations and resettlement agencies, agency administrators and faculty from urban schools could coordinate with each other to confirm that students are receiving appropriate guidance with regard to assignments. If students and families witness more collaboration among community and school staff, they may be more likely to seek academic support from school staff.

Third, many Muslim refugee youth are very actively involved in the civic life of their ethnic and religious community. To combat the racialization and demonization of Muslims within the United States, many refugee youth feel the need to confront and combat such negative perceptions (Itaoui & Elsheikh, 2018). Involvement in civil society groups grooms refugee youth to become leaders in their respective fields and communities. They have demonstrated their capacity to identify key issues that newcomers face and support particular causes and issues pertaining to their religious and ethnic identities. Ideally, they can use their passion for social justice to influence their respective communities to resist and combat unjust, unconstitutional policies.

Civic engagement has been deemed important and beneficial for democratic societies, especially for communities with youth (Balsano, 2005; Lerner, 2004; Sherrod, 2007; Karakos, 2015). Moreover, civic engagement functions as an important element of youth development (Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Youniss & Yates, 1999; Kirshner, Strobel, & Fernandez, 2003) with adolescence being a critical period in the emergence of a civic identity. During adolescence, youth begin to transition out of the role of beneficiaries within their communities and embrace the roles and responsibilities of active citizens (Hart & Atkins, 2002). Some researchers have focused on developmental outcomes associated with service and activism, such as improved self-esteem and sense of social responsibility (Conrad & Hedin, 1982; Karakos, 2015; Pancer, Rose-Krasnor, & Loiselle, 2002). Refugee youths' civic engagement in their communities is a mechanism for them

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to develop a sense of competence, purpose, and empowerment, enabling them to vocalize their particular concerns and to advocate on behalf of their communities to create sustainable change.

Urban schools and community organizations should channel these skills by offering more supports and mechanisms for refugee youth to develop leadership skills within their schools and local communities. Faculty and staff could allow refugee youth to mentor and offer guidance to other refugee and immigrant youth. Urban schools and community organizations could also provide platforms and venues to bring together immigrant and refugee youth as allies to work on shared challenges and strategies for addressing them.

Finally, urban schools and community organizations can actively promote and support refugee youth by offering more arts-based, culturally and ethnically relevant OST programs so that Muslim refugee youth and other immigrant populations can retain and express their cultural and ethnic identities. Such programs would contribute to refugee youths' emotional and physical health as they process their current legal status as refugees. Due to the prolonged stress, depression, and trauma experienced by refugees prior to resettlement, there is a significant benefit to refugee youth participation in peer-to-peer psychosocial support. Youth need spaces to explore their own inner narratives and trauma, and drama and writing programs offer a space for youth to accomplish these goals.

Offering more OST programming within urban schools and community organizations will provide refugee youth with an outlet for exploring their identities and traumas and connect them with peers and support staff.

Conclusion

As the United States and other countries continue to resettle Muslim refugee youth and their families in the coming years, it is important for urban schools and community organizations

to consider what types of educational experiences should be provided for these newcomers. With increasing policy and program emphasis on access to and quality of OST programs, recognizing that the needs of refugee youth differ from the needs of U.S.-born ethnic and racial minority youth has become critical. Muslim refugees from the Middle East are a particularly vulnerable group, facing concerns such as mental health challenges, acculturation stress, and Islamophobia and discrimination based on their religion and national origin. Therefore, the experiences and general participation of Muslim refugee youth in OST programs are unique and must be treated as such, both within programs targeting refugee and immigrant youth specifically and within those targeting the youth population in general. Research has suggested that programs and initiatives that best serve refugee youth at the school and community levels are those that respond to the cultural, social, and political needs of the populations served.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1, I introduced you to Saarah Awad, a refugee girl who recently fled war-torn Syria for a new life with her family in the United States. She connected with a refugee resettlement agency that assisted her with enrolling in a CPS. Upon resettling in the United States, she was extremely apprehensive about attending school due to her limited English-language skills, her unfamiliarity with U.S. schools, and her Muslim identity, which was, in fact, met with hostility among some of her teachers and peers. When she arrived in the United States, Saarah was still processing the loss of her distant relatives in Syria as well as the separation from friends in Syria and Jordan. Saarah had always loved school and desired to thrive in her new educational environment, but she was also aware of the challenges in navigating her new school and the broader community. How did she feel about school? How has she adapted to her new school environment?

Beyond the school day, Saarah also had a desire to participate in OST programs. She wanted to connect with other refugee girls who also identified as Middle Eastern and/or as refugees. She wanted to talk about her beautiful home in Syria with others who had experienced similar losses. With the goal of one day becoming an actress, Saarah wanted a platform to process her emotions and to practice her acting skills. To supplement the ESL classes she was attending at school, Saarah also wished to practice more English with trusted adults from the refugee resettlement agency, which had been instrumental in her family's resettlement in the United States. What were Saarah's perceptions of OST programs? What were the types of programs that would be ideal for her to participate in based on her specific needs?

I also introduced you to Saarah's parents, Oman and Fatimah, who were excited yet apprehensive about their three daughters—Amara, Saarah, and Tamur—attending school in the

United States. Their daughters had limited access to schools prior to resettlement, so they were anxious about enrolling them in public schools. Receiving assistance from a case manager, the family enrolled their daughters in public schools that were known for welcoming refugee and immigrant populations. While the parents embraced the school administrators and staff, they were unsure of how to navigate these schools without understanding the school practices and norms and the general behaviors they were expected to display. While they were learning English at the IMAS, they did not feel comfortable with the expectation for them to be conversing with the teachers and staff. While Oman worked two jobs to sustain the family, Fatimah was the active parent in the household, connecting with teachers and staff several times a year. How did Fatimah feel about the school? How did she connect with school staff and parents? What were her general experiences at Saarah's school?

This dissertation focused on three major areas. First, the goal of this study was to understand the experiences and patterns of student engagement among Muslim refugee youth who attend public schools in Chicago. Specifically, how do students like Saarah experience and engage with school during the day and after school? The study also sought to understand what motivated Muslim refugee students like Saarah to be engaged in school and OST programs. Second, this study considered the role of parents' engagement in schools. More specifically, this study explored the role of involvement by parents like Fatimah and the other participants at their respective schools and how that might affect parents' overall involvement and sense of belonging at the school. Finally, with children and youth spending more of their waking hours out of school, this study considered how Muslim refugee youth like Saarah perceive OST as well as their participation in these programs that assist with their academic and social emotional needs.

Chapter 2 seeks to understand the refugee student interlocutors' experiences of engagement

with school, in part to provide insight into the applicability of the student engagement framework—outlining cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement—for this particular population. In terms of cognitive engagement, students conveyed an investment in learning English with the goal of excelling in their classes and developing relationships with their peers. Related to behavioral engagement, Muslim refugee youth also shared concerns around active participation in their classes due to a lack of confidence in their accents and acquired languages as well as an unfamiliarity and general discomfort with classroom, school-based norms in a U.S. context. Another finding connected to behavioral engagement relates to refugee youth sharing how they typically relied on mentors, tutors, and youth workers from local community organizations and refugee resettlement for academic support—not teachers and staff from their local schools. Finally, students described mixed feelings around their own emotional engagement with school, citing numerous examples of bullying and discrimination from teachers, school staff, and peers. They also shared a desire to learn English in the hope that doing so would contribute to a feeling of belonging to their academic community. Finally, this chapter delved into the intersection between student engagement and the role of identity in assisting refugee youth to perform well academically and socially.

Chapter 3 describes the patterns of parent experience and involvement in their children's school. Factors facilitating parental involvement included a welcoming and inclusive environment cultivated by school administrators, staff, and teachers or staff who share racial and ethnic similarities with the refugee families. Barriers to their involvement included a lack of English-language proficiency, a lack of parent understanding of their need to be involved for their child to perform well academically, and discrimination and xenophobia instigated against their children, which caused parents to disengage with the schools.

Chapter 4 documents Muslim refugee youths' patterns of participation and experiences in OST activities within their respective schools and local communities. First, analyses documented the types of OST programs youth participated in within their respective schools with refugee boys typically involved in sports-based programs and girls engaged in arts-based programs; for boys and girls, these activities reinforced their feelings of nostalgia for their countries of origins. Second, refugee students typically participated in OST programs within their local communities—but outside of their schools. Favored OST activities included programs offering them academic support and homework assistance, encouraging refugee youths' engagement both civically and politically in their schools and communities, and promoting their cultural and ethnic identities. Finally, these findings delve into the perceptions of a handful of refugee youth that OST programs are a distraction from their academic pursuits.

This study provides an empirical opportunity to learn about refugees' firsthand experiences of schooling and OST in the United States, their unique perceptions of the social context, and knowledge about what they need in order to feel supported by school staff and their local communities.

Limitations

This study had many strengths. First, it prioritized the experiences of a disenfranchised population whose narratives have traditionally been relegated to the outer periphery of academic scholarship and which have been made invisible through the privileging of dominant groups. This study captured the experiences of Muslim refugee and their families, who have been the targets of discriminatory and xenophobic practices in the United States. It shed light on their particular school-based challenges. Second, this study prioritized the experiences of both parents and youth in school settings, allowing their narratives to be the central focus. A third strength of this study is

the rigorous analytical methods used to develop and maintain a level of trustworthiness (Guba, 1981; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Trustworthiness was established through prolonged engagement with the participants, member checks, and use of an expert panel of insiders. At every stage of my study, I connected with staff from the IMAS and the families to give them updates on the study and to ask for their feedback on my initial findings. Throughout the study, I also developed a level of dependability by creating memos after each interview to capture my initial observations and thoughts after each session. While reconnecting with community stakeholders and participants, I described my findings in simplistic terms, minimizing the amount of jargon shared with them.

However, there are several limitations related to this study. The first type of limitations derives from the sampling method. As a small-sample qualitative study, my findings are not generalizable across all refugee populations or even to all Arab refugees. In particular, the experiences, perceptions, and patterns of engagement may differ between Syrian and Iraqi refugee youth who were not sampled. Participants in this study live in Chicago, and they were connected with institutions who work closely with refugee and immigrant populations. Although I purposely sampled from varied networks, my study used a relatively homogeneous sample, which means it was unable to capture the full range of experiences among all refugee youth. In addition, while I narrowed the sample to include mainly Iraqi and Syrian refugees, there is still some variation between these two groups around their engagement in schools; this study does not delve into those distinctions. Still, this study informs our understanding of Muslim refugee students' school engagement in urban school settings. Since sample recruitment and data collection occurred through a local community organization, the sample consisted of people who were involved with the organization—people who were intentionally seeking resources and are actively involved.

Moreover, although the schools varied in their particular culture and climate, the study was based in a single region of a single city within a single public-school system. While two schools offered a more welcoming space to immigrant and refugee groups, the third school was less welcoming to this vulnerable population.

The second set of limitations relates to the investigator's lack of Arabic language skills. While all of the students had some familiarity with English, students varied in their comfort with English, and engagement with the interviews varied depending on their prior knowledge of English and how long they had resided in the United States. Additionally, lack of English fluency among students and parents required the use of a translator in my study. While most of the youth were fluent in English, most of the parents spoke only Arabic. Although efforts were made to ensure the accuracy of the translations, there likely was slippage with respect to the communication of subtle meanings. The translator and I typically met prior to and after each interview to process the interviews and for me to ask questions about the subtle statements. During the analysis phase, I also met with the translator to review each interview. These were critical and essential discussions since some of the findings could yield multiple interpretations. The translator was intentional about describing the subtle meanings and differences in order to arrive at the best English wording. Moreover, the use of quotations from participants, an important part of qualitative analysis, was limited by the accuracy of the translations and of my interpretation of their meanings. While I checked in with my translator to verify the meaning of all quotes, it was difficult to translate concepts from Arabic to English due to culturally specific, culturally bound words.

An additional limitation pertains to whether the specific findings are only applicable to an urban context like Chicago. Chicago has been regarded as a "Sanctuary City" and adopted a "Welcoming City Ordinance," which ensures that refugee, immigrant, and undocumented

residents are not prosecuted solely due to their immigration status. The Sanctuary City protection covers Chicagoans of all ages—in school, at work, and as they seek city supports and resources. Chicago police officers are not permitted to make arrests or cooperate with federal authorities on detaining individuals based solely on their immigration status or national origin.

Moreover, CPS draw on a "Sanctuary Schools" framework, which means immigrant, undocumented, and refugee youth and their families are granted a safe haven/space from being targeted by police and other outside forces. Under the Sanctuary Schools model, "every child, regardless of race, ethnicity, or national origin, is treated with dignity and respect from the moment they enter our schools. It means that we value the diversity each student brings to our District and that we believe in their absolute right to a world-class education" (CPS website). Schools are intentional about keeping ICE agents or other immigration officials from school buildings and providing families with "Know Your Rights" trainings and workshops for if they are ever approached by police.

CPS embrace a culture of protecting the most diverse and vulnerable students by creating institutional policies and resources to support families. While some variation exists among schools, this critical ordinance may have impacted my findings since the study participants attended schools who embrace the "Sanctuary Schools" framework. Some findings and recommendations may not be applicable to urban school districts that have not embraced this framework or have yet to implement programs and resources to prioritize the mental and physical safety of immigrant and refugee youth. Moreover, these findings may not be applicable to contexts that do not embrace these policies like Chicago does.

A final limitation may be related to how this study engages refugee families connected to only two out of the six refugee resettlement agencies located in Chicago. While all six of these

agencies share a similar mission of assisting refugees with a successful and smooth transition to Chicago, each organization varies a bit in the number of personnel or the level and quality of support they provide refugee families. If I had connected with study participants associated with the other refugee resettlement agencies, they may have described different experiences with their involvement with local organizations or schools.

Contributions to Existing Literature on Student Engagement

Immigrant and refugee youth are now the fastest-growing sector of the U.S. child population (Landale & Oropesa, 1995). Today, one in five children in the United States is the child of immigrants or refugees, and it is projected that, by 2040, one in three children will fit this description (Rong & Prissle, 1998). Given the numbers involved, this study provides a broader sense of their experiences and patterns of student engagement. This study also expands the current student engagement framework to include other forms of engagement—civic and OST—which are critical to the academic and socioemotional development of refugee populations.

Finally, this dissertation study fills a gap in the existing literature by focusing on student engagement among Middle Eastern Muslim refugee youth and their families, who experience high levels of discrimination and bullying in America. Islamophobia has been on the rise in school settings, sometimes propagated by reductive curricula and uninformed teachers (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2012; Abu El-Haj, 2006, 2007, 2009; Abu El-Haj & Bonet, 2011; Bayoumi, 2008; Wingfield, 2006; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Research demonstrates that a high number of hate crimes have been directed at Muslim students and other Muslim Americans (Asali, 2003; McMurtrie et al., 2001; Wingfield & Karaman, 1995). Although a few studies have explored student engagement among Muslim students, none have focused specifically on refugee youth.

Contributions to Existing Literature on OST Programs

While this study explores the experiences and patterns of refugee students' involvement in OST programs, there is an urgent need to expand our knowledge in this field. Prior research on student engagement has mainly focused on cognitive engagement or academic-related activities over the other dimensions. Although academic experience is a critical factor in educational success, school is also a place where students socialize with their friends and participate in OST programs (Wang & Degol, 2014). Focusing exclusively on cognitive engagement dismisses the school's role as a developmental context in which students engage in OST activities that shape their identities. In the school environment, students build skills and relationships that are critical to their academic success. Hence, students' schooling experiences should include various forms of engagement, including extracurricular or OST program engagement. More research is needed to integrate these forms of engagement in schools and examine how they interact to influence students' academic and socioemotional well-being.

Future Research

In addition to the findings reported in depth in the three analytic chapters of this dissertation, the experiences shared by the refugee youth suggest other important topics deserving deeper study. Moving forward, I would like to explore two topics connected to this study. First, I would like to explore the role of identity, analyzing how it influences students' engagement in school. As highlighted in Chapter 3, many refugee youth expressed higher levels of agency within school settings in the United States compared to their prior educational experiences in other countries. Many students, across gender, felt like they were able to choose their academic path and interests. For example, students were able to pursue career paths related to their interests and not simply careers assigned to them. Additionally, students have the capacity to choose their coursework, their OST programs, their friend groups, and their attire. Possessing this level of

agency is a departure from their previous experiences and a reason why students are engaged in school and OST programs. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to incorporate another dimension to the tripartite student engagement model to capture this agentic engagement. Reeve (2013) has conceptualized agentic engagement as the act of exerting agency through proactive behaviors that may alter or enrich the flow of teaching and learning. While his focus is mainly in classroom settings, this framework also extends to students' levels of engagement outside of the classroom.

Second, I plan to explore college-readiness among refugee youth in order to gain further insight into the barriers they encounter and the supports that might ensure greater opportunities for higher education success. While this was not explicitly explored in my dissertation, it was a recurring theme in my data that students had a strong desire to attend college, which motivated them to excel in secondary schooling.

The immediate goal of U.S. policy is to work with refugees to help them rapidly become self-sufficient. Within research on refugee integration, much of the attention has been on adult breadwinners or children in primary or secondary school. Yet, participation in the post-secondary educational system in the country of resettlement provides one mechanism for young adult refugees to integrate, obtaining employment and the skills needed for long-term stability (Ager & Strang, 2004). However, navigating institutions of higher education can be challenging for recently resettled refugees, especially those who have experienced high levels of migration-related stresses (García-Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Refugees also face many other barriers to accessing higher education (Tuliao, Hatch, & Torraco, 2017; Morrice, 2013; Reyes, 2013; Taffer, 2010). Furthermore, racial, ethnic, or cultural identities might affect their overall feelings of connection to higher education institutions (García-Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). As a result, refugee young adults may be at higher risk

for college dropout or disengagement while in college despite high aspirations and ability (McMichael, Nunn, Correa-Velez, Gifford, 2017).

A large body of educational research has focused on engagement with elementary and secondary schools as an important component of students' academic, social, and emotional learning. Despite the research on the importance of student engagement, the current literature includes few studies of engagement among refugee young people within postsecondary settings. Furthermore, most research about refugees in higher education examines their experiences in four-year university settings (Earnest, Joyce, de Mori, Silvagni, 2010; Ferede, 2010; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Morrice, 2009, 2013; Xiong & Lam, 2013). Since refugees are relatively more economically disadvantaged than other immigrant groups, they are, in reality, more likely to attend relatively low-cost community colleges or publicly funded adult education centers (Hollands, 2012; Perry, 2008). Due to a lack of reliable national data on refugee and immigrant students attending community colleges, researchers have only limited data regarding refugee attendance at community colleges. The data that do exist often conflate "international students" and "immigrant and refugee students," which fails to acknowledge the distinct experiences and challenges of these specific groups (Conway, 2010; Prins & Toso, 2012; Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, 2011). The proposed study would explore the experiences of refugee young adults attending two-year colleges. The study would examine factors that promote or impede students' cognitive, relational/affective, and behavioral engagement with their schools (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).

Implications for the Field of Social Work and Educational Practice

As described in my study, local community organizations and resettlement agencies function as central players in supporting refugee youth and their families with integration into U.S. schools and their local communities. Schools are among the first influential institutions

encountered by newly arrived refugee youth. Therefore, more intentional collaboration between these institutions is imperative for the development and successful adjustment of refugee youth and their families. In order to support refugees more effectively, school social workers and social workers in refugee resettlement organizations must become familiar with the dynamics of migration as well as the implications of refugee and immigration policy for individuals and families. This section of the paper offers concrete recommendations on how social workers can continue to support refugee youth within community settings and schools.

While refugee youth embraced their new lives in the United States, my findings described high levels of anxiety and homesickness. Refugee youth experience "cultural bereavement," a sense of losing touch with attributes of their homelands (Eisenbruch, 1991). Features of cultural bereavement include survivor guilt, anger, and ambivalence. In Chapter 5, refugee youth expressed feelings of nostalgia and a strong connection to their home country. Homesickness is often an overlooked psychosocial problem of refugees. The act of leaving their countries of origin involves intense feelings of separation and conflicting emotions (Rumbaut, 2005a). Cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physical adversities may be triggered when youth and their families are forced into exile and unable to return home. Many of the refugee youth still yearn for home while also seeking to embrace their new homes in the United States.

To combat the feelings that refugee youth experience, it is ideal for refugee youth to access trauma and grief-focused group psychotherapy with the goal of targeting the ontogenic and ecosystem levels and reducing post-traumatic stress, depression, and grief (Layne, Pynoss, & Saltzman, 2001). However, given the dearth of clinicians who speak refugee languages and the low priority given to mental health, traditional Western mental health approaches have not often been effective with immigrants and refugees, who also often underutilize the mental services that

are available due to the stigma associated with mental illness (Geltman, Augustyn, Barnett, Klass, & Groves, 2000; Munroe-Blum et al., 1989). Therefore, schools and community organizations must be intentional about offering mental health supports to refugee youth that will help them process and heal from their trauma. Offering more group-based, therapeutic programs will help refugees process their traumas and support their social emotional needs. Arts-based therapies can also function as creative interventions that utilize self-expression in treatment within the context of psychotherapy, counseling, rehabilitation, or medicine.

My findings also indicate the importance for social workers to understand refugee students' pre-migration educational experiences in order to better gauge their prior and current academic needs. Throughout the study, refugee youth expressed levels of discomfort with or unawareness of particular classroom norms and practices in the United States, contributing to an uneasiness that altered their levels of engagement and sense of belonging within the schools. Almost all refugee children arrive in the United States with prior educational skills. While most existing literature on the education of resettled refugee focuses primarily on the characteristics of refugee children at the time of and after their arrival, it would be valuable to research the pre-migration experiences of refugees and get a sense of their prior educational experiences. Schools and community staff would have a better sense of their former school experiences, which are often unknown, such as language barriers, privacy concerns, and cultural misunderstandings. Refugee youth may also disclose mental health concerns and other feelings like homesickness, loneliness, and sadness. These initial meetings would also provide staff with an opportunity to gauge what types of OST programs would address students' academic and social emotional needs.

For social workers who work in refugee resettlement agencies and other social service agencies tailored to refugee and immigrant populations, language acquisition is critical to refugees'

development and overall acculturation. It is imperative for refugees to have access to ESL instruction since they "face a number of challenges during their initial year of resettlement, adjusting psychologically, socially, and economically to the realities of their new cultural context" (Beiser, 2012). As studies suggests, refugee youth and their families may arrive in the United States with minimal previous formal education, interrupted schooling, and/or limited English, all of which make it difficult to thrive in their new environments. Therefore, social workers should consider learning basic Arabic along with their cultural and linguistic practices in order to display a level of respect for refugees' identities but also to assist families who are learning English and adapting to U.S. culture.

Finally, and most importantly, school social workers and school support staff can be instrumental in addressing the anti-Muslim, xenophobic, and discriminatory practices that occur at the school and community levels. Schools are supposed to provide safe environments in which children can learn, grow, and thrive as they prepare to face the world as adults. School administrators are powerfully positioned to shape these experiences. In my research, Muslim refugee students reported harassment, bullying, and intimidation by their peers and staff at school due to their legal status, race, and religion. This directly affected their education. School social workers and other mental health specialists can offer more one-on-one counseling or group therapy sessions to Muslim refugee students who feel targeted by bullying and discriminatory practices. They can also offer more extensive counseling to students who are battling more severe mental issues, like PTSD or depression.

The United States has a proud history of admitting refugees fleeing countries due to persecution, war, or other humanitarian violations. Since the late 1880s, the United States has admitted millions of refugees seeking a new home. With these numbers steadily increasing, school

social workers and mental health specialists at local community organizations can expect to encounter such clients during their careers; it is estimated that, by 2040, immigrants and refugees and their offspring will account for over one-quarter of the U.S. population (Fix & Passel, 1994). Further, immigrants and refugees will account for 65% of the country's population growth by 2050 (Doyle, 1999). In order to adequately engage these particularly vulnerable populations, especially youth within schools and community organizations, it is imperative that social workers understand the distinct categories of refugee populations, the causes of migration, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of refugee populations, and policies developed across time that dictated which refugees could enter this country. Social workers offer the greatest hope for a successful resolution due to their broad skillsets and placement within schools and community organizations, through which they can help to facilitate more collaboration across these institutions.

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Appendix A

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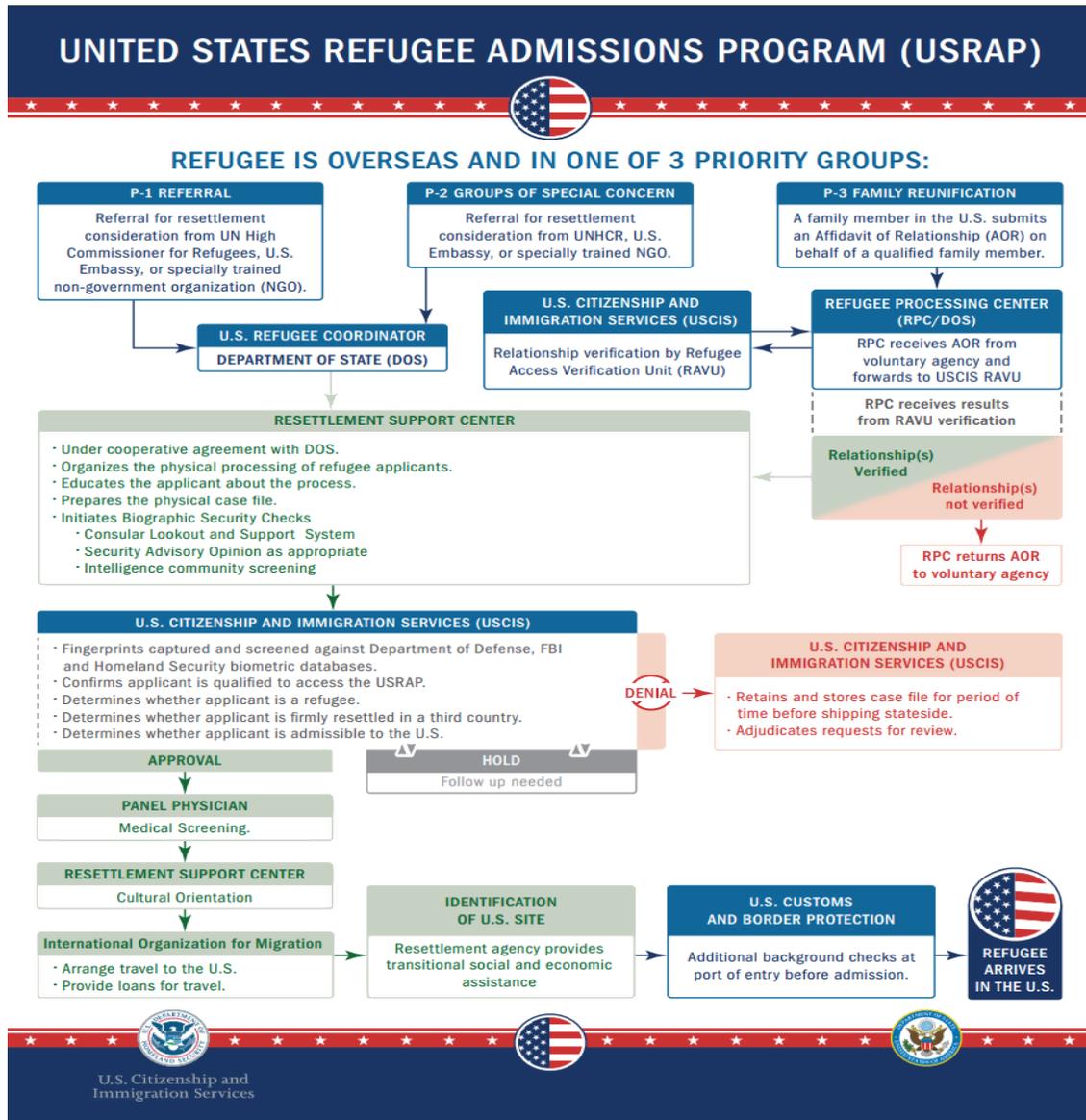
Appendix B

Table B1

Characteristics of Full Sample

Parents' Names (Pseudonym)	Country of Origin	Time in the US (Months)	Number of Children in Study	Students' Names (Pseudonym)	Grade Level(s)	High School Name
Adira	Syria	18	2	Amir, Tasneem	Freshmen, Junior	Lee
Amala	Syria	12	1	Muhammed	Freshmen	June
Farah	Iraq	36	3	Korian, Shawar, Ashaki	Freshman, Sophomore, Senior	Lee
Hana	Syria	28	1	Reema	Senior	Lee
Inas	Iraq	27	2	Zeena, Rahul	Freshman, Sophomore	Washington
Jamila	Syria	36	1	Abia	Freshman	Clinton
Khadeejah	Iraq	48	1	Maia	Freshmen	Obama
Kifah	Syria	24	1	Sharonda	Freshman	Lee
Lena	Iraq	84	1	Shamir	Junior	Lee

Mira	Syria	8	2	Bassma, Yalanda	Freshman, Junior	Lee
Muna	Syria	18	1	Onur	Sophomore	Lee
Oman & Fatimah	Syria	3	3	Saarah, Tamur, Amara	Freshmen, Sophomore, Junior	Clinton
Ruth	Iraq	30	2	Leila, Karida	Sophomore, Junior	Lee
Sameena	Iraq	44	1	Syman	Freshman	June
Talora	Iraq	42	2	Shaia, Zahrah	Freshmen, Senior	June
Tana	Syria	18	2	Sarni, Umarah	Freshman, Sophomore	Lee
Tynan	Iraq	36	1	Gabi	Senior	Obama
Zena	Syria	16	1	Frana	Sophomore	June

Appendix C

Interview Guide (Students)

Patterns of Student Engagement in Chicago Public Schools

Introduction to Study (Verbal statement)

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me. This interview focuses on your experiences as a newly resettled Muslim refugee attending a Chicago Public School. I am interested in how you participate in and feel about school. Even though I have prepared some topics to discuss, the purpose of this interview is to understand your in- and out-of-school experiences.

Discussion Domains

I have several topic areas that I will ask you about during this interview. We will begin by talking about your life before coming to the United States and then move into your experiences at school and out of school. I want to remind you that the goal of this interview is to understand what is most important to your experiences.

Pre-Resettlement/Introductory Questions

1. Tell me about your life in [country of origin] before coming to the United States.

- What was your country of origin like?

- Describe your prior school experiences in your country of origin.

2. Tell me a little bit about yourself and your family.

3. Describe your experiences with attending school in the United States.

4. Describe the differences between attending school in your country of origin and the United States.

Student Engagement Framework

1. Cognitive Engagement

- Tell me about your classes.

- How would you describe your coursework? Homework?

- When you need additional homework support, whom do you ask for help?

- Describe your process for learning English at your school.

2. Emotional Engagement

- How do you feel about attending your school?

- What has it been like to make friends?

- Describe any teachers and school staff you feel close to at your school.

- How do you feel about safety at your school? In your community?

3. Behavioral Engagement

- How would you describe your participation in class?

- Can you tell me about your involvement in after-school programs?

- How does your educational experiences differ from the ones in the United States?

Out-of-School Time

1. What do you like to do for fun?

2. What do you like to participate in for fun after school?

3. Describe any out-of-school activities you like to participate in at the school, in the community, or at home.

4. If you need assistance with your homework, where (or whom) do you seek for support?

Appendix D

Interview Guide (Parents)

Patterns of Student Engagement in Chicago Public Schools

Introduction to Study (Verbal Statement)

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me. This interview focuses on your experiences as a parent to a newly resettled Muslim refugee attending a Chicago Public School. I am interested in how you participate and feel about your child's school. Even though I have prepared some topics to discuss, the purpose of this interview is to understand your perceptions and experiences with your child's (or children's) schools.

Discussion Domains

I have several topic areas that I will ask you about during this interview. We will begin by talking about your life before coming to the United States and then move into your experiences at school and out of school. I want to remind you that the goal of this interview is to understand what is most important to your experiences.

Pre-Resettlement/Introductory Questions

1. Tell me about your life in [country of origin] before coming to the United States.

2. Describe your prior educational experiences in your country of origin.

3. Describe your prior work experiences in your country of origin.

4. Tell me a little about yourself and your family. How many children do you have?

5. When you arrived in the United States, what was your life like?

6. Describe how you and your family have adapted to the United States.

Parent Engagement Framework

1. What does your child like about school?

2. What do you like about your child's school?

3. Do you feel welcome in your child's school?

   a. If yes, what do the school staff do that shows you that you are welcome?

   b. If no, what could the school do differently that would make you feel welcome?

4. Describe your level of satisfaction with how often and in what way school staff communicates with you about your child?

5. What do you do to prepare your child to do well in school?

6. What do you consider to be the parent or family's role in a child's education?

Schools talk about the importance of "Parent Involvement" or "Parent Engagement." Schools use these terms to mean several different things. Some of the main ways parents are "involved"—or participate may vary quite a bit. The following questions seek to understand your level of involvement with your child's school:

7. Describe your level of involvement in your child's school prior to resettling in the United States. How do your prior experiences differ from now?

8. How does the school ask you to be involved?

9. What kind of school activities do you like to attend?

10. What could the school do to help you be more involved?

11. Is there anything else you would like us to know about what is important to you as a family about your child's education?