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Investigating Relationships Between Muslim High School Students' School Belonging and  
Career Decision-Making

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A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St.  
Louis, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Education  
with an emphasis in Counseling

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## ABSTRACT

Muslim Americans have been subjected to systemic oppression and unjust experiences, such as discrimination, racism, hate crimes, and stereotypes, for generations in the United States. Although ample research has investigated relationships between systemic oppression in society and its impacts on marginalized students in public school environments, little research has directly investigated Muslim students' school experiences. Additionally, studies and scholarship have explored the long-term impacts of systemic oppression on marginalized groups to develop a comprehensive understanding of minority groups' experiences in the United States. This study investigated Muslim students' experiences in public high schools regarding their sense of belonging and other long-term experiences related to their career decision-making. Given the marginalized status of Muslim students, the social experiences investigated in this research are aimed to include the influences of systemic racism and discrimination. Using a sample of 180 Muslim students who attend public schools in the United States, we conducted a quantitative, descriptive, and multivariate correlational design to explore the relationship between perceived discrimination, sense of belonging, and career decision-making self-efficacy. Findings revealed that higher levels of perceived discrimination suggested lower levels of sense of belonging. Additionally, lower levels of sense of belonging correlated with lower self-efficacy in career decision-making.

*Keywords:* Muslim Americans, public high schools, school sense of belonging, career decision-making, social cognitive career theory.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The American society is a caste system, an artificial hierarchy through which the people in power get to determine standing and respect, the belief of what beauty looks like, who gets the benefit of the doubt, and, most importantly, who has access to resources (Wilkerson, 2020). This system leaves marginalized groups of people in the lower caste with no determination are less respected (Wilkerson, 2020). The Muslim population is one of these groups who experience intense challenges and obstacles and have access to fewer resources than the majority groups in the United States (Samari, 2016). This is due to a culture in the U.S. where Christianity is the privileged religion giving power to Christian people and organizations to define normalcy (Blumenfeld et al., 2009). Additionally, Christianity privilege places disadvantages for non-Christians that are beyond an interpersonal level, and more at a societal and institutional level, leading to religious oppression towards any group who are non-Christian. Muslims, for example, are among these groups who are the subject of this oppression through biased media reports that result in hate crimes and attacks on Mosques (Blumenfeld et al., 2009).

Imbalances based on artificial hierarchies and standings are not only elements of the larger societies in the United States, but schools are also witnessing gaps in educational opportunities and access to resources (Milner, 2012). Muslim students, in particular, are underrepresented and experience discrimination at many levels in public schools, and their cultural needs are not being met (Mahalinjappa et al., 2017). This proposed study intends to investigate Muslim individuals' perceived discrimination and sense of belonging in relation to their career decision-making self-efficacy. A Social Cognitive Career Theoretical (SCCT) approach is used to conceptualize the model with

this population. Given the marginalized status of the Muslim population in the United States, perceived discrimination will be explored along with Muslim individuals' sense of belonging during their high school years.

Many theoretical frameworks explain the process of career decision-making including the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). Lent et al. (1994) developed the SCCT, and its main idea is that career development behaviors are influenced by self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and career goals (Lent et al., 2000). Career goals interplay with one's ethnic background, culture, gender, socioeconomic status, social support, and perceived barriers (Lent et al., 1994). The use of SCCT as a theoretical framework for Muslim students allows for the consideration of the barriers and challenges they experience as a result of their marginalized status in the United States.

Sense of belonging is defined as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environments" (Goodenow, 1993, p. 80). Other research defines sense of belonging as the students' belief that they matter as individuals to the adults in schools and to their peers in such ways that they are cared for (CDC, 2009). Four defining attributes for sense of belonging are positive emotions, positive relations with peers and teachers, interest and effort to be meaningfully involved in school groups, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances as needed (St-Amand et al., 2017). In general, research regarding sense of belonging relies heavily on students' positive relationships, especially with teachers and peers.

According to Allen et al. (2018), a lower sense of school belonging can be an indication of a lack of teacher support in the school and students' lower self-esteem.

Other factors that influence students' sense of belonging are emotional instability and less academic motivation (Allen et al., 2018). Considerations when assessing students' sense of belonging are their demographic characteristics, such as gender, race, and ethnic background (Allen et al., 2018). This study aims to go beyond Muslim students' sense of belonging during high school and further explore their career decision-making process during and post-high school. Career decision-making is the process it takes for students to choose a career to pursue among the different career options, including the educational path or training that aligns with the choice of occupation (Kulcsar et al., 2020). Muslim students' competencies and abilities to make career decisions will be explored in this study.

Similar to students' sense of belonging, teacher support and peer support are both interpersonal considerations that influence students' career decision-making process (Wu et al., 2015). Choe et al. (2013) reported that teachers play a significant role in influencing students' career decision-making. Students depend mostly on teacher support and affirmations, followed by peer interaction, and have less dependency on their parents in their career decision-making process in both collectivist and individualistic cultures (Cheung & Arnold, 2014). This suggests that interpersonal factors mostly at school influence high school student's career decision-making process and their sense of belonging. The environment individuals are in can also impose either obstacles or support to one's career development. According to Lent et al. (2000), individuals are constantly influenced by their perceived surroundings as they navigate career decisions. Social barriers, for example, have significantly influenced individuals' career decision-making



self-efficacy (Lent et al., 2002), and the religious minority status of Muslim high school students could be considered one such social barrier.

The student's career decision-making self-efficacy during and after high school is a critical area to explore because it is associated with individuals' psychological well-being and their future socioeconomic status (Robertson, 2014). Additionally, sense of belonging is another critical component of healthy human development (Maslow, 1943). Therefore, the goal of this study is to understand how Muslim students perceive their experiences, specifically their perceptions of discrimination and their sense of belonging in high school, and how these experiences relate to their career decision-making process post-high school. Understanding what contributes to Muslim students' career decision-making will allow educators, particularly school counselors, to be better equipped with the necessary tools needed to support Muslim students and increase their sense of belonging within their cultural spaces.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This proposed study was to investigate Muslim individuals' perceived discrimination and sense of belonging during their high school years in relation to their career decision-making self-efficacy post-high school. The research questions explored are the following:

1. What is the relationship between Muslim individuals' perception of discrimination experienced in high school and their sense of belonging in high school?

2. What is the relationship between Muslim individuals' sense of belonging in high school and their current career decision-making self-efficacy post-high school?

In response to the research questions, the following were the hypotheses of this study: It is predicted that Muslim high school students who have a lower perception of discrimination will present with a strong sense of school belonging in their high school environments. On the other hand, Muslim high school students who report a higher sense of belonging in school environments where they are included, respected, and accepted are most likely the students who experience less discrimination. Additionally, Muslim students who present with a higher level of sense of belonging during high school years are more likely to demonstrate high competence in career planning post-high school and have higher levels of self-efficacy when making career decisions. That said, the hypothesis of this study suggests that Muslim individuals' perceived discrimination will correlate with their sense of belonging during their high school years; thus, their sense of belonging will correlate with their career decision-making self-efficacy during and post high school.

### **Significance of the Study**

The outcomes of this study will bring awareness to educators, especially school counselors, of the experiences of Muslim high school students and the various ways their high school experiences influence their post-secondary life and career. This awareness aims to promote a positive transformation within public schools in the United States. Increased awareness of the unique challenges Muslim high school students face enables educators, and specifically school counselors, to provide more effective support and

implement interventions through a lens of cultural competence. These interventions can help address the challenges and obstacles emerging from Muslim individuals' experiences related to their perceptions of discrimination and sense of belonging during their school years and their self-efficacy in career decision-making during and post-high school. According to the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) code of ethics, school counselors must "support all students and their development by actively working to eliminate systemic barriers or bias impeding student development" (ASCA, 2022, pg. 1).

School counselors and educators may gain a better understanding of Muslim individuals' experiences beyond high school by exploring their career decision-making process around post-secondary education and career choice. This will allow school counselors to better advocate for Muslim students' career development opportunities, as ASCA indicates that school counselors are to "promote and advocate for resources needed to optimize and support academic, career, and social/emotional development opportunities" (ASCA, 2022, pg. 1). Additionally, implications for school counselors and educators will be shared to further support Muslim individuals in strengthening their sense of belonging at school and enhance their career decision-making self-efficacy process. This is especially critical since most Muslim individuals are marginalized and underrepresented in many ways in the United States and experience challenges and obstacles that majority groups of people do not.

For school counselors, it is important to understand the experiences of Muslim students within public high schools to provide culturally responsive support that aims to strengthen their sense of belonging in schools and facilitate the development of their

career decision-making process. Additionally, there is a need to address personal biases that may keep school counselors and educators from understanding the effects of systemic oppression within marginalized groups. To consciously address the impact of systemic oppression, school counselors must be willing to create a safe space for Muslim American students to feel that they belong. Overall, this investigation into Muslim students' sense of belonging in public schools and their career decision-making process will contribute to the progress toward more critically conscious school counseling work.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### ***Sense of Belonging***

Maslow's hierarchy of human needs categorized sense of belonging as having a central position and stated them in the following order: physiological, safety, love, belonging esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). A widely accepted definition of sense of belonging in research is by Goodenow (1993), who defined it as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (p. 80). Additionally, researchers connected the "sense of belonging" terminology with school connectedness, defined as the belief student carry the level that adults and peers care for them and their learning (CDC, 2009).

#### ***Perceived Discrimination***

Discrimination can be defined as the unfair or biased treatment of individuals due to factors such as their race, gender, age, religion, ethnic background and more, in other words, people who do not belong to the normalized dominant social group (Molina et al., 2016). Another definition of discrimination is the actions of the majority group of people that cause a negative effect on minority groups of people, whether through overt or covert

actions (Feagin & Eckberg, 1980). Perceived discrimination, on the other hand, refers to an individual's personal perceptions of being treated unfairly or judged based on characteristics or traits that place them in the minority and marginalized groups of people (Banks et al., 2006). In other words, perceived discrimination pertains to an individual's subjective understanding of experiencing prejudice or unjust treatment by others.

### ***Career Decision-Making***

Career decision-making is defined as the process it takes to choose a career to pursue among the different career options (Kulcsar, et al., 2020). This process may involve choosing an occupation and the educational path or training that aligns with the occupation of choice, (Kulcsar, et al., 2020). The career decision-making process does not end with the first choice of occupation, some individuals explore whether to stay at their job of choice or switch to another job; in other words, it's a lifelong process for some individuals (Kulcsar, et al., 2020). Other research defines "career decision-making" as one's ability to make career decisions after the consideration of obtaining sufficient information that is needed for such a decision (Gadassi et al., 2012).

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Muslim Americans are a rapidly growing population in the United States, with a rate of growth of roughly 100,000 per year and a projection to reach 8.1 million by the year 2050 (Pew Research Center, 2017). This projection places Muslims as the second-largest religious group in the nation after Christians. In 2017, the Muslim population was at 3.45 million, with an estimated 1.3 million children who mostly attended public schools in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2017). The Muslim American population is diverse and is composed of numerous ethnic origins. According to the Pew Research Center (2017), approximately 24% of Muslims in the United States are native-born to U.S.-born parents (many of the Muslims who fall in this percentage group are children of refugees from other countries), and 73% are immigrants from South Asia, the Asia Pacific region, the Middle East, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe. This diversity within the various ethnic backgrounds suggests that the languages spoken in the homes of a wide majority of Muslim Americans may include languages other than English, and can include Arabic, Urdu, Somali, Bosnian, and Indonesian.

The majority of Muslims in the United States are of ethnic and racially diverse backgrounds, suggesting that the culture and traditions that are practiced at home are also diverse. In other words, Muslim families' way of life in the United States is diverse within the Muslim culture and can be divergent from the general population, specifically when it comes to their values, their codes of ethics and manners, the way they dress, the rituals they practice, their social interactions among each other, and more (Nanji, 2017). Therefore, it stands to reason that most Muslim American students within U.S. public

schools will be presented with cultural values and practices that are distinct to them and different from the general student population (Chan & Schlein, 2010).

According to Mahalinjappa et al. (2017), Muslim students find some school policies, procedures, and practices to be conflicting with their cultural practices and do not notice a representation of themselves in the curriculum. These school procedures conflicting with Muslim students' cultural practices and values take their exclusion to a deeper level. According to the American School Counselors Association's ethical standards (2022), students have a right to be respected and treated with dignity and be included despite their cultural background and belief system. School counselors are to “actively work to establish a safe, equitable, affirming school environment in which all members of the school community demonstrate respect, inclusion, and acceptance” (ASCA, 2022, pg. 1). Hence, school counselors should play a critical role in fostering supportive environments within schools that are inclusive to the unique needs of Muslim high school students. Their role is pivotal in ensuring Muslim students feel accepted, supported, and respected in their school community. By fostering an environment of trust and understanding, school counselors lay the foundation for addressing potential trauma Muslim students may bear.

### **Muslim Students' and Trauma**

Many Muslim Americans came to the United States as refugees from wars in their countries of origin, such as Bosnian Muslim Americans, Iraqi Muslim Americans, and most recently Syrian and Afghani Muslim Americans (Pew Research Center, 2017). In fact, Muslims are amongst one of the largest growing groups of people who are displaced due to conflict in their countries. 46% of all refugees entering the U.S. as of 2016 were

Muslim (Pew Research Center, 2016). This suggests that Muslim students who experienced conflict or war in their countries of origin are likely to be recovering or still experiencing trauma, grief, and loss.

Therefore, a large group of Muslim students may be coming to school with trauma experiences and backgrounds. The role of the school counselor is to provide students and their parents with culturally responsive mental health support and resources that address traumatic experiences (ASCA, 2022). Besides having traumatic background experiences, Muslim students may present a distinctive immigration status to the United States.

### **Immigration Status**

In addition to Muslim students' historical experiences of trauma, they have a unique immigration status in the United States. The degree of Muslim students' acculturation and assimilation is influenced by whether they are first-, second-, or third-generation immigrants. First-generation immigrants are individuals who were born outside the United States, while the second generation consists of U.S.-born individuals of at least one parent who was born outside the United States, and the third generation is U.S.-born individuals with both parents also being born in the United States, yet at least one foreign-born grandparent (Duncan & Trejo, 2017).

Exploring whether Muslim American families prefer that they keep their traditions from their countries of origin or choose to push harder for assimilation into the culture and traditions of the larger society in the United States is essential. In other words, the acculturation process with Muslim students can either be headed toward enhancing the cultural identity of their country of origin or the cultural identity of



Western society. Such awareness of the acculturation process helps school counselors and educators provide culturally responsive support that is tailored to Muslim students and provides inclusive school environments for them. Besides immigration status, it is critical to acknowledge the diverse racial backgrounds of Muslim students, as this intersectionality can affect their day-to-day experiences in American public schools.

### **Racial Background**

Racial background is not homogenous within the Muslim American population. According to the Pew Research Center (2018), 20% of Muslims in the U.S. identify as African American or Black including immigrants from Africa such as Somalia and Sudan, while 41% of Muslims identify as white, including immigrants from Middle Eastern and European countries. That said, Muslim students may be identified within a certain racial background in the United States yet may or may not have the experiences of that specific group of people. For example, Muslim students from Middle Eastern backgrounds who are racially identified as white students face prejudices, stigmatization, and discrimination, that the majority of white students in the United States do not face (Mahalinjappa et al., 2017). The diversity in countries of origin, racial background, and other divergent factors among Muslim Americans suggest that Muslim students' experiences in public schools are not homogenous to the entire population, and hence, they cannot be treated as a monolith.

### **Muslim Americans' Religious Identity**

Despite the diversity, Muslim Americans share many common religious practices and beliefs. Muslim families tend to place a strong emphasis on collectivist idealism, which differs substantially from Western societies in which individualism and self-

reliance are valued (Springer et al., 2009). Individuals who belong to collectivist ideologies are more inclined to view themselves in an interdependent fashion with selected others and are willing to sacrifice personal interests for the benefit of the larger group (Thomas et al., 2016). In a society that highly values self-reliance, it is likely that this creates a complex multicultural identity for Muslim American students to have to navigate through in schools. Based on collectivist idealism, Muslim students may strongly emphasize communal efforts for the greater good. Thus, it is essential to consider the various ways Muslim students' communal orientations emerge, and how their engagement with family and societal communities influence their daily school life and decision-making processes.

Having a religious minority status is another similarity among Muslim Americans. This minoritized status is especially challenging when there are speculations that Islamic values are inherently incongruent with the values of people in Western societies. Indeed, this portrayal of incongruent values threatens the sense of inclusion and belonging for most Muslims who live in the U.S. (Sirin & Fine, 2008), especially when policies are made that contradict the values and policies Muslim individuals follow in the U.S. Unfortunately, this is not just a reality within the broader society; public schools in the U.S. also include policies that contradict values and Islamic guidelines that Muslim students follow. An example is found in the case of a Muslim girl in Oklahoma who was suspended twice for wearing a hijab (head covering) on a no-hat day, based on the belief that hijab is an obligation for Muslim women (Mahalinjappa et al., 2017). This is a clear example of when Muslim students' experiences go beyond feelings of exclusion and extend to the experience of having to face negative consequences for abiding by their

obligatory practices. Other examples are Muslim students' reports of being not only verbally and physically bullied, but also intimidated in ways that they felt were specific to their core beliefs by being questioned or challenged on negative perceptions about their faith. For instance, core beliefs about their religious identity are challenged when Muslim girls have to respond to questions like, "Are you oppressed?" This places students in a position of being representative of a clear stereotype about Muslim women (Mahalinjappa et al., 2017). Collectively, these examples provide insight into the intensity of the challenges Muslim students face in public schools.

### **Islamic Faith and Muslims**

Understanding the basics of the religious and cultural background of Muslim students equips school counselors and other educators with cultural competencies specific to this population. This section aims to cover religious needs that require accommodations in schools for Muslim students to feel more understood and supported, while acknowledging the importance of not generalizing these religious accommodations or assuming that every Muslim student will request or require them.

The word Islam comes from the Arabic root word "salaam," meaning "peace" and the literal meaning is "surrender." "Muslim" translates as the one who submits to the will of God or surrenders to Islam and therefore follows the religion of Islam (Merriam-Webster). The Quran is the holy book that sets the guidelines for Muslims to follow and is the source through which the majority of Muslims receive their values and code of manners. This text is originally in the Arabic language; therefore, most of the religion's major terminology used today remains in the Arabic language.

Despite the diversity and variation in adhering to other principles within the religion, most Muslims follow the five major pillars of Islam (Ali, et al, 2004). Muslim youth are obligated to start following the tenets of the faith, and the pillars in Table 1 (all tables are in Appendix A) once they reach the age of puberty (Ali, et al, 2004). Thus, in many cases, Muslim students are starting to follow the obligatory practices of Islam in their middle school to high school stage. Therefore, it is critical to learn the basic tenets and obligations Islam places on Muslims to better understand Muslim students' experiences and needs in their day-to-day school life.

Islam creates a structure for a way of life for many Muslims (Nanji, 2017). The religious tenets include directions for all aspects of living including one's social environment, personal behavior, and public self-conduct (Nanji, 2017). These attributes describe some of the values that create unique tasks for Muslim students. For example, Muslim students who follow Islamic practices, such as the second pillar described in Table 1 will need to perform one out of the five prayers during school hours. The five prayers do require ablution (a structured way of washing one's body) before conducting the prayer. The prayers also require space that allows Muslim students to perform prostration and more bodily movements while performing the prayer. Also, students who choose to fast, as described in the third pillar in Table 1 will be fasting from dawn to sunset for a full month which oftentimes falls in the school year calendar. These students who choose to fast will need other spaces in the school besides the cafeteria to be in during lunchtime.

Another critical religious tenet necessary to consider is the female dress code in Islam. What stands out from the common clothing of Western societies is the head

covering that many Muslim women chose to wear. "Hijab" is the Arabic word for the head cover, and unlike its perceptions in Western societies as an act that oppresses women, the hijab for Muslim women functions to define their Muslim identity, preserve intimate relationships, and provide freedom (Droogsma, 2007). Freedom in this case refers to a Muslim woman's decision to depart from established norms for how people dress within the majority groups in our societies. The concept of hijab is especially crucial to consider for Muslim female students because it is an identity marker for students who chose to wear it, and hence hijab subjects them to religious discrimination in Western societies (Weichselbaumer, 2020). Female students who choose hijab feel more excluded from their non-Muslim peers and constantly have to confront negative perceptions about themselves as either oppressed people or as individuals who are coerced into covering, despite the fact that they are dressing in the way that they actually chose (Mahalinjappa et al, 2017).

Although this section discusses the homogenous attributes and practices among Muslim Americans, the religiosity level of every Muslim will differ and will be based on their choices. Therefore, it is critical not to generalize and assume that every Muslim student in a public high school in the United States will require accommodations for the tenets and pillars of Islam that the majority of Muslims follow. That said, knowledge of the basic tenets and practices of Islam is necessary, while simultaneously considering students' varying levels of practice.

Furthermore, discrimination and hate crimes against minority groups, in general, are unfortunate realities of Western societies. Muslims belong to a religious minority group that is highly stigmatized in Western societies and that places unique challenges on

Muslim students' day-to-day school experiences (Nanji, 2017). Challenges include facing hate crimes, experiencing a negative portrayal of their religious background in mainstream media, noticing increased surveillance and scrutiny of their communities, and vandalization of mosques (Shryock, 2010). Muslim Americans have faced many barriers, especially post-September 11, including an increase in the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media (Nanji, 2017). In the wake of September 11, Muslim Americans have become the second highest group in the U.S. to report hate crimes that are religiously based, according to the FBI National Uniform Crime Reporting Program (2002). This political atmosphere, that causes religious stigma, presents itself in certain school environments as well. A report conducted by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) suggested that schools in the United States can be a hostile environment for Muslim high school-age students. Results of a survey done by CAIR with 621 Muslim students ages 11-18 in public schools and private non-Islamic schools in California indicated that 60% of boys and 53% of girls experienced discrimination that traced back to their religion (CAIR, 2021). In other words, the political environment, especially post 9/11 is feeding into the religious stigma, leading to a growing number of Muslim parents choosing to enroll their children in private Islamic schools (Badawi, 2006; Joseph & Riedel, 2008). All of the above-discussed religious and cultural factors are necessary to understand when examining Muslim students' social environment in public schools in the United States. Specifically, they are essential components affecting Muslim students' sense of school belonging and career development.

### **School Sense of Belonging**

School sense of belonging refers to 'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment' (Goodenow, 1993, p. 80). However, students' sense of school belonging is a complex construct. According to Allen et al. (2018), ten themes were identified as influencing students' sense of school belonging in their meta-analysis of 51 studies. Of these themes, the most influential factors in students' sense of belonging in schools were: teachers' support or lack of support, parent support, peer support, and students' positive personal characteristics, such as self-esteem and optimism. Other factors that apply to school settings are extracurricular activities, such as sports and after-school clubs. Additionally, school safety where students are not under the threat of violence is a factor that impacts the sense of belonging and is highly affected by the larger society (Allen et al., 2018). Finally, themes at the individual level include the emotional stability of students, academic motivation, and cultural background of students, such as gender, race, and ethnicity (Allen et al., 2018). Even though race and ethnic backgrounds were found to be themes associated with students' school belonging in schools, there are not enough studies for general conclusions regarding such themes. Given that the majority of the Muslim populations in the United States are of ethnic minority groups, this further highlights the gaps in research that are specific to this population.

### **School Environments and Sense of Belonging**

The political atmosphere in the United States is a major source of the stigmatization the Muslim community faces in the United States, where they are viewed as the enemy or even labeled as terrorists by most people (Nanji, 2017). Given the social

discourse and stigmatization of the Muslim community, Muslim students are likely to experience an interruption in their emotional safety and social engagements in schools. Additionally, Muslim students who carry intersectionality of multiple stigmatized minority statuses such as Muslim Americans of Arab origins, or African origins, will face more extensive challenges in school due to their membership in both racially and religiously minoritized groups. As a result of a possible diminishment in Muslim students' sense of belonging, they may face barriers to academic success that can be traced beyond their religious minority status. Therefore, supporting Muslim students requires an understanding of the students' whole social context and how their intersecting identities shape their school experiences. There is a gap in the research as it relates to Muslim high school students and their sense of school belonging; however, the experiences of other minoritized groups with similarly marginalized statuses have been discussed in the literature.

African American students, for example, felt a stronger sense of school belonging when they perceived fewer differences between themselves and other students in schools. African American students also felt a stronger sense of belonging when other students accepted and appreciated them (Booker, 2007). Other research showed that students from marginalized backgrounds who had a diminished sense of school belonging also experienced higher levels of discrimination (Kogachi & Graham, 2020). More research with students from marginalized racial and ethnic groups, including African Americans, Latinos, and American Indians, indicated a lower sense of belonging in schools in comparison to students of nonmarginalized groups (Mello et al., 2012). According to another study conducted with 2967 first-year college students suggested



that students from marginalized backgrounds, such as African American, Asian, and Hispanics, reported less sense of belonging than students who are white (Johnson et al., 2007).

Therefore, it is critical for educators and school counselors to consider students' intersectionality, and minoritized and marginalized status when exploring their sense of school belonging (Uwah et al., 2008). Enough research has not been done directly on American Muslim students and their sense of school belonging; however, given that the Muslim population belongs to minority and marginalized groups in the United States, a diminished sense of belonging can be traced back to the studies done with other minority and marginalized groups. As a result, this study will be focused more on the themes of school belonging, such as educators' support, peer support, and feelings of safety for Muslim adolescents in public school settings as opposed to faith-based private Islamic schools, where Muslims are a majority. The study will also examine the outcomes of a sense of belonging among American Muslim high school students and the relationship between those outcomes and students' long-term career decision-making process. Additionally, this study will provide the specific implications for school counselors, and their roles in working with Muslim students in public schools.

### **Educator Support and School Sense of Belonging**

The interpersonal relationship and connection between students and teachers create a sense of belonging (Libbey, 2004). This emphasizes the importance of teachers in creating the proper conditions for students to feel supported and connected. Another study suggests that the teacher-student relation factor is among the strongest connections with the student's sense of school belonging (Dukynaite & Dudiate, 2017).

Considering the religious and, in some cases, ethnic minority status facing Muslim students in U.S. public schools, where predominant Eurocentric and Christian Western values are embedded, teachers and administrators were found to be ill-equipped from the cultural and religious perspectives to foster a sense of belonging for Muslim students. Niyozoy (2009) found that teachers in Western societies had lower expectations for their Muslim students and that displayed a lack of cultural sensitivity. Furthermore, this study indicated that educators were unwilling or unable to include contemporary Islamic perspectives in school curricula (Nivozoy, 2009). This study suggests that American Muslim high school students may not receive adequate educator support in school which is required to foster a strong sense of school belonging. In other words, the lack of proactive inclusion from the power position that educators and administrators in schools hold may further contribute to the lack of belonging for Muslim students in public school settings.

### **Impacts of School Sense of Belonging**

Sense of belonging was also found to be correlated with students' academic achievement in high school. Students with a higher sense of school belonging have been shown to have higher GPAs and lower dropout rates. A longitudinal study with 572 students from Latin American, Asian, and European backgrounds between the ages of 13.94 and 19.13 examining the sense of belonging and its association with academic success and motivation indicated that the years the students reported a higher sense of belonging also indicated higher achievement levels and reported that school was more enjoyable and useful (Neel & Fuligni, 2013). Another study by St-Amand et al. (2017) presented the results of inquiries into the literature suggested that sense of belonging significantly

and positively affects motivational measures and academic success. Other meta-analyses investigated 82 studies and found a positive correlation between students' sense of belonging and motivational outcomes (Korpershoek et al., 2020; Vieno et al., 2007). These motivational outcomes included a mastery of goal setting, better social-emotional outcomes, and higher self-efficacy. These are all indicators that affect students' academic achievement. Another study examining the impact of sense of belonging among black students in K-12 public schools suggests that a lower sense of belonging is correlated with less chance of academic success (Ezizkwele, 2020).

### ***Socioemotional Impacts***

School belonging not only affects academic outcomes but also plays an important factor in predicting students' social and emotional health. Based on a qualitative meta-analysis study done by Craggs and Kelly (2018) to examine adolescents' experiences of school belonging indicated four major themes, *Intersubjectivity*, the relatedness among peers in which students seek support and connections within the school community where they also engage in the co-creation of school belonging. *Acceptance of individual identity*, including religious and cultural identity, and the positive reception of the individual identity cultivates mutual acceptance. *In-group membership* reduces feelings of exclusion and enhances the sense of safety and security. Lastly, *safety and security*, in an environment where bullying, victimization, and violence are not prevalent.

### ***Psychological Impacts***

Lastly, school belonging was found to affect students' psychological outcomes in various ways. A study of psychological outcomes revealed a significant negative correlation between students' perception of school's sense of belonging and other

psychological problems (Anderman, 2002). In a research of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Anderman (2002) found that individual students' sense of belonging was inversely related to depression, social rejection, and other school problems. Challenging environments in the form of stereotype threat that conveys prejudice, exclusion, discrimination, and nonbelonging have been found to deprive students of self-relevant information and foster inaccurate self-concept (Inzlicht et al., 2006; Taylor & Walton, 2011). These challenges contribute to the perceived stress at school, which can lead to disengagement and other mental health risks. Indeed, a sense of school belonging was found to negatively correlate with discrimination stress among Latino youth and African Americans in schools that are predominantly White (Morris et al., 2020; Roche & Kuperminc, 2012). Although school belonging is important to all students, it is likely for it to be even more relevant to cultural minority students, including racial, ethnic, religious, and other socially stigmatized populations (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Uwah et al., 2008). Additionally, school sense of belonging is found to affect high school students' overall function and achievement. Sense of belonging affects students' academic achievement, socioemotional levels, and psychological well-being (Goodenow, 1993).

In addition to sense of belonging in school, another variable that is critical to investigate when examining students' overall success in school and beyond is their career development and their career decision-making process. Understanding such a process allows school counselors and educators to provide support that empowers students to make informed decisions and prepare them effectively for their post-secondary life. The American School Counselor Association model provides a comprehensive framework for

school counselors to not only address students' social-emotional and academic needs but also for them to provide career development support. This comprehensive model includes providing an inclusive and positive school environment (ASCA, 2019a; ASCA, 2019b).

### **Career Decision-Making**

Career decision-making is defined as the process it takes to choose a career to pursue among the different career options (Kulcsar, et al., 2020). This process may involve choosing an occupation and the educational path or training that aligns with the occupation (Kulcsar, et al., 2020). The career decision-making process with some individuals continues beyond a first job and explores whether to stay at the job of choice or switch to another job; in other words, it is a lifelong process for some individuals (Kulcsar et al., 2020). Other research defines career decision-making as one's ability to make career decisions after the consideration of obtaining sufficient information that is needed for such a decision (Gadassi et al., 2012).

### **Factors that Influence Career Decision-Making**

#### ***Extrinsic Factors***

Extrinsic factors that influence career decision-making include financial remuneration, job security, professional prestige, and job accessibility (Akosah-Twumasi, 2018). Financial remuneration was considered the most influential extrinsic factor in career decision-making, especially since income is considered a significant component of living and survival (Agarwala, 2008). Job security along with accessibility are both important extrinsic factors in career decision-making. In some collectivist cultures, nearness to the job was a factor that prevented students from deciding on careers that they prefer (Atitsogbe et al., 2018). Lastly, professional prestige is an influential factor that

affects students' career decision-making. In some studies, professional prestige was ranked as the second-most significant influential factor due to the incentives of living good lives and being respected in society (Bojuwove & Mbanjwa, 2006).

### ***Intrinsic Factors***

Intrinsic factors are personal interests, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and professional development opportunities (Akosah-Twumasi, 2018). Personal interests in career decision-making appeared to be an important factor in the selection of a life career (Caldera et al., 2003). In a study that compared career choice in Hispanic women and non-Hispanic White women, Caldera et al. (2003) found that the personal interest was the most important intrinsic factor influencing Hispanic women's career decision-making. In about 50% of youth, career decision-making is based on personal interest, even in collectivist societies; personal interest matters to a great extent; however, it remains influenced by social comparison (Lent et al., 2010). In other words, an individual's interests are impacted by other people's opinions and assessments.

Another important intrinsic factor in career decision-making is self-efficacy (Akosah-Twumasi, 2018). According to Haward et al. (2009), both individualistic and collectivist societies emphasized self-efficacy when exploring career decision-making; however, in collectivist cultures, the levels of students' self-efficacy aligned with their parents. Similarly, outcome expectations in collectivist societies suggest that the degree of expectations was congruent with parents (Sawitri et al., 2015). Lastly, professional development opportunities were found to be a major intrinsic career decision-making influencer. According to Lee (2001), university students in China matured in their career decision-making process based on opportunities for professional development.

### ***Interpersonal Factors***

According to Akosah-Twumas (2018), interpersonal factors that affect students' career decision-making include family members, educators, peers, and social responsibilities (Akosah-Twumas, 2018). Family support was found to be among the most influential factors, specifically connecting career congruence with parents' increased confidence in career decision-making (Sawitri et al., 2014). Also, parents' professions influence the career choice of their children; for example, children from agricultural backgrounds are more likely to follow their parent's careers, while those from industrial settings are more independent with the career choices they make (Howard et al., 2009).

Educator support was also found to impact career decision-making. According to a study conducted on 285 urban middle and high schools in the United States, teacher support was shown to have a direct effect on students' school engagement, that then directly impacted students' career preparation and career development (Perry, 2009). Another study suggested that teacher support was significantly correlated with students' career development, students' self-efficacy, and students' future career or vocational-outcome expectations (Metheny, 2008). Additionally, peer interactions were found to influence students' career decision-making. In some studies, peer influence was found to be the third force, after parent and educator that significantly affect students' career decision-making (Howard et al., 2009). Lastly, social expectations influence career decision-making in both individualistic and collectivist cultures (Lee, 2001).

### **Relationship Between Sense of Belonging and Career Decision-Making**

Various research studies established a connection between the process of career decision-making and sense of belonging. For example, a study that used

phenomenological research approaches to examine the career decision-making process of 17 employed adults suggested that integral factors to career decision-making include sense of belonging and meaningful engagement (Amundson, 2010). In fact, most of the participants in this study reported that sense of belonging is critical for the decision they made to join and to remain in a workplace. In another study that compared the effects of career-based exclusion (n=46) and personal exclusion (n=46) with career-based inclusion (n=56) amongst college students suggested a significant association between concepts of belonging and career decision-making. This study demonstrates that undermining sense of belonging hinders college students career decision-making process (Pesch, 2017). These findings are similar to the findings of a study that investigated the various factors that impact students of color's sense of belonging at predominantly white institutions. The study used moderate regression analysis on data collected with a sample size of 626, and the finding indicated a negative effect of discrimination on the sense of belonging of students of color attending predominantly white institutions (Hussain, 2019). Another study investigated the sense of belonging of 357 children of Chinese migrants in relation to their perceived discrimination. Data for this study was collected using the perception of discrimination scale and sense of belonging instrument. The findings suggested a significant correlation between perceived discrimination and sense of belonging (Liu, D et al., 2014).

Research also indicates that psychological factors affect students' career development. Perceived perception, confidence levels, and self-esteem are all psychological factors found to affect students' career development (Paa & McWhirter, 2000). Therefore, factors such as educator support, specifically teachers and counselors,



and other psychological factors are shown to influence both students' sense of belonging and their career decision-making process. According to Stipanovic et al. (2017) providing students with support, such as counseling services and career pathway models, enhances students' sense of career and academic self-efficacy. Given the indications discussed earlier that teachers in Western societies display a lack of competence with Muslim students, this suggests that Muslim students who do not receive an adequate level of teacher support may experience negative outcomes in both their career development and sense of school belonging as a result of the lack of support.

### **Social Cognitive Career Theory**

Even though few empirical studies provide evidence-based career work with American Muslim students, a Social Cognitive Career Theoretical approach is used as a foundation to conceptualize the relationship between sense of belonging and career decision-making for Muslim American students in this study. Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) was developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett in 1994. SCCT has been applied to examine how personal variables, like culture and gender, and environmental factors might impact individuals' ability to engage in career-relevant learning experiences and choice options (Lent et al., 2000). Career goals interplay with one's ethnic background, culture, gender, social interactions, social support, and perceived barriers (Lent et al., 1994).

The use of SCCT as a theoretical framework is appropriate for studying the population of Muslim individuals in America, as it allows for the consideration of the interplay between sense of belonging, feelings of self-efficacy around career choice, and the barriers and challenges emerging from their marginalized status in the United States.

Figure 1 (all figures are in Appendix B) demonstrates the social cognitive career theory model. The arrows indicate that person inputs, which refer to the contextual elements from an individual's background, alongside environmental conditions, influence one's learning experiences (Lent & Brown, 1996). Learning experiences then influence self-efficacy expectations.

Environmental conditions in this study are specific to public schools and Muslim individuals' experiences with discrimination in those spaces. Hence, within the SCCT framework, discrimination, as an environmental condition, can be studied as a variable that theoretically correlates with students' *learning experiences*. Learning experiences refer to the experience of moving through the contextual variables (e.g., discrimination) as an individual turns their interests into goals and goals into action (Brown & Lent, 2013), and sense of belonging in the context of this study is synonymous with learning experiences.

A widely accepted definition of sense of belonging in research is by Goodenow (1993), who defined it as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (p. 80). Racial and ethnic minority groups, such as African American and Latino students were found to have a lower sense of belonging in public high schools in the U.S. due to experiences of discrimination (Morris et al., 2020; Roche & Kupermine, 2012). In the SCCT model, learning experiences – or in this case, sense of belonging, theoretically influence individuals' self-efficacy expectations. The specific focus for self-efficacy in this study is career decision-making self-efficacy, which refers to the belief in an

individual's ability to successfully complete all the tasks needed in making career decisions (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

### **SCCT and Marginalized Groups**

Despite the lack of research that directly connects the efficacy of the SCCT theoretical model with the Muslim population in the U.S., studies examined SCCT approaches with other marginalized and underrepresented groups of people. A study that examined the relationship between critical consciousness development among racial and ethnic minority college students and their career decision-making self-efficacy following an SCCT model suggested a higher critical agency links to higher career decision-efficacy. This study was tested with 135 racially and ethnically diverse college students, and further results indicated that critical action and reflection predicted the higher critical agency (Cadenas et al., 2020). Another study that examined the applicability of SCCT with 208 African American college students through a path analysis suggested a strong connection between learning experiences, self-efficiency beliefs, outcome expectations, vocational interest, and choice goals for the six Holland themes (Dickinson, 2008).

Additional studies investigated the expanded model of SCCT with diverse populations. For example, in a study that examined the relationship between the social cognitive constructs and the four experiential sources of learning amongst African American men and women and Hispanic men and women, findings suggested that outcome expectancies were positively associated with research career intentions. The paths in this study were consistently associated with the SCCT framework in the sense that the connections of the sources of learning to intentions were mediated by the participants' self-efficacy (Adedokun et al., 2013). Considering Muslim Americans'

marginalization status, previous studies suggest that the SCCT model factors into their unique experiences.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Since Muslim students inhabit multiple minority statuses and their sense of school belonging is an under-researched area, understanding the dynamic of school belonging and its consequences can inform school counselors, administrators, and parents in developing specific programs and strategies to help them cope with psychological challenges in their daily lives. As the ASCA states under its code of ethics, the school counselor's role is to provide marginalized students with the following, advocate for students to ensure their safety in all environments, work towards establishing an equitable environment where all students feel respected and included, and advocate for resources to supports all students' academic, career, and social/emotional development.

For school counselors to implement ASCA's code of ethics with Muslim American students in public schools, an understanding of attributes that are distinctive and unique to Muslim students is necessary. These attributes, such as religiosity, cultural values, collectivist attributes, trauma history, and experiences of perceived discrimination, all impact Muslim students' social experiences in schools. Variables that influence Muslim students' sense of belonging in schools, mainly teachers' and educators' support, therefore leading to outcomes that impact students' academic achievement, motivation levels, socio-emotional health, and psychological well-being were all factors that also influenced students' career decision-making. These findings allow researchers to examine Muslim students' sense of belonging using qualitative methods or empirical studies using the sense of belonging scales and connecting the

results to the student's career decision-making competencies and post-secondary outcomes. Additionally, this study aims at equipping school counselors and educators with the knowledge needed to establish competencies while supporting Muslim American students in public high schools. Specifically with increasing Muslim students' sense of belonging and enhancing their career decision-making competencies.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate Muslim students' levels of perceived discrimination and sense of belonging in public high schools, and whether there is a relationship between perceived discrimination, sense of belonging and career decision-making self-efficacy. This chapter describes the research design, the participants, measures, procedures, data collection, and data analysis techniques used to address the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between Muslim individuals' perception of discrimination in high school and their sense of belonging in high school?
2. What is the relationship between Muslim individuals' sense of belonging in high school and their current career decision-making self-efficacy?

#### **Design**

A quantitative, descriptive and multivariate correlational design was used. Data were collected with survey methodology. Purposive sampling was employed to invite Muslim individuals throughout the United States to participate in this study to understand their perceived discrimination and sense of belonging during high school, and to investigate the relationship between perceived discrimination, sense of belonging and career decision-making self-efficacy. Participants responded to survey questions that asked them about their past perceived discrimination and sense of belonging experiences during high school and their past and current career decision-making process.

#### **Participants**

Participants in this study were individuals who identified as Muslim, were aged 18-23 years and who graduated from high school within the past five years. The actual

age of the participants was not recorded because of the desired restrictions on age range. Restricting the years post graduating from high school allowed the participants to recall memories regarding high school experiences, and adequately answer the survey questions. Current high school students may be unable to share the long-term impacts of their high school experiences on their career decision-making, for that reason the participants were at least age 18. This study specifically explored the public school environment, so an eligibility criterion for the participants was to have attended public schools. That said, the participants' criteria for this study was the following: Participants must identify as Muslim, have attended a public high school in the U.S., and be between the ages of 18-23 years.

Participants in this study were recruited through invitations to complete the surveys that were placed on various social media platforms. No restriction was placed on gender or ethnic background, as this study aimed to capture the experiences that are unique to Muslim students' experiences. To reach a diverse ethnic background of Muslim participants, the invitation to participate was placed on Islamic social media platforms that service Muslims from various backgrounds. The number of respondents during the data collection period was 236. Once those not meeting inclusion criteria or with incomplete surveys were deleted, then final  $N$  was = 189.

## **Measures**

To explore the relationships between Muslims' experiences of discrimination, their sense of belonging in high school, and their career self-efficacy beliefs, three measures were used in this study: The *Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire-Community-Brief Version* (PEDQ-CV-B), the *Simple School Belonging Scale* (SSBS),

and the *Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale* (CDSE). Full questions for each questionnaire and scale are in Appendix C.

### ***Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire-Community Version***

The Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire-Community-Brief Version (PEDQ-CV-B) was adapted by Brondolo et al. (2005), from the Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire (PEDQ) (Contrada et al., 2001). The PEDQ-CV-B is used with various ethnic groups to assess individuals' perceived ethnic discrimination or experiences of racism. The scales specifically measure subdimensions of racism, which allows for the exploration of various forms of this race-related stressor (Brondolo et al., 2005). The questionnaire has 17 items. Sample items included, "Have you been treated unfairly by teachers, principals, or other staff at school?", "Have you been treated unfairly by co-workers or classmates?", and "Have others ignored you or not paid attention to you?". Item responses were on a scale of *1 = Never Happened*, *2 = Sometimes*, *3 = Happened Very Often*. The prompt for responding to the items was modified for use in this study from, "How often have any of the things listed below ever happened to you, *because of your ethnicity?*" to, "How often have any of the things listed below ever happened to you during high school *because of your religion?*".

Reliability of the PEDQ-CV-B across diverse traditionally marginalized groups, including African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans, has been reported with Cronbach alphas between .65 and .88 for the subscales across all groups (Arellano-Morales et al., 2015; Brondolo et al., 2011; Brondolo, Kelly, et al., 2005; Kwok et al., 2011). Convergent validity of the PEDQ-CV-B in American Indians was evident through



high correlations between PEDQ-CV-B scores and scores on the EDS (overall  $r = .85$ ) (Blair et al., 2017).

Discriminant validity, another form of construct validity, was tested by examining the relationship of perceived racism/ethnic discrimination to appraisals of discriminatory situations as challenging or beneficial. Convergent validity was examined by correlating scores on the PEDQ-CV-B with those on the Black or Latino version of the PRS (McNeilly, et al., 1996). The Lifetime Discrimination scale of the PEDQ-CV-B was correlated with the Black version of the PRS ( $r = .61, p < .001$ ) in a sample of 70 Black students and it was also highly correlated with the Latino PRS ( $r = .57, p < .001$ ) in a sample of 58 Latino students (McNeilly, et al., 1996). This supports that these sub-scales have good convergent validity with one published and well-used measure of perceived racism.

The significance of the data collected from the perceived ethnic discrimination questionnaire allows school counselors and educators to better understand Muslim students' experiences with discrimination and the possible influence those experiences have on their school sense of belonging and career decision self-efficacy. By understanding such experiences, school counselors specifically will be better equipped with the cultural competencies needed to make their work with this population more meaningful and impactful. The need for cultural competencies in school counselors' work is critical, especially with students who are marginalized in school settings considering today's political climate that threatens their personal, academic, and career success (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017).

### ***Simple School Belonging Scale***

Developed based on Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM), the Simple School Belonging Scale (SSBS) was designed to overcome the conflicting psychometric properties regarding the PSSM's dimensional structure as well as the interpretations of the studies using the scale (Whiting et al., 2018; Ye & Wallace, 2014; You et al., 2011). The SSBS contains 10 items, where five of them were taken from the PSSM and the other five were new items developed by consulting with an expert panel for content validity (Whiting et al. 2018). Psychometric properties of SSBS revealed a unidimensional scale, which resolved the multi-factorial issue in PSSM (Whiting et al., 2018). The 10 items were measured on a scale of *1 = Disagree A Lot* to *4 = Agree A Lot*. Reported internal consistency reliability of the SSBS is high with Cronbach's alpha of .91 and high scale reliability of .96 using Raykov's Confirmatory Factor Analysis based method (Whiting et al., 2018).

Construct validity has been previously established by evidence for convergent validity between the SSBS and the Vaux Social Support Record (Vaux et al, 1986),  $r = .64$  (Whiting et al., 2018). Whiting et al. (2018) also report some evidence of divergent validity supported by a weak correlation ( $r = .14$ ) between students' year of residency in the community and the SSBS. Since the SSBS is a relatively new scale and has not been used in research broadly, there is a lack of research data to support the validity of the scale in various populations, including Muslims.

### ***Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale***

Tayler and Betz (1983) developed the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale which measures an individual's degree of belief that they can successfully complete the tasks

necessary to make career decisions. The subscales of CDSE were derived from the five career choice competencies, accurate self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, making plans for the future, and problem-solving (Crites, 1978). The short form of the CDSE was used for this study in which each competence area included five items from the full scale leading to a 25 item scale (Buyukgoze-Kavas, 2014). Each item had a responses scale of *1 = No Confidence* to *5 = Complete Confidence*.

The CDSE has been reported to be highly reliable. In the original normative sample of 346 students from both a private liberal arts college and a large state university, internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach  $\alpha$ ) ranged from .86 to .89 for the subscales and .97 for the total score (Taylor & Betz, 1983). Other researchers reported similar levels of internal consistency, such as Luzzo (1993) who reported a total scale alpha of .93. The internal consistency reliability of the short form, which is used in this study ranged from .73 (Self-Appraisal) to .83 (Goal Selection) for the short form 5-item subscales and .94 for the 25-item total score (Betz et al., 1996). There is also evidence for test-retest reliability (stability). Luzzo (1993) reported a six-week test-retest coefficient of .83 for the CDSE total score.

As for the CDSE validity, it has not been widely used with the Muslim population, but some studies have reported ethnic group comparisons using this scale. Peterson (1993) examined CDSE scores in 678 under-prepared college students who were enrolled at the University of Minnesota. African American students reported a much higher CDSE ( $M = 6.9$ ) than Native Americans ( $M = 5.3$ ), while Hispanic and Caucasian students scored higher than Native American or Asian students. Another study done by Chaney et al. (2007), indicated that the CDSE scores of 200 African American students

were significantly higher than 1,400 Caucasian students. Lastly, Betz and Borgen (2010) examined CDSE in a large group ( $N = 906$ ) of undecided college students. For the total group of undecided students, prior to the intervention, there were no gender differences in career decision self-efficacy. The means for males and females were identical ( $M = 3.5$ ). There were significant ethnic group differences, however. The 59 African Americans for whom pre-test CDSE scores were available were the most career self-efficacious ( $M = 3.8$ ), and this mean was significantly larger than that for either the 54 Asian Americans ( $M = 3.6$ ) or the 796 White students ( $M = 3.4$ ). Likewise, the mean for Asian Americans was also larger than that for White students.

### **Procedure**

Before starting data collection, approval was obtained by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure this study met the requirements of ethical research with data collection involving human subjects. After IRB approval was granted, the questionnaire was created in Qualtrics (2023) to allow the participants to electronically answer and submit their responses. The link to the surveys was sent to participants through social media, direct contact, and email. The invitation to the survey was posted on the following social media sites: Facebook (especially on Muslim participant pages), large Muslim What's App groups, TikTok, and Instagram to reach out to as many participants as possible. The eligibility criteria for the study was stated in the introduction to the survey. The participants responded *Yes* or *No* if they were 18 to 23 years of age. If the participants answered *Yes*, they were taken to the page with the description of the study and the consent form where they could *Accept* or *Decline* to participate in the study. If the participants clicked *No* to being of the age 18 to 23 years old they were be

taken off the survey page. Data were exported from Qualtrics as a Microsoft Excel file. The exported Excel file was cleaned, screened and responses to survey items that were formatted as strings were converted to numerical values. The reformatted Excel data file was used for further statistical analyses.

### **Data Analysis Process**

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, SPSS version 29, was used to conduct all analyses except statistical power. The reformatted Excel file was imported into SPSS and the uploaded data file was cleaned to examine participants' responses to the 17 items of the PEDQ-CV-B, the 10 items comprising the SSBS, and participants' responses to the 25 statements comprising the short form of the CDSE scale. Thus, there were 52 measurement variables. Mean scores were computed across the items for the PEDQ-CV-B, across the items for the SSBS, and across the 25 items of the CDSE were computed. Internal consistency reliability, measured by the commonly used Cronbach's alpha (Kim et al., 2022), would be computed for each measure.

The independent variables were the scores on the PEDQ-CV-B and the SSBS. The higher the number, the more that characteristic was reported. The dependent variable was the respondents' scores on the CDSE-SF. The higher the number, the more career decision self-efficacy. Frequency analyses for the distribution of the average scores would be done to assess the percent of scores falling within one standard deviation of the mean between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 84<sup>th</sup> percentiles, below one standard deviation and above one standard deviation to obtain at what level the participants, as a whole, were at for each variable. This is an acceptable method for describing the overall level of performance on a variable for a sample when the variable approximates a normal distribution (Allen &

Yen, 1979; Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019). Further descriptive statistics (Kim et al., 2022) used to get a picture of the overall dataset and to describe each measured variable would include sample means and medians to express central tendency; variance, standard deviations and standard errors of the mean to indicate extent of variability; and statistics for skewness (the symmetry of the distribution of scores), kurtosis (how peaked is the distribution of scores) and histograms to describe the degree of normality in the distribution of score for each measure.

All tests of significance were to have  $\alpha = .05$ . To assess relationships among the variable pairs and to evaluate the first research question concerned with the relationship between perceived discrimination and sense of belonging during high school, bivariate, Pearson correlations,  $r$ , were to be computed (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019). The Pearson correlation is a coefficient that describes the degree and the direction of association between two quantitative variables (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019; Kim et al., 2022). A correlation coefficient from .00 to .30 indicates a degree of association that is nonexistent or low, from .30 to .50 is a medium relationship, from .50 to .80 is a high relationship, and .80 and greater is a very high correlation (Kim et al., 2022). Coefficients of determination,  $r^2$ , were to be computed for each variable pair to measure the amount or percent of variance in one variable that is shared with or explained by the other variable (Kim et al., 2022).

The second research question focused on the association between SSBS with CDSE-SF was to be examined with multiple regression. If a bivariate relationship between SSBS and PEDQ-CV-B is observed, then PEDQ-CV-B would be included as an independent variable in the regression model. Multiple regression is an appropriate

analysis to assess the relationship more than one quantitative variable has with a quantitative dependent variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Tolerance was to be used to verify that multicollinearity, the occurrence of redundancy, or too high of a relationship among correlated independent variables would not obscure results or interpretations of the results (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Values for tolerance that are closer to one reflect a lack of multicollinearity (Oke, et al., 2019). These techniques would be used to validate the degree of correlation sense of belonging has with career decision self-efficacy. A regression analysis will yield a multiple correlation,  $R$ , and a multiple  $R^2$  to describe the degree of relationship between the combination of independent variables and the dependent variable, and an  $F$  statistic will be calculated in the regression analysis to test if  $R$  is significantly greater than zero (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019). The impact that each independent variable had on the dependent variable will be indicated by resulting regression values,  $B$  (the beta coefficient or slope),  $\beta$  (the standardized beta coefficient), and  $t$  statistics will be identified from the analysis to assess the significance of the relationship between each independent variable with the dependent variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019; Shuck & Reio, 2014). A scatterplot along with the regression line representing the slope of the perfect relationship between the independent variable and the estimated values for the dependent variable obtained from the regression model would be used to depict any significant and relevant relationship (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Statistical power, which is the probability of not finding a significant result when a correlation really does exist (Morling, 2021), will be calculated post hoc using G\*power version 3.1.9.7. The target sample size was  $N = 200$ . Power will be calculated

for a normal bivariate correlation model and for a linear multiple regression random model (Faul et al., 2009), since both analyses were planned for evaluation of the main research questions.



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

My study investigated Muslim individuals' (aged 18 to 23 years) perceived discrimination and sense of belonging during their high school years in relation to their career decision-making self-efficacy. The relationship between Muslim individuals' perception of discrimination and their sense of belonging in high school, and the relationship between Muslim individuals' sense of belonging in high school and their current career decision-making self-efficacy were explored.

Data were collected via an online Qualtrics survey. The invitation to the survey was posted on various social media sites that were especially relevant to the Muslim population. The survey included a question to screen potential participants by asking if the participant was Muslim, if the participant was aged 18 to 23 years, and if the participant attend a public high school in the United States. Participants responding *No* to the screening criteria item were deleted from the collected data. The other measures in the survey were the Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire Community Brief Version (PEDQ-CV-B; Brondolo et al, 2005), the Simple School Belonging Scale (SSBS; Whiting et al., 2018), and the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (CDSE-SF; Tayler & Betz, 1983). Sixteen of the purposively sampled participants initially responding to the survey ( $N = 236$ ) were prevented from finishing because they responded *No* to the screening criteria item. The remaining participants ( $N = 220$ ) continued the survey, but 19 did not respond to any of the measures and 12 participants partially responded but left measures incomplete and were not included in the final sample. Participants with complete survey responses were retained for analysis. The final

sample,  $N = 189$ , consisted of participants that met all inclusion criteria and completed all measures.

### **Variables, Reliability and Descriptive Statistics**

Three main variables were measured to address the research questions. Two were independent variables (PEDQ-CV-B & SSBS) and one variable was dependent (CDSE-SF). Descriptive analyses were used to assess the integrity of the dataset. Reliability of each measure was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability indicators for the PEDQ-CV-B ( $\alpha = .87$ ), SSBS ( $\alpha = .85$ ), and CDSE-SF ( $\alpha = .95$ ) were all good or excellent (Taber, 2017). The reliability results represented what has been previously reported for each measure (Brondolo et al., 2005; Whiting et al., 2018; and Tayler & Betz, 1983). The shape of the distributions for each measure are illustrated in Figure 3. The measures did not violate assumptions of normality either analytically or visually (Fig. 3). Statistics for central tendency variability and normality are presented in Table 2. Means, medians and modes were identical for PEDQ average scores, and within tenths for the SSBS average scores and CDSE average scores. Skewness, the measure of distribution asymmetry was within typical levels,  $-.13$  to  $.69$ , where skew should be approximately 0 and  $< 2$  (Kim, 2013). Kurtosis, which indicates the degree of peak observed in a distribution, was measured at  $.45$  to  $2.14$  which are indicative a normal peak (kurtosis less than 3) in the distributions of scores (Kim, 2013).

A frequency analysis was performed to further evaluate the overall level response, measured as the percent of respondents below and above one *SD* from the mean for each variable. For PEDQ-CV-B, 12.7 % of respondents reported low perceived discrimination, and 12.2% reported high discrimination. For SSBS, 14.8% reported a low sense of

belonging and 10.6% reported a high sense of belonging. For the CDSE-SF measure, 11.1% reported low levels of career decision self-efficacy and 10.1% reported high career decision self-efficacy.

### **Relationship Between Perceived Discrimination and Sense of Belonging**

To examine the research question if perceived discrimination and sense of belonging in high school were correlated, bivariate correlations were computed for each pair of measures (Table 3). The statistical power, calculated post hoc for the correlational analysis was high,  $1 - \beta = .98$ . Career decision self-efficacy, CDSE-SF, was included in the correlational analysis to gain a preliminary description of the relationship with perceived discrimination and sense of belonging. Significance levels for the correlations were set at  $\alpha = .05$ . Results support the relationship between perceived discrimination (PEDQ-CV-B) and sense of belonging (SSBS) was negative and significant,  $r = -.42$ ,  $p < .001$ , and PEDQ-CV-B explained 18% of the variance in SSBS.

### **Relationship Between Sense of Belonging and Career Decision Self-Efficacy**

Multiple regression was used to evaluate the research question concerned with the relationship between Muslim individuals' sense of belonging (SSBS) in high school and their current career decision-making self-efficacy (CDSE-SF). The main independent variable was SSBS, and the dependent variable was CDSE-SF. Perceived discrimination (PEDQ-CV-B) was included in the regression model as an independent variable to assess the extent of the relationship SSBS had with CDSE-SF in combination with PEDQ-CV-B. The statistical power, calculated post hoc for the multiple regression analysis was high,  $1 - \beta = 1.00$ . Levels of significance were tested with  $\alpha = .05$ . Regression statistics are presented in Table 4. Sense of Belonging and PEDQ-CV-B are correlated (see Table

3), but multicollinearity was low as indicated by tolerances of .82 (Table 4; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Sense of belonging and perceived discrimination formed a significant prediction model of CDSE-SF,  $R = .58$ ,  $F(2, 186) = 46.23$ ,  $p < .001$ . The combination of both independent variables accounted for 33% of the variance in CDSE-SF,  $R^2_{adj} = .33$ . Sense of belonging, SSBS, was a stronger correlate with CDSE-SF,  $\beta = .47$ ,  $t = 7.08$ ,  $p < .001$  than was perceived discrimination, PEDQ-CV-B,  $\beta = -.19$ ,  $t = -2.90$ ,  $p = .004$ . Perceived discrimination was negatively correlated with CDSE-SF,  $B = -.35$ ,  $p = .004$ .

The relationship between the average SSBS scores and the average of the CDSE scores is depicted in Figure 4. The scatterplot depicts the linearity observed in the correspondence between these variables. Regression and correlation results support the notion that sense of belonging in high school is related to career decision self-efficacy in young adult Muslims.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### Interpretation of Results

Students' sense of belonging is the degree to which they experience a sense of personal acceptance, respect, inclusion, and support from other students and their school's broader social environment (Goodnow, 1993). Students' sense of belonging influences their career decision-making efficacy (Amundson, 2010). Therefore, it is essential for school counselors and educators to understand how to identify strategies to increase students' sense of school belonging. Two main research questions were assessed:

1. What is the relationship between Muslim individuals' perception of discrimination in high school and their sense of belonging in high school?
2. What is the relationship between Muslim individuals' sense of belonging in high school and their current career decision-making self-efficacy?

Findings concerning the first research question about the relationship between perceived discrimination and sense of belonging suggest that Muslim students with higher levels of perceived discrimination reported experiencing a lower sense of belonging during high school. The observed significant correlation between both variables supports the hypothesis, and the negative correlation indicates that the more Muslim students experienced discrimination and perceive those experiences, the less they reported a sense of belonging during public high school in the United States. The findings align with the literature suggesting that school environments where marginalized students experience discrimination are also environments where students develop less sense of belonging (Kogachi & Graham, 2020). Conversely, Muslim students who develop a

lower perception of discrimination in their high school years are more likely to experience a higher sense of belonging in their school community. Additionally, Muslim students with higher perceptions of discrimination and a lower sense of belonging are presumed to be less emotionally stable and not achieve academically to their fullest potential, as supported by research studies with other marginalized groups in the U.S. (Neel & Fuligni, 2013). Additionally, Muslim students who have higher perceptions of discrimination are more likely not to achieve their academic potential and lack confidence and motivation (Neel & Fuligni, 2013).

The results of my study also revealed that only a small proportion of the participants, 12.7%, reported low perceptions of discrimination. Conversely, the majority of the participants perceived discrimination at an average to high level during their high school years. These findings suggest that underrepresented Muslim students in public high school experience discrimination at various levels. Consistent with the existing literature, Muslim students are underrepresented, and experience discrimination and their cultural needs are not being met (Mahalinjappa et al., 2017). This implies that discrimination is a prevalent issue in public high schools in the U.S., particularly with the Muslim student population. That said, the need for more inclusive environments where more equitable treatment of Muslim students is essential.

My study also found that only 10.6% of my participants reported high levels of sense of belonging during their high school years. The majority of the participants felt that they did not belong in their school environment. Such findings are consistent with the SCCT framework. In the SCCT model, one's person input and environment both influence their sense of belonging (Lent & Brown, 1996). Similar to the results from this

study, Muslim students' religious identity (person input) and their experiences of discrimination (their environment) both correlated with their sense of belonging. These findings are similar to existing literature that found in students with marginalized backgrounds, such as African American, Asian, and Hispanics less sense of belonging than students who are white (Johnson et al., 2007). Additionally, similar proportions of the participants from my study reported lower levels of career decision-making self-efficacy, and only 10.1% reported high career decision-making self-efficacy. Thus, a notable number of the participants felt detached and isolated from their school environment and lacked the confidence and ability to make decisions related to their careers.

Research question two, addressing the relationship between Muslim individuals' sense of belonging in high school and their current career decision-making self-efficacy, was supported. It was found that school sense of belonging was significantly related to career decision self-efficacy. The correlation was positive, so as reflections of sense of belonging during high school rose, levels of career decision self-efficacy were higher. These results align with a previous study that demonstrates that undermining sense of belonging hinders college students' career decision-making process (Pesch, 2017).

The findings of my research also suggest a negative correlation between perceived discrimination in high school and career decision self-efficacy. In general, as perceived discrimination during high school decreased, career decision self-efficacy increased. However, it was found that sense of belonging was a more important correlate with career decision self-efficacy than was perceived discrimination. Therefore, the importance of exploring Muslim students' sense of belonging in high school goes beyond

achieving immediate success and remains a critical variable to their future success as well. There would be a gap in college and career counselors' work if they do not integrate factors that impact students' sense of belonging. Hence, how effective would be the results of a personality assessment to explore future career options for a Muslim student who experiences intense discrimination in high school and feels a lack of belonging? Exploring students' interests and personality types without considering the social experiences and barriers is surface-level work and does not adhere to ASCA's model that calls for culturally responsive approaches that address barriers to students' career development.

Muslim students' experiences of a lower sense of belonging in public high schools are not only negatively impacting them during their high school years, but they are also carrying those experiences to their career decision-making process and their post-secondary years. Adhering to the theoretical orientation guiding this study, the SCCT model, learning experiences theoretically influence individuals' self-efficacy expectations (Lent & Brown, 1996). The participants' learning experiences derived from the SCCT model are their experiences with sense of belonging, which theoretically impacts their self-efficacy expectations. Aligned with the results, Muslim students' sense of belonging significantly correlates with their career decision-making self-efficacy.

Previous research supports the findings of this study, indicating that an individual's career decision-making process is highly impacted by their sense of belonging and meaningful engagement (Amundson, 2010). Such findings are similar to the results from this study, where Muslim individuals who reported less sense of belonging during their high school years also reported less self-efficacy in their career



decision-making. The existing literature also indicates that students who belong to marginalized groups are less likely to feel like they belong in predominantly white environments. Perhaps the relationship between low sense of belonging and lower career decision-making is a result of potential impacts on students' motivation to succeed (Neel & Fuligni, 2013). Also, students' academic achievement is negatively influenced by their sense of belonging (Ezikwelu, 2020). Therefore, school counselors working with students in their career decisions must explore the students' sense of belonging. The findings from this study along with previous research suggest a strong relationship between high school students' sense of belonging and their career decision-making self-efficacy.

Given the marginalized status of Muslim high school students, this study also examined their perceived discrimination and its relation to their sense of belonging. As previously defined, the student's sense of belonging encompasses their perceptions of being accepted, included, and respected within their school communities. The results from this study suggest that Muslim students who experience discrimination are more likely to feel excluded and less respected in their school communities. My findings agree with previous research reporting that African American students felt a stronger sense of belonging when other students accepted and appreciated them (Booker, 2007). On the other hand, Muslim students who report a higher sense of inclusion and acceptance in their high school communities are believed to have experienced a lower level of perceived discrimination.

As the results indicated, perceived discrimination and sense of belonging formed a significant prediction model. Despite the correlation between Muslim students' perceived discrimination and their sense of belonging, their career decision-making self-

efficacy was more strongly correlated with their sense of belonging. Thus, findings are aligned with the SCCT model; learning experiences, or in this case, Muslim students' sense of belonging experiences, theoretically influence their self-efficacy expectations, in this case, their career decision-making self-efficacy (Lent & Brown, 1996). The SCCT model also indicates that one's person input and environment both influence their sense of belonging (Lent & Brown, 1996). Similar to the results from my study, Muslim students' religious identity and experiences of discrimination correlated with their sense of belonging, and their sense of belonging correlated with their career decision-making self-efficacy (Schlein & Chan, 2010). This means that Muslim students who experience higher discrimination have less sense of belonging and are more likely to be negatively impacted in their career decision-making self-efficacy. The impacts on students' confidence and motivation due to the lack of their sense of belonging are most likely leading to long-term effects on their post-secondary decisions.

### **Limitations**

Given the structure of data being self-reported, it assumes potential sources of bias, such as selective memory, where students responded only according to certain memories and events that occurred at some point. Furthermore, considering that 46% of all refugees entering the U.S. as of 2016 were Muslim (Pew Research Center, 2016), it is plausible to assume that a lack of English fluency for some participants indicates a language barrier upon completing the questionnaires. Additionally, the scales were shared on social media accounts throughout several states; however, due to the location of the researcher, most of the participants were from the Midwest region. Thus, the population accessed limited the extent to which the results of this study can be generalized from the

participant sample that was studied to the general population (Bracht & Glass, 1968). In other words, Muslim participants' experiences and the findings of the results may not be generalizable to other regions of the nation.

Considering factors that jeopardize the validity of the results of the data analysis is pivotal. Local history, for example, where the participants may have encountered negative experiences prior to the survey completion, could have directed their responses specific to that experience rather than the school environment holistically (Bracht & Glass, 1968). On the other hand, some participants are responding based on events that happened a few years ago, specifically, participants who are not 18 or 19, or very recently graduated from high school. The time difference could be biasing their responses based on post-secondary experiences. Consideration of the racial and ethnic composition of each school serves as critical information to minority student's sense of belonging, and this study is not assessing for that.

### **Implications for School Counselors**

Despite the discussed limitation, the results obtained from this study can be utilized to provide information about the unique needs of Muslim students in public high schools and promote multicultural inclusion in school settings, specifically with students who hold minoritized statuses regarding their religious and ethnic background. A shared effort among school counselors, educators, and school leadership is needed for safer public school environments with less discrimination against Muslim students. School counselors have an ethical responsibility to support students' social-emotional development and career development by providing classroom lessons, small group

counseling sessions, and individual counseling sessions that address topics such as building self-efficacy, perseverance, and responsive decision-making (ASCA, 2022).

Additionally, school counselors are tasked with assisting students who have expressed experiences that interfere with their sense of belonging by providing the students and parents with culturally responsive resources (ASCA, 2022). Culturally responsive approaches begin with being knowledgeable and aware of the student's cultural background and cultural practices. In terms of the religious practices within the school day, it is critical for school counselors and educators to be aware of such practices. This knowledge and awareness are essential in order to meet the Muslim students' cultural needs in their day-to-day school life and foster an inclusive school environment. For example, Muslim students who pray may need access to a private room to practice the afternoon prayer during the day. Similarly, those who fast during the month of Ramadan may need to be accommodated in an alternative space beside the cafeteria during lunchtime. Considering that high percentages of the Muslim population in the U.S are refugees, school counselors and educators should aim towards fostering problem-solving strategies to promote social relationships and develop interventions that concur with Muslim refugee students who are feeling less than (Haffejee, 2015).

Additionally, the school counselors' role includes implementing a multi-tiered support system by executing a program that caters to the needs of all students. A tier 1 approach, such as programs that serve all students systemically, includes creating systemic change in collaboration with other stakeholders to advocate for all students' achievement and educational equity (ASCA, 2019). Specific to Muslim high school students, school counselors should consider the following implications: organizing

school-wide cultural competence training tailored to meet the unique needs of Muslim students. When working with Muslim students, such training may encompass a deeper understanding of the Islamic faith and students' obligations during school hours.

Additional tier 1 support includes delivering classroom lessons focused on social-emotional learning aimed at ensuring equity and access for all students (ASCA, 2019a, 2019b). In order to deliver effective lessons, instruction should help address barriers to students' social, emotional, academic, and career development needs (ASCA, 2019a, 2019b). Considerations specific to Muslim students should involve incorporating a representation of their cultural background in these classroom lessons. As Goodenow (1993) stated, an essential factor in cultivating students' sense of belonging is their perceptions of inclusion. Students who see themselves and a representation of their cultural background in the delivered instructions are more likely to feel included. Additionally, integrating activities that would help students develop skills to think critically about the impact of cultural, social, and environmental influences on their school experiences and career development is encouraged (ASCA, 2019b).

In the MTSS model and framework, tier 2 support includes regular check-ins, group counseling, and mentoring programs. Given the literature that depicts Muslim students' backgrounds orienting from war-torn countries or facing discrimination and Islamophobia in the U.S., trauma-informed practices are imperative for school counselors to adopt (Haffejee, 2015). A trauma-informed practice involves comprehensive support and changes to system-wide practices (Overstreet and Chafouleas 2016) such as training school counselors and educators about trauma and the indications of student distress, including the recognition and the avoidance of the triggering of painful memories

stemming from Muslim students who have a background in war-torn countries and promoting healing and recovery (Samshha, 2014). Thus, school counselors could examine Muslim students from a cultural lens with consideration of providing the support needed to avoid re-traumatizing experiences of discrimination (Lemke & Nickerson, 2020).

Other implications that are an integral part of the school counseling program involve career development and post-secondary readiness (ASCA, 2019b). School counselors are to provide resources to support students in identifying their strengths, interests, and applicable career paths, for example, hosting a career fair, where professionals from the community are invited to come to the school and give an informative session about their career and answer questions students might have. A recommendation specific to Muslim students would be inviting professionals who represent their religious backgrounds. By including such culturally responsive career interventions, school counselors are helping students from underrepresented backgrounds feel more included and create a culturally appropriate career pathway for their future (Chan, 2019). Hence, allowing for environmental conditions where Muslim students' person input is represented theoretically positively influences their experiences and perceptions of discrimination, which then turns their interests into goals and goals into action (Brown & Lent, 2013).

Given the culture of collectivist idealism Muslim students belong to, collaboration between school counselors and families ensures a more comprehensive approach toward post-secondary success. In fact, the ASCA career development position statement, revised in 2023, advises "collaborating with students, families, educational staff and the

community, school counselors work to ensure all students select a postsecondary path to the productive citizenry (e.g., military, career technical certificate, or two-/four-year degree program) appropriate for the student". By implementing ASCA's rationale, school counselors ensure a culturally informed approach in their career development work with Muslim students.

Additionally, findings from this research can be an indicator and possibly generalized to the experiences of ethnic and religious minority students and their sense of belonging in public high schools in the U.S. Ultimately, my goal for conducting this study was to bring awareness to the experiences of this under-represented population and promote programmatic changes and foster multicultural inclusion for all students, not only Muslims. Additionally, this study aims to bring awareness to the educational systems to encourage change in the long run. That said, a follow-up longitudinal study would bring a more comprehensive awareness of the long-term effects of Muslim students' experiences of discrimination and lower sense of belonging. It is important to understand the connection between students' experiences in high school and their civic engagements as adults in society. Other recommendations for future studies include investigating college and career counseling in schools with a strong component of mental health integration, hence, investigating if students sense of belonging in high school impacts whether or not they go to college. A qualitative follow-up study would also allow for an in-depth understanding of the social phenomena of Muslim students' experiences and the various ways they make meaning out of their perceptions of discrimination and their sense of belonging.

In conclusion, this study focused on the experiences of Muslim high school students in public high schools in the U.S. with an emphasis on the correlations between their sense of belonging and their career decision-making self-efficacy. Muslim students perceived discrimination was also explored in relation to their sense of belonging within their school communities. Through quantitative and multivariate correlational analysis with 180 Muslim participants, findings suggested a significant correlation between the participant's perceived discrimination and sense of belonging. Muslim students who experienced a higher discrimination level had lower levels of sense of belonging. Additionally, a reduced sense of belonging among participants was found to be correlated with less career decision-making self-efficacy.

These findings underscore the influence of systemic racism and discrimination against marginalized groups within the school environments. Muslim students' experiences of discrimination due to the political atmospheres that create discriminatory school environments in the U.S. did not only correlate with their sense of belonging during high school. In fact, Muslim students' career decision-making self-efficacy post-secondary was also correlated with their sense of belonging and experiences of discrimination during their high school years. Therefore, Muslim students' challenges in public high schools in the U.S. are ones that carry into their adulthood and career lives.

There is a critical need for school counselors to provide targeted interventions within schools to foster a more inclusive environment that promotes equity for Muslim students and other marginalized groups. Such interventions align with the ASCA national model, where school counselors are to provide support in a comprehensive framework that addresses all students' social-emotional, academic, and career development needs



(ASCA, 2019a; ASCA, 2019b). A comprehensive framework requires school counselors to integrate student's career development interventions and support with their social-emotional needs.

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**APPENDIX A: TABLES****Table 1***Five Pillars of Islam*

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Pillar	Description
One	Believing that God is the only one God and the Prophet Mohammad is his messenger.
Two	Praying five times each day with a scheduled time for the completion of each prayer.
Three	Fasting from dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan.
Four	Giving 2.5% of their salary to charity each year from one's savings or wealth.
Five	Making a pilgrimage to Mecca (a city in Saudi Arabia) once in a lifetime for those who can afford it.

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**Table 2***Descriptive Statistics for Measures*

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i> <i>M</i>	<i>Md</i> <i>n</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>s</i> <sup>2</sup>	Ske <i>w</i>	<i>SE</i> <sub>ske</sub> <i>w</i>	Kurtosi <i>s</i>	<i>SE</i> <sub>kurt</sub>	Min	Max
PEDQ-CV-B	189	1.71	.02	1.71	.33	.11	.46	.18	1.04	.35	1.00	3.00
SSBS	189	2.59	.04	2.56	.52	.27	-.13	.18	.45	.35	1.11	4.00
CDSE-SF	189	2.89	.04	2.88	.61	.37	.69	.18	2.14	.35	1.36	5.00

*Note.* Statistics are calculated from participant mean scores averaged across all items for the scale.

**Table 3***Correlations among each Pair of Measures*

Variable Pair	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>
SSBS, PEDQ-CV-B	-0.42	< .001	0.18
SSBS, CDSE-SF	0.55	< .001	0.30
CDSE-SF, PEDQ-CV-B	-0.39	< .001	0.15

*Note.* *N* = 189. All relationships significant at  $\alpha = .01$ . Sense of Belonging (SSBS) and Career decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE-SF) reflected a positive correlation.

**Table 4**

*Regression Statistics for Perceived Discrimination and Sense of Belonging on CD Self-Efficacy*

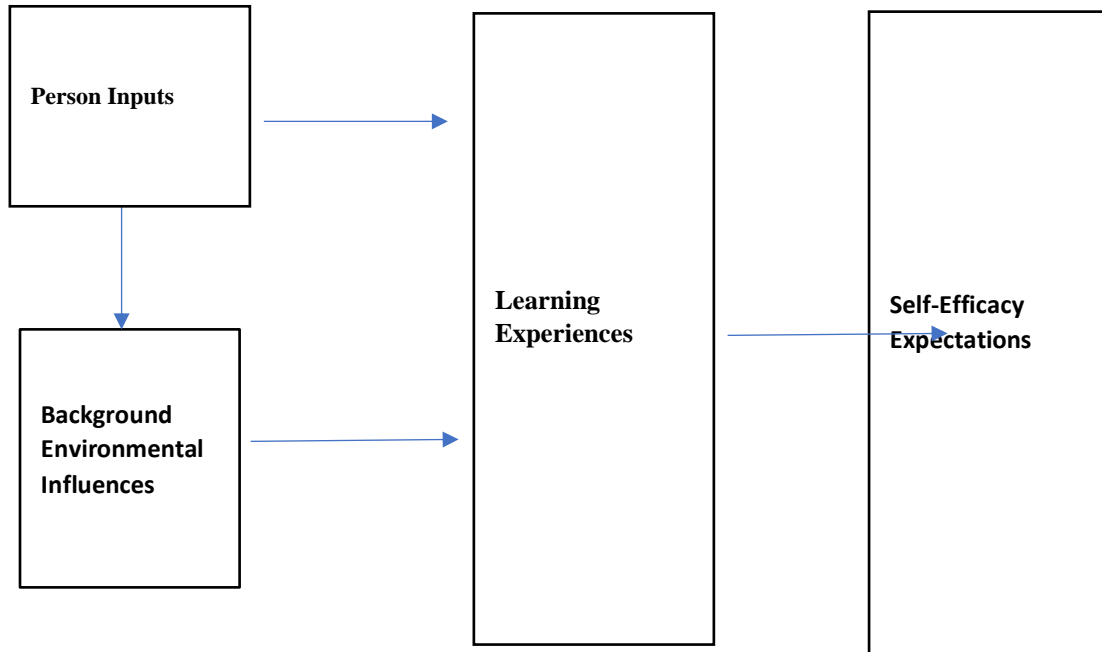
Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Tolerance
Constant	2.08	.35		6.01	<.001	
SSBS	.55	.08	.47	7.08	<.001	0.82
PEDQ-CV-B	-.35	.12	-.19	-2.90	.004	0.82
$R^2_{adj}$	.33					

*Note.* The measure for Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) was the dependent variable. Sense of belonging was measured with the SSBS and perceptions of discrimination were measured with the PEDQ-CV-B. The association between perceived discrimination (PEDQAVG) and career decision self-efficacy was negative and significant,  $B = .35$ ,  $t = -2.90$ ,  $p = .004$ .

**APPENDIX B: FIGURES**

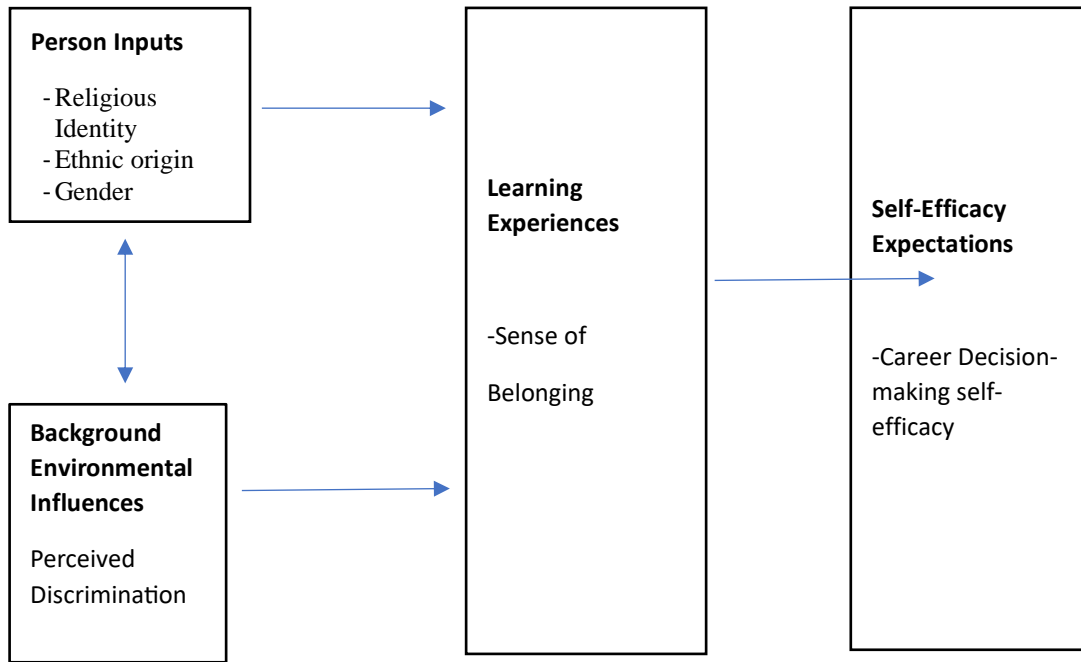
**Figure 1**

*Social Cognitive Career Theory Model*



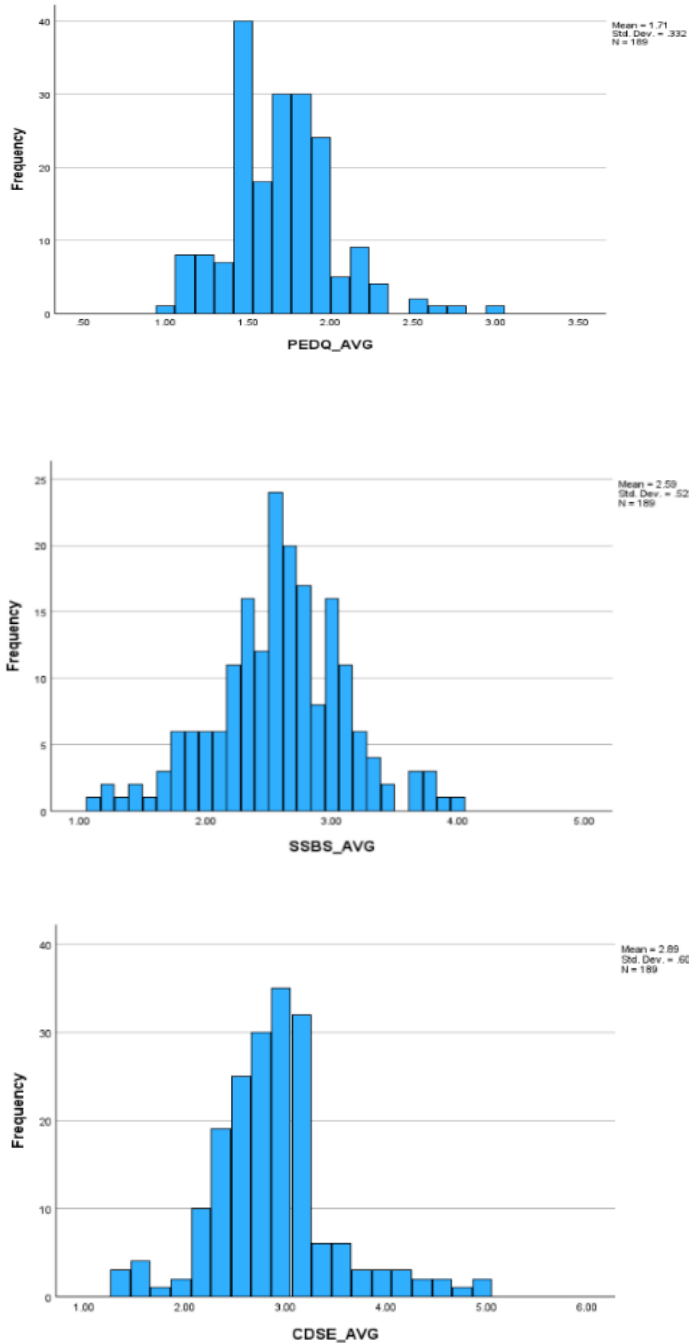
**Figure 2**

*SCCT Model with Applicable Specific Measures*



**Figure 3**

*Histograms for each Independent Variable and the Dependent Variable*

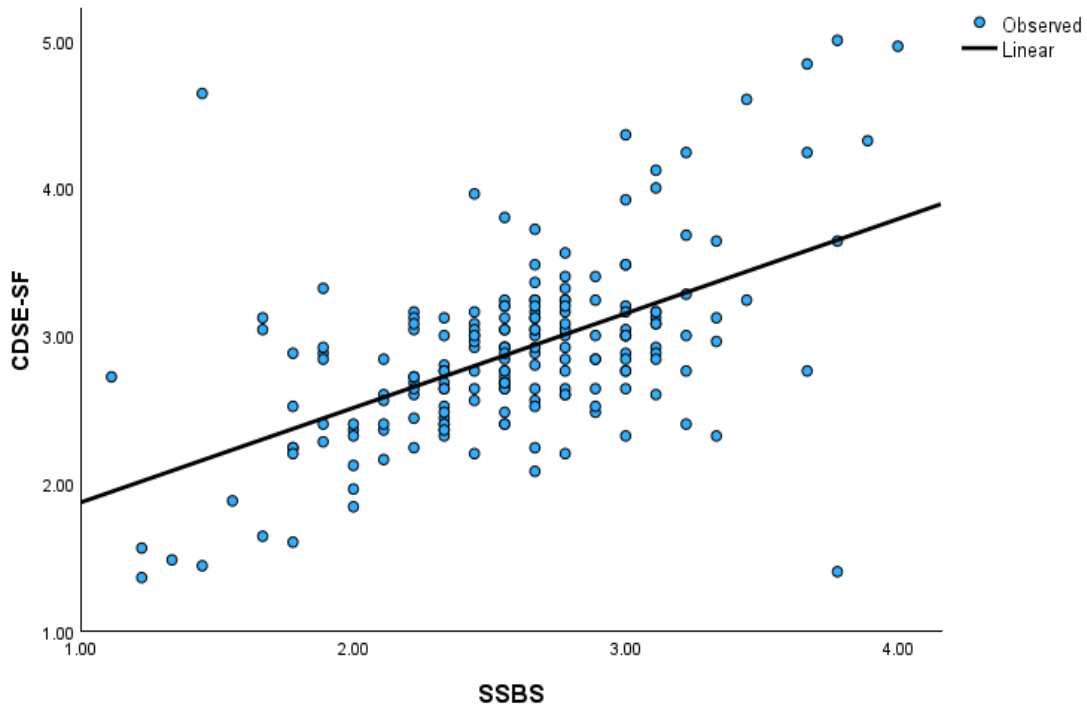


*Note.* Each variable reflected generally normal, symmetrical distributions so that heteroscedasticity was not at issue. Independent variables are SSBS (SSBS\_AVG) and PEDQ\_AVG (PEDQ-CV-B). The dependent variable is CDSE\_AVG (CDSE-SF).



**Figure 4**

*Scatterplot of the Relationship Between SBSS and CDSE*



*Note.* The relationship between sense of belonging and career decision self-efficacy was positive, significant and linear,  $r = .55$ ,  $p < .001$ . Sense of belonging, SSBS, shared 30% ( $r^2 = .30$ ) of variance with career decision self-efficacy, CDSE-SF.

**APPENDIX C: SCALES AND QUESTIONNAIRES****Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire-Community-Brief Version**

How often have any of the things listed below ever happened to you during high school because of your religion?

*1 = Never Happened*            *3 = Sometimes*            *5 = Happened Very Often*

How often...

1. Have you been treated unfairly by teachers, principals, or other staff at school?
2. Have others thought you couldn't do things or handle a job?
3. Have others threatened to hurt you (ex: said they would hit you)?
4. Have others actually hurt you or tried to hurt you (ex: kicked or hit you)?
5. Have policemen or security officers been unfair to you?
6. Have others threatened to damage your property?
7. Have others actually damaged your property?
8. Have others made you feel like an outsider who doesn't fit in because of your dress, speech, or other characteristics related to your ethnicity?
9. Have you been treated unfairly by co-workers or classmates?
10. Have others hinted that you are dishonest or can't be trusted?
11. Have people been nice to your face, but said bad things about you behind your back?
12. Have people who speak a different language made you feel like an outsider?
13. Have others ignored you or not paid attention to you?
14. Has your boss or supervisor been unfair to you?
15. Have others hinted that you must not be clean?
16. have people not trusted you?
17. Has it been hinted that you must be lazy?

**Simple School Belonging Scale**

Responses are on this scale:

*Disagree A Lot*      *Disagree A Little*      *Agree A Little*      *Agree A Lot*

1. People here notice when I am good at something.
2. Other students in this school take my opinions seriously.
3. People at this school are friendly to me.
4. I am included in lots of activities at this school.
5. Other students here like me the way I am.
6. I like to think of myself as similar to others at my school.
7. People at my school care if I am absent.
8. I feel like my ideas count at my school.
9. I feel like I matter to people at my school.
10. I feel like I matter to people at my school.

**Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale**

How Much Confidence Do You Have That You Could:

<i>No Confidence:</i>	1
<i>Very Little Confidence:</i>	2
<i>Moderate Confidence:</i>	3
<i>Much Confidence:</i>	4
<i>Complete Confidence:</i>	5

1. Use the internet to find information about occupations that interest you.
2. Select one major from a list of potential majors you are considering.
3. Make a plan of your goals for the next five years.
4. Determine the steps to take if you are having academic trouble with an aspect of your chosen major.
5. Accurately assess your abilities.
6. Select one occupation from a list of potential occupations you are considering.
7. Determine the steps you need to take to successfully complete your chosen major.
8. Persistently work at your major or career goal even when you get frustrated.
9. Determine what your ideal job would be
10. Find out the employment trends for an occupation in the next decade.
11. Choose a career that will fit your preferred lifestyle.
12. Prepare a good resume.
13. Change majors if you did not like your first choice.
14. Decide what you value most in an occupation.
15. Find out about the average yearly earnings of people in an occupation.
16. Make a career decision and then not worry whether it was right or wrong.
17. Change occupations if you are not satisfied with the one you enter.
18. Figure out what you are and are not ready to sacrifice to achieve your career goals.
19. Talk with a person already employed in a field you are interested in.
20. Choose a major or career that will fit your interests.
21. Identify employers, firms, and institutions relevant to your career possibilities.
22. Define the type of lifestyle you would like to live.
23. Find information about graduate or professional schools.
24. Successfully manage the job interview process
25. Identify some reasonable major or career alternatives if you are unable to get your first choice.